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JOURNAL OF RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP

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Articles

Book Reviews

Introduction to the 2023 Spring *Journal of Religious Leadership*

Robert K Martin, editor

I am delighted to present this issue of the *JRL*. Its articles and reviews represent some of the best theological thinking on the subject of leadership in and for religious communities. For those who may not know much about the *JRL* and its professional guild, please allow me to provide a brief overview and an invitation to explore our website: arl-jrl.org.

The *JRL* is published by the Academy of Religious Leadership. Its purpose is to enhance religious leadership education; to develop a learning, collegial community; and to foster and disseminate leadership education and research. We are a welcoming body, especially eager to assist newer members of the guild to develop their skills in teaching, pastoring, and other forms of leadership.

The ARL has been around for quite a while. With support from the Lilly Endowment, Scott Cormode convened a series of conversations starting in 1998 among educators and practitioners that resulted in the establishment of the guild in 2004. Each year, the ARL holds an Annual Meeting – usually in April – to address specific topics in the vocation of leadership in and for religious communities. As a professional society, we seek to embody and practice our interdisciplinary work collegially, value diverse gifts and voices, and mentor new scholars, teachers, and practitioners.

Twice a year, the *JRL* is published as a peer-reviewed venue for scholarly conversation applicable to all sorts of religious contexts. The autumn issue thematically develops presentations from the previous ARL Annual Meeting. We open the spring issue to a variety of articles.

The Spring 2023 *JRL* contains four intriguing and helpful articles as well as a host of book reviews. The first article by Neil Dougall lays out a broad understanding of leadership that he hopes will encourage more Christians to see themselves as leaders. His guiding theme is leadership as "taking responsibility." He argues

that too often our attention is focused solely on heroic models of leadership, and consequently we fail to recognize other forms of leadership which may not be as visible or spectacular but nevertheless provide for the health and wellbeing of communities. He writes: "Whether a child in the playground, a parent in a family, a worker in an office, a church member in the pew, a neighbor on a street — every human being can offer a degree of leadership when they decide to accept responsibility for their surrounding circumstances." He illustrates seven ways of taking responsibility through scriptural narratives of individuals who act faithfully on behalf of others for the greater good.

Our second article is offered by Chloe Lynch, a Lecturer in Practical Theology at London School of Theology and a Carmelite-formed spiritual director. Her essay explores the complicated and ambiguous reality of "Vulnerability in Leadership." Her starting point is the association of leadership with love: "If Christian leadership is exercised within a relational reality of mutual love, then power must be exercised *with* others, implying a level of mutual vulnerability." What follows is an insightful theological reflection on the nature of vulnerability, its relation to leadership, and practices by which we might develop the courage to accept our inherent vulnerability, not only gracefully but wisely, for the sake of collectively living in divine communion.

The third article, "Embodied Influence," offers a powerful tool by which people can reflect on the distribution and enactment of social power in their groups. Authors Maros and Dixon propose that developing a "power audit" can help us observe and recognize the often invisible operations of power within communities, large and small, so that group members can change their behavior and relate to each other with greater intentionality. In addition to providing a theoretical framework for reflecting on power, three case studies illustrate how the audit stimulates reflective conversation that can transform power dynamics in groups.

Fourth is an article by John Senior, a white male theologian, who examines the structural character of white supremacy and ways that white communities can actively subvert its influence and effects. "Resisting the Moving Sidewalk" is a metaphor that

illuminates the ineluctable pervasiveness of white supremacy in western Eurocentric contexts: If we do not actively resist it and walk in a different direction, we will be inevitably carried along with it. Senior lifts up New City Church as a liberationist community that deliberately "centers marginalized voices" as one example of how we might seek to participate in God's mission, a mission that invites transformation of our personal and systemic practices.

TAKING RESPONSIBILITY – REFRAMING CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

NEIL J. DOUGALL

Abstract

In a post-Christendom world, the church urgently requires leadership so it can play its part in God's mission. Cultivating a broad rather than narrow understanding of leadership will prompt more Christians to see themselves as leaders. Framing leadership as "taking responsibility" provides a powerful tool for expanding the understanding of leadership roles within communities of faith. Since there are many different ways of taking responsibility, this allows many people to understand the leadership they could offer. Seven ways are described, each illustrated from scripture, that can empower a wider range of people to identify their leadership capacity and offer leadership the church requires.

Introduction

The church is discovering that "it is calibrated for a world that no longer exists."[1] In the Church of Scotland,[2] for example, this manifests in an aging and declining membership, a decreasing number of ministers, and reduced income.[3] As the church recognizes its need for change, it looks for leaders who can help with the complex task of recalibration.[4] Instinctively, it assumes that heroic leaders will save it from rapid declines. Leadership is

[1] Scott Cormode, *The Innovative Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2020), 1.

[2] I am a Church of Scotland minister. The same reality manifests, albeit in different ways, in many churches across the Western world.

[3] Douglas Gay, *Reforming the Kirk* (Edinburgh: St Andrew Press, 2017), 29.

[4] https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/news-and-events/news/2020/2020/Chief-officer-calls-for-inspirational-leadership-at-every-level; accessed May 26, 2022.

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identified with "the competent, well-oiled, occasionally flashy, charismatic (in the broadest sense), up-front people in large or thriving churches or in the media."[5] Their stories of heroic church leadership spread through conferences, books and online sermons and much conversation.[6] It is assumed that their story will provide a model that is easily replicated and will work for every church in every community, if only Christian leaders seek to emulate the leading pastor. It is believed that, if enough people replicate the same method across the globe, then the current crisis of decline could be ended.

This high faith in an individual leader is an example of the "trait approach" to leadership. It is the conviction that there are certain innate qualities and characteristics which the great social, political, religious and military leaders of human history have possessed.[7] These people possess skills and charisma that set them apart from the majority. It is through their visionary ideas, superhuman efforts, and inspirational actions that crises are overcome. Many Christian leaders believe that emulating the personality and characteristics of these leaders is the key to providing transformative leadership needed for their own individualized contexts.

It is undeniable that certain individuals can stand above their contemporaries as leaders. Particularly in times of crisis and change, the heroic traits and actions of individuals can play a critical role. Without trait leadership, historians maintain that the course of history would have been different.[8] Nonetheless the "trait approach" has been criticized for a number of reasons.[9] Despite repeated attempts it has proved impossible to define what the traits are that set these natural leaders apart. Some who naturally excel in leadership in one context later failed to replicate similar success in another. When the spotlight focuses on certain individuals, the role

[5] Arthur Boers, *Servants and Fools* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2015), 195.
[6] One example of this is Saddleback Community Church, https://saddleback.com (accessed 6/2/22) and *The Purpose Driven Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), written by its founding pastor, Rick Warren.
[7] Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership, 7th ed.* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2016), 19.
[8] See for example, Ian Kershaw, *Personality and Power: Builders and Destroyers of Modern Europe* (UK: Allen Lane, 2022).
[9] Northouse, 30.

of others whose contribution might have been equally essential can more easily be overlooked. Additionally, those lacking the charisma and temperament associated with these "natural leaders" have proved to be surprisingly capable and fruitful leaders.

The last two observations gave birth to this article. The "heroic" or "trait approach" magnifies the effect of the few and minimizes the contribution of the many. An unfortunate consequence of this is the disempowerment of ordinary people who lack the traits, charisma, and confidence that are recognized and praised in high-profile leaders. Since the implicit message is that trait leadership is what true leaders look like, and knowing they could never look like this, many people conclude they cannot lead. If heroic leadership is seen to be the norm, other patterns of leadership are more easily marginalized. People who know they could never offer this kind of leadership conclude that they cannot offer any kind of leadership.[10]

Heroic normativity runs counter to the picture of leadership in the Bible. Throughout the Bible "God repeatedly shows a preference for those who are not 'stars' and sets aside those who look most predictably like leaders."[11] In the New Testament, "the body" is used as a foundational image for the church. "The body" speaks of plurality rather than singularity, of variety rather than uniformity, of dispersion rather than concentration.

Framing leadership as *taking responsibility* can help make diverse leadership a reality because it opens the door to a variety of ways of leading. Different people, in different circumstances, take responsibility in quite different ways. This article describes seven different ways that *taking responsibility* resulted in effectual leadership, using a biblical story to bring each possibility to life. Taken together, these suggest that framing leadership as *taking responsibility* is one way to help the church with the urgent task of recalibration. It allows for a plural rather than singular understanding of leadership. It has the potential to encourage many

[10] Warren Bennis & Joan Goldsmith, *Learning to Lead: A Workook on Becoming a Leader, 4th ed.* (New York: Basic Books, 2010), 21-27.
[11] Boers, 88.

to recognize that God is calling them to offer leadership where they have not recognized it before. Ultimately, it can empower the many rather than exalting the few.

Leadership as taking responsibility.

Former Chief Rabbi of Britain and the Commonwealth Jonathan Sacks argues that all leadership starts with a willingness to take responsibility.[12] Reframing leadership as Sacks does is powerful because, as Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal demonstrate in *Reframing Organizations,* the way something is framed shapes peoples' reactions to it. "A frame is a mental model — a set of ideas and assumptions — that you carry in your head to help you understand and negotiate a particular territory."[13] Since the frame that is used determines the questions that will be asked and, therefore, the solutions proposed, reframing in and of itself creates new solutions and possibilities. "The most powerful way to change how people act is to change how they see the world."[14] Framing leadership as *taking responsibility* has the potential to provide the church with the kind of leadership it needs for the times it faces and to do this in an inclusive manner. This might result in more Christians recognizing the leadership they can offer to today's church and stepping forward to offer it.

Lessons in Leadership inspired me to develop the notion of leadership as taking responsibility. In that book, Sacks reflects on the Jewish lectionary which begins with the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Sacks points out that when God challenged Adam about eating the forbidden fruit, Adam *refused* to take responsibility and blamed Eve. Eve then *also* ducked responsibility and blamed the snake. Sacks comments, "A leader is one who takes responsibility. Leadership is born when we become active rather than passive, when we do not wait for someone else to act."[15]

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[12] Jonathan Sacks, *Lessons in Leadership: A Weekly Reading of the Jewish Bible* (New Milford, CT: Maggid Books, 2015), 5.
[13] Bolman, Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership, 6th ed.* (Hoboken, NJ: Jossey Bass, 2017), 12.
[14] Cormode, 25.
[15] Sacks, *Lessons in Leadership*, 5.

Sacks' penultimate reflection concerns Moses's farewell at the end of Deuteronomy. He says, in essence, that Moses is saying to the Israelites, "Do not blame God when things go wrong," which is precisely what they tended to do. The Israelites, as well as humanity in general, are quick to blame God, the system, or someone else because "the story of humanity has been, for the most part, a flight from responsibility."[16] Finally, Sacks concludes, "leading is about being active, not passive, choosing a direction, and not simply following the person in front of us."[17]

This paper deals with seven stories from the Bible,[18] each of which illustrates a different way that someone took responsibility and exercised leadership. Leaders identify that something needs to be done, some change must be initiated, or some wrong challenged. *Taking responsibility* expands leadership from a singular concept into a plural one, implying that everyone can play a part. Whether a child in the playground, a parent in a family, a worker in an office, a church member in the pew, a neighbor on a street — every human being can offer a degree of leadership when they decide to accept responsibility for their surrounding circumstances.

Elijah: A hero steps forward.

Elijah is a biblical example of the larger-than-life, almost superhuman leader who appears to possess traits mere mortals can admire but never imagine they could embody. At a time when true faith in God had all but disappeared, Elijah single-handedly challenged the faith decay of the day. His words and actions inspired the people to return to God and God's ways.

[16] Sacks, *Lessons in Leadership*, 294.

[17] Sacks, *Lessons in Leadership*, 305.

[18] Scholarly debate surrounds most, if not all, of the scriptural stories this paper draws on. While some believe each story is an accurate record of what actually happened, others question some of the details and still others suggest the stores are works of fiction. For the purposes of this paper, each story is accepted in the form that it now appears in scripture. Both fictional and historical stories have the capacity to inspire people to imagine a different future. For this reason, it is sufficient to acknowledge, without detailing, the critical discussions that surrounds each story.

There is no doubting Elijah's willingness to take responsibility. He is the one who, in obedience to God's prompting, declares there will be no rain in Israel (1 Kings 17:1), challenges Ahab and the prophets of Baal to a rain-making contest (1 Kings 18:19-24 and then proceeds, without help from any other person, to call down rain from heaven (1 Kings 18:36-38).

Various commentators employ phrases that resonate with the superhero archetype. "Elijah appears unannounced with little personal information provided,"[19] that is without an origin story. "The hero they sketch is commanding and even monumental."[20] "A single prophet challenges the whole nation to return to God."[21]

Elijah's story inspires and intimidates. It is inspirational because it shows how a nation or institution, mired in moral and spiritual decay, can be revived and invigorated in response to a leader claiming responsibility for the current state. Another commentator asserts that Elijah's actions shaped the history of Israel and Judah for the next two generations.[22] The story of Elijah is also intimidating, given that there are few people who can imagine doing what Elijah did. If Elijah stands as the archetype for what religious leadership looks like, many people will conclude they are not able to lead.

However, Elijah's story also illustrates two of the weaknesses of the superhero archetype, or the trait theory of leadership.

First, Elijah's trait leadership led to burnout. Elijah's victory on Mount Carmel was followed by a spectacular implosion. In 1 Kings 19, the prophet flees into the wilderness for fear of his life. "After the heights of triumph come the depths of despair."[23] Monumental victory is followed by physical, spiritual, and emotional collapse.

Second, Elijah's leadership was tinged with narcissism, which emerges from the temptation to be superhuman and the "refusal to live within the God-ordained limitations of creaturely existence."[24]

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[19] Lissa M. Wray Beal, *1&2 Kings* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2014), 231.
[20] Graeme A. Auld, *I and II Kings* (Edinburgh: St Andrew's Press, 1986), 109.
[21] Donald J. Wiseman, 1 and 2 Kings, (Leicester, UK: IVP, 1993), 167.
[22] Ronald S. Wallace, *Readings in 1 Kings: An Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 108.
[23] Auld, 122.
[24] Chuck DeGroat, *When Narcissism Comes to Church: Healing Your Community from Emotional And spiritual Abuse* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2020), 4.

Elijah, like many superhero leaders, developed an exaggerated sense of his own importance. In the wilderness he complained "I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me" (1 Kings 19:10).[25] He appears to believe that he alone remains faithful and obedient to God.

In fact, Obadiah had hidden a hundred prophets who remained true to Yahweh (1 Kings 18:13). Yet, when confronting the prophets of Baal, rather than seeking their assistance, Elijah was determined to do it on his own. This way of looking at leadership assumed that *only* Elijah was responsible and marginalized the contribution of others, preventing them from also *taking responsibility* and sharing in leadership.

There is no doubting that the kind of heroic, or trait leadership, offered by Elijah is one way of *taking responsibility*. If the church has tended to make the mistake of focusing too much on this kind of leadership, it should beware of the opposite danger of excluding it altogether. It should be both/and, not either/or. For some people in some contexts, trait leadership can be effective, fruitful, and life-giving. Equally true, other ways of leading, while being less dramatic, can be just as if not more productive. They allow people who can never imagine leading like Elijah to understand the leadership role God calls them to play. Six other ways of taking responsibility follow.

Shiphrah and Puah: Midwives who said, 'No.'

Shiphrah and Puah were midwives when the Hebrews were slaves in Egypt. Alarmed by and afraid of the rapid birth rate of the Hebrews, Pharoah instructed the midwives to kill all male babies (Exodus 1:16). Shiphrah and Puah resisted, *taking responsibility* for the larger good of the community by refusing to follow Pharaoh's order.

This is the earliest recorded example of civil disobedience.[26] Commentators point out that the risks of resisting were extremely

[25] Scripture quotations from NIV (2011).

[26] David Daube, *Civil Disobedience in Antiquity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1972), 5.

high,[27] and that the midwives' action was prompted not simply by humanitarian concern but their commitment to God.[28] Shiphrah and Push changed the course of history.[29]

Later, when Pharoah asked why the Hebrew population was still growing, Shiphrah and Puah answered slyly, "Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they are vigorous and give birth before the midwives arrive" (Exodus 1:19). Rather than meekly surrendering to Pharaoh, they continued to be enterprising. "Their clever response to Pharoah is not a lie, they simply do not tell the whole truth."[30]

Gender, ethnicity, and status feature prominently in this story. Being both women and Hebrews, Shiphrah and Pugh were doubly marginalized. Many in their position might accept themselves to be powerless and, therefore, exempt from responsibility. However, their story demonstrates the fallacy of this conclusion. They realized their status as midwives made them experts in a field that Pharoah and his officials had no knowledge of. They used men's lack of understanding about "women's issues" to circumvent the intentions of the men who unquestioningly believed they held all the power. Shiphrah and Puah played an essential role in bringing the nation of Israel into a fuller expression of life.

This story exemplifies what Moises Naim calls micropower, which is "not the massive, overwhelming, and often coercive power of large and expert organizations, but the counterpower that comes from being able to oppose and constrain what big players can do."[31] Naim argues that the nature of today's world has made micropower a more significant factor than it was in the past. The powerful are not powerful in the way they once were. Minority groups and marginalized individuals often subvert intentions of

[27] Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture, Vol. 2* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2006), 76.
[28] T. Desmond Alexander, *Exodus* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2017), 56.
[29] Sacks, *Lessons in Leadership*, 63.
[30] Renita J. Weems, "The Hebrew Women Are Not Like the Egyptian Women," *Semeia*, 59, (Society of Biblical Literature, 1992), 25-34, 29.
[31] Moises Naim, *The End of Power: From Boardrooms to Battlefields and Churches to States, Why Being in Charge Isn't What It Used to Be* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 17.

majority groups and dominant institutions. "Power has become more available…. in today's world more people have power."[32]

Shiphrah and Puah, by refusing Pharaoh's order, demonstrate that even those who are most marginalized are not powerless and, therefore, not excluded from leading. By *taking responsibility*, they helped bring a nation to life. Traditionally, Moses is regarded as the hero of the Exodus story. Yet, had Shiphrah and Puah not taken responsibility as they did, there would have been no Moses. People in the church who, for whatever reason, have felt marginalized and excluded can do as Shiphrah and Puah did. They can be encouraged to recognize the micropower they possess and to take responsibility, even if the only avenue open to them is "no."

Nathan: A prophet who dared question the king.

Nathan was given an unenviable task. When King David took Bathsheba and then had her husband killed, Nathan was sent by God to confront David about his actions (2 Samuel 12:1). Nathan took responsibility for a king who had lost his moral compass and helped him find the right path again. Knowing how ruthlessly David had acted, Nathan was under no illusions about how David was likely to react if Nathan addressed the issues directly. Walter Brueggemann explains, "The narrative struggles with how truth shall speak to power. The prophet addresses the king. Such speech is dangerous business, especially to address a king so cynical and desperate."[33]

Behind the issue of survivability lies a more profound leadership dilemma that is best recognized and addressed by adaptive leadership theories. Heroic leaders are expected to find solutions to problems and effect transformation. When they do, the people they lead are usually content to be passive, the crisis is resolved, and the people are left unchanged.

Although heroic leadership solves problems for others, adaptive leadership "focuses primarily on how leaders help others do the

[32] Naim, 9.
[33] Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 280.

work they need to do, in order to adapt to the challenges they face."[34] Adaptive leadership recognizes that some issues can only be addressed by the people most affected by them, and it is only when these people are willing to change, that progress will be made.[35] In this scenario, the role of the leader is not to provide answers but to prompt people to find the answer themselves. One of the most effective ways of doing this is to ask uncomfortable questions.

Ronald Heifetz explains, "Rather than providing solutions, you must ask tough questions … Instead of maintaining norms, you must challenge 'the way we do business.' And rather than quelling conflict, you need to draw issues out and let people feel the sting of reality."[36]

The way Nathan spoke to King David offers an excellent example of this. He told David an extremely evocative parable about a rich man with many animals who takes the only lamb of a poor man to feed an unexpected guest. The parable had the desired effect. David was "drawn in by the story"[37] so that "David burned with anger" (2 Samuel 12:5). Nathan's words asked deep and searching questions of David and he demanded that the offender be punished. When Nathan responded "You are the man!" David realized he had passed judgment on himself.[38]

The task of leadership is to prompt people to face reality, to maintain sufficient discomfort so that people will do the difficult work, and to support in the process.[39] This less-direct form of leadership is less heroic and takes longer to produce results, but those results tend to be more durable and significant. Many contend

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[34] Northouse, 258.
[35] Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow and Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2009), 74.
[36] Ronald A. Heifetz and Donald L. Laurie, "The Work of Leadership" in *HBR's 10 Must Reads on Leadership* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review, 2011), 59.
[37] David G. Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2009), 427.
[38] Joyce Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester, UK: IVP, 1988), 237.
[39] Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1994), 84-86.

that, if the church is to navigate the challenges currently facing it, there needs to be an emphasis on adaptive leadership.[40] In their assessment, adaptive leadership is not simply a useful tool to add to the kit — it is the essential tool, without which the church will be unable to fulfill its divine calling at this point in history. Asking difficult and uncomfortable questions, refusing to give the easy and convenient answers people demand, and offering consistent support while people work out what truer answers mean for them is another way of assuming responsibility.

Hannah: A woman who shaped a nation through prayer.

In a desperate situation, Hannah prayed. She took responsibility for her own pain and her family's friction in the only way she could: by turning to God in prayer. It was through her prayer that she provided her family the leadership it needed.

Hannah was being tormented by Peninah, "her rival (who) kept provoking her in order to irritate her" (1 Samuel 1:6). She was trapped in a dysfunctional family, at her wits end and, it seemed, utterly powerless to do anything to improve her situation. Rather than giving into despair she chose to pray. The text does not indicate whether her prayer was prompted by desperation or born of faith. It does, however, use language that indicates that it was passionate, heartfelt, and whole-hearted.[41] In response to her prayer, she conceived the child she was so desperate for. Hannah's commitment to God through prayer broke the negative patterns that governed not just own her life, but that of her family.[42] The child she would soon bear, Samuel, would go on to play a profound role in the shaping of the nation of Israel.

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[40] For example, Mark Lau Branson and Alan J. Roxburgh, *Leadership, God's Agency, and Disruptions: Confronting Modernity's Wager* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2021); Scott Cormode, *The Innovative Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2020); Gil Rendle, *Quietly Courageous* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019).

[41] David Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007), 10,11.

[42] Firth, 56.

While it is true that some turn to prayer when all else fails, offering leadership through prayer addresses a deeper issue: "functional atheism." Church consultant Gil Rendle explains, "While speaking of depending on God, the functional atheist actively depends on his or her own agency and the resources that can be produced."[43] In drawing on the insights and ideas from leadership studies, the church has often unconsciously absorbed the mindset that assumes that it is human agency alone which shapes the future.[44]

However, Hannah did not rely on her own agency. She knew this was not a problem she was able to fix. She did not imagine that through her own skill, effort, or brilliance she could devise a solution. Instead, she turned to God, recognizing God's power was present when she felt the most helpless. This dependence was expressed in prayer, and her pattern of prayer was so unusual that Eli, the supposed expert in prayer, assumed she was drunk (1 Samuel 1:13).

Prayer is an important way of *taking responsibility* over hopeless situations.[45] Prayer is a practice that expresses the conviction that ultimately it is God who is in control. The discipline of prayer both looks to God to resolve problems and listens for God's prompting. Through prayer, Christian leaders take responsibility and do so in a manner which recognizes rather than ignores God's agency

Ezekiel: Catalyzing change through bizarre acts.

God instructed the prophet Ezekiel to perform a series of bizarre, unusual, and disturbing sign-acts. Daniel Bock explains, "Sign-acts are best interpreted as dramatic performances designed to visualize a message and, in the process, to enhance its persuasive force so that the observers' perceptions of a given situation might be changed and their beliefs and behavior modified."[46]

[43] Rendle, 77.
[44] Branson and Roxburgh, 41.
[45] Branson and Roxburgh, 25.
[46] Daniel I. Bock, *The Book of Ezekiel Chapters 1-24* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997), 166.

Ezekiel was among the first wave of exiles taken to Babylon. His compatriots not only longed for a return to Jerusalem, they also assumed that this is what God intended for them. Ezekiel's message cut across the hopes, dreams and expectations of his hearers. Simply speaking to them was unlikely to have much impact. He needed to be creative, imaginative, and perplexing since his "hearers had to reprint their thinking totally."[47]

Nine sign-acts are recorded in Ezekiel 4,5. In the first, outside his house, Ezekiel made a clay model of Jerusalem, laid siege to it, then placed an iron pan between himself and the city, before turning his back on it. "'We must suppose it was not long before the word got round that Ezekiel was doing some unusual things near his home."[48]

Ezekiel's intention was to grab people's attention and stir their curiosity. To subvert their expectations he had to find a way of disturbing their assumptions. His provocative and eye-catching actions were ambiguous. They were capable of many explanations. They must have prompted many conversations and created space for fresh thinking.[49]

One way of characterizing Ezekiel is as a catalyst. A catalyst is "a person or a thing which precipitates an event." It in its original context it describes "a substance that increases the rate of chemical reaction without itself undergoing any permanent chemical change."[50] Describing Ezekiel as a catalyst expresses the way his presence prompted change in others. His words and actions had the effect of making his contemporaries look at things in a new way. To characterize him as a catalyst is not to suggest his ministry among the exiles left him untouched or unmoved. It is, instead, to stress the role of the leader in being "a non-anxious, self-defined presence"[51] who is connected to others but refuses to allow him-

[47] Ronald E. Clements, *Ezekiel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 22.
[48] Peter C. Craigie, *Ezekiel* (Edinburgh: St Andrew's Press, 1983), 28.
[49] Walther Eichrodt, *Ezekiel, trans. Cosslett Quin* (London: SCM, 1970), 83.
[50] *Oxford English Dictionary, 2nd Ed (revised)* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2005), 271.
[51] Edwin Freedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: Church Publishing, 2007), 151.

or herself to be absorbed into their pain and confusion. Ezekiel is among the exiles but remains apart from them. He risks rejection and ridicule to become the catalyst that forces the community to ask questions and face reality.

Ezekiel's words and actions are similar to the disruptive effect of some forms of art. Artists use a variety of media to speak truth, present reality, expose hypocrisy, and issue warnings.[52] Gorringe describes great art as "secular parables" because of its ability to "provoke, tease, challenge, illuminate, surprise."[53] In art's ability to disturb the status quo, to shock and even offend, and to prompt people to see something in a new way it functions as a catalyst, much as Ezekiel did among the exiles in Babylon.

Many church leaders feel frustrated because the congregations they serve are locked into a Christendom view of reality. Having grown up in a time when the church had a dominant position that allowed it to shape public life, congregations assume Christendom is normal and expect it to return. It is very difficult to lead people into new patterns of understanding when they consistently expect former patterns to return. Like Ezekiel, the challenge for the modern church leader is to "reprint their thinking totally."[54] *Taking responsibility* by being a catalyst is like that of asking questions — it is a less-direct way of initiating change. It is a way of giving the work back to the people,[55] which prompts them to look at matters in a fresh way. It can be an effective tool in helping people recognize that radical change is now required.

Esther: A queen who defied convention.

The Book of Esther tells the story of how Queen Esther saved the Jewish people from genocide. Set in the reign of Xerxes (485-

[52] Robin M. Jensen, *The Substance of Things Seen: Art, Faith, and the Christian Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), 139.
[53] T. J. Gorringe, *Earthly Visions: Theology and the Challenges of Art* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2022), 14.
[54] Ronald E. Clements, *Ezekiel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 22.
[55] Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review, 2002), 123.

465 BCE), Esther's life is shaped by the social conventions of her day. In her examination of this, Meredith Stone identifies two common approaches adopted by contemporary scholars. First, Stone notes that Esther "submits herself to patriarchy and conforms to gendered expectations" and, second, she notes that Esther "subverts patriarchy and gendered expectations and challenges the authority of males characters." She rejects both these "binary approaches" and argues that a more nuanced assessment is needed of how gender and power are connected.[56]

Esther's life and livelihood is shaped by social expectation and the power of her king. When Mordecai informed her of the plot to kill the Jews and instructed her to go to the king and beg for mercy, she reminded him that anyone approaching the king without being summoned was most likely to be killed (Esther 4:8-11). Linda Day explains, "The temptation to do nothing would be strong for a person in her position. Life has been generous and pleasant, and the threat is distant and uncertain: why make a fuss? It requires personal courage to decide to stand out, to take the more treacherous road."[57]

Esther's response captures the cost of *taking responsibility*. To take responsibility often involves risk and carries the threat of loss. To take responsibility is to decide to act when others will not, to speak when others dare not, or to say "no" when others are acquiescing. As Esther agrees to raise the matter of the Jews with the king, she discovers her agency. Until now, Mordecai has been the one instructing Esther, but now she instructs him. "From this point on Esther, who had up till now done as Mordecai told her, herself takes the lead and assumes responsibility in her own right."[58]

Social convention dictated that wives needed to obey their husbands. Esther's predecessor Vashti challenged this directly and forfeited her position. Convention also dictated that no one could approach the king unless they were summoned. However,

[56] Meredith J. Stone, *Empire and Gender in LXX Esther* (Atlanta, GA: SBL Press, 2018), 62,3.
[57] Linda M. Day, *Esther* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 91.
[58] Joyce G. Baldwin, *Esther: An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester, UK: IVP, 1984), 81.

convention also bestowed on the queen considerable power. Esther was aware that, if she could secure an audience with the king, she had the opportunity to influence him.

Esther seems to have a good grasp of the issues involved. She devised an approach that allowed her to leverage the power she had. It began with her defying convention and presenting herself before the king when he was on the throne. To her relief, he extended the scepter, which granted her an audience and spared her life. When asked, "What is your request?" She responded by inviting the king to a banquet (Esther 5:3,4).

Her agenda was to ask the king to spare the Jews. For the queen to become involved in matters of state was a defiance of convention, more so as her request asked the king to reverse an existing decision. Esther, realizing the risks, devised and implemented a sophisticated plan. First, she invited the king and Haman to a banquet. At the banquet, rather than making her expected request she simply invited the king and Haman to another banquet (Esther 5:4-8). The anti-climactic first banquet had its desired effect. It lulled the two men into a false sense of security. When at the second banquet, she made her request, the king immediately adopted her perspective and Haman was completely wrongfooted (Esther 7:1-7).

Esther's story helps fill out what is often involved in *taking responsibility*. Many individuals, who do not have formal power or position, have far greater informal power than they realize. Eric Liu challenges some of the accepted understandings of power. For example, rather than power being a zero-sum game, where one person can only gain power if another loses it, he argues that power is infinite.[59] Power can be generated, and people who previously believed they had no power, can gain power. "Those getting a raw deal can create a new deal by looking beyond the confines of their helpless situation and making more power."[60] To do this they need to grasp that power "flows through many conduits: institutions, organizations, networks, rules and laws, narratives and

[59] Eric Liu, *You're More Powerful Than You Think: A Citizen's Guide to Making Change Happen* (New York: Public Affairs, 2017), 25.
[60] Liu, 39.

ideologies."[61] By learning to read these flows, people can generate power for themselves and frustrate the intentions of those who seem to have all the power.

Esther had the ability to read the power map of the royal palace. Being queen was a status and relationship. Her status gave her power and her relationship to the king allowed her to subvert some of the normal dynamics of power. Rather than simply enjoying the benefits afforded to her, she decided to take responsibility for the Jewish people. She leveraged her status and relationship by defying convention.

While the church is the body of Christ it is also a human institution. Like all institutions, it generates its own culture. At one and the same time, the church speaks of the need for change and has many subtle ways of rewarding those who maintain the status quo. There is a need for leaders who are prepared to defy convention.[62] Queen Esther offers an example of what this looks like in practice.

Anonymous: Who convened this conversation?

The first recorded Church Council is described by Luke in Acts 15. At first sight, it appears to narrate a simple process: a problem arose, a meeting was convened, and a solution agreed. This narration conceals some critical questions, particularly, who decided to call the meeting, how did the right people end up in the room, and why was harmony the outcome?

How Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus were to relate to one another quickly became an explosive issue in the early church. This conflict first emerges in Acts 10 when Peter visited Cornelius. There is evidence as late as Chapter 21, when Paul was arrested, that the issue continued to simmer underneath the surface of the new church community. Its potential to pull the church apart was defused, however, when some unnamed people took responsibility for convening a conversation in Acts 15.

[61] Liu, 8.
[62] Rendle, 7-13.

The fundamental question centered on whether Gentile Christians need to be circumcised and follow the Mosaic law.[63] Six different groups, each with a slightly different perspective on this matter, can be identified in Acts 15. At one end of the spectrum were those, like Paul and Barnabas, who believed that Gentiles should be allowed into the church without being circumcised. At the other end were some Pharisees who had become Christians and who demanded in the strongest possible terms[64] that "the Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses" (v 5). This range of views and loyalties had the potential to fragment[65] the church, miring it in in-fighting and preventing it from engaging in God's mission.

However, Acts 15 concludes with an agreement that is described as being unanimous (verse 25). This was only possible because some people, who are never named, took responsibility for convening a conversation. Luke states that Paul and Barnabas were "appointed to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question" (verse 2). How did this happen? Why did the Antiochian church resolve to consult rather than secede? Clearly one or more individuals decided the matter needed resolution and that a conversation in Jerusalem was the best way this could happen. They then were able to persuade the rest of the church in Antioch to follow this line. They took responsibility for convening a conversation.

When Paul and Barnabas arrived in Jerusalem, aware of the different views, "the apostles and elders met to consider this question" (verse 6). Once again this was not the only possible response. The question could have been dismissed or an individual could have issued a ruling. That a meeting took place indicates that someone took responsibility for convening it, proposing an agenda, and ensuring the right people were in the room. That the outcome of the meeting was widely accepted indicates that the

[63] Eckhard J. Schnabel, *Acts* (Grand Rapids, MI;]: Zondervan, 2012), 628.
[64] Schnabel, 632.
[65] John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Acts* (Leicester, UK: IVP, 1990), 256.

church as a whole was satisfied with the way the matter had been handled. These are indicators of effective convening.

Many within mainline churches[66] have long recognized the need for significant and urgent change. Nonetheless, change tends to be piecemeal and slow, which reflects the complexity of changing an institution.[67] Every institution consists of different groups with a variety of vested interests. For change to happen, someone needs to take responsibility for convening a conversation. One or more people need to be willing to take responsibility for getting key groups around a table, encouraging them to talk to one another, and helping them chart a path forward.

Convening involves inviting individuals, gathering participants, enabling contribution, encouraging listening and prompting decisions. Peter Block refers to convening as an art. It involves three things: first, creating a "context that nurtures an alternative future;" second, initiating "conversations that shift people's experience;" and third, listening and paying attention.[68]

Facilitating change requires people who are willing to take responsibility for convening conversations, both formal and informal.[69] It is a task that requires patience, persistence and a thick skin. The person who takes the responsibility for convening might not be seen as a leader, and their role might go unnoticed. Like those who convened the conversation in Acts 15, their names might never appear in the official record. As with other ways of *taking responsibility*, there is usually less pain to be found by sitting back and leaving discontent or stasis to continue. Unless someone is willing to step up and convene, necessary change and/or agreement will not be reached.

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[66] I have been a minister in one, the Church of Scotland, for over 30 years, during which time I have held congregational, regional and national leadership positions.

[67] Rendle, 106-108.

[68] Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2008), 88.

[69] Gordon T. Smith, *Institutional Intelligence: How to Build an Effective Organization* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2017), 32.

When people take responsibility, it reflects the image of God.

These seven stories demonstrate different ways of *taking responsibility* and highlight the powerful leadership outcomes that can result from this mental model. In addition to heroic or trait leadership, responsibility can be exercised by refusing to participate, by asking questions, praying, by being a catalyst, defying convention, and convening conversations. Elijah, Shiphrah and Puah, Nathan, Hannah, Ezekiel, Esther, and the unnamed people in the early church, each exercised leadership in their own way, because while "others wait for things to happen; leaders help make things happen."[70] Rather than waiting for someone else to do something about the issues they and their people were facing, each decided to take responsibility and do what they could with the power and influence they possessed. While the actions of each were different, all were intentional. Theirs was a deliberate decision.

These stories also illustrate that while context constrains, it does not preclude. There is no doubt that, given the social contexts of their time, the women (Shiphrah and Puah, Hannah and Esther) faced considerable constraints in exercising traditional leadership. Despite being excluded from patriarchal positions of power, they were not powerless. Each discovered ways of exercising the power they had, bringing significant benefit to others. In like manner, the prophets (Elijah, Nathan, and Ezekiel) might have had a status that gave them a degree of power, yet because they used it to challenge the dominant royal power,[71] they also occupied a precarious role.

The conviction that all human beings are created in the image of God helps explain why even those who seem most powerless are not. The image of God "designates the royal office or calling of human beings as God's representatives and agents in the world, granted authorized power to share in God's rule or administration of earth's resources and creatures."[72] Since every human being is created in God's image it follows that every person is created by

[70] Sacks, *Lessons in Leadership*, xxi.
[71] Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination 2nd Ed* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 39.
[72] J. Richard Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids MI: Brazos Press, 2005), 27.

God to exercise power. Irrespective of what any social system might say, no one is powerless. Every human being is called to exercise responsibility.

Framing leadership as *taking responsibility* expands the pool of people who are able to hear and respond to God calling them to lead. It broadens the conception of what leadership is and invites a wider group of people to participate. For people who feel excluded from leadership by cultural or systemic norms, this is an empowering concept. Seeing leadership as *taking responsibility* allows those who are marginalized by social systems to discover their agency. Since all are created in God's image, all are endowed with some of God's power and, therefore, all are called to exercise responsibility. Framing leadership as *taking responsibility* challenges everyone to act in whatever way they can. It summons them to be intentional, effect change, challenge wrong, or prompt transformation.

Conclusion

The church is called by Jesus to participate in God's mission of reconciliation.[73] This is the purpose of the church, its reason for existence. By participating in what God is doing in the world, the church comes to participate in the very life of God.[74] The Church in Scotland, like many other churches in the Western world, is realizing that it is calibrated for a world that no longer exists. Unless and until it recalibrates, it will be unable to fulfill its divine calling. This recalibration will profoundly change the church's culture, practices, and mindset. This kind of change can only happen through collective action, which, in turn, demands different styles of leadership.[75]

The premise of this article is that this leadership will need to come from many and not just a few. While the trait leadership that some charismatic and very visible individuals offer will be important, it is insufficient on its own. The change the church

[73] Michael W. Goheen and Jim Mullins, The Symphony of Mission (Grand Rapids, MI; Baker Academic: 2019), 29.
[74] Edward W. Klink III, John (Grand Rapids, MI; Zondervan: 2016), 861.
[75] Mark van Vugt, "The Origins of Leadership" in New Scientist, (2008, 42-44), 42.

is facing is of a scale and complexity that many will be required to help facilitate it. It is an adaptive change because it challenges existing values, assumptions and habits.[76] Adaptive change must be embraced by the people most affected. This will require many leaders who take responsibility in many different ways to help people engage with, understand and embrace these changes.

Framing leadership as responsibility offers a valuable tool in this process. This article has demonstrated that this offers a broad way of looking at leadership. Using biblical interpretation and imagination, it opens the door to a multitude of ways of seeing how people can lead. It encourages many to wonder how God could be calling them to lead. It empowers those who have felt marginalized and powerless to discover their agency and to begin using it. It recognizes that since everyone is made in God's image, everyone has a degree of God's power. It prompts everyone to ask how they, in their context, can take responsibility. It invites all of God's people to understand that they too, in their own way, are called to offer leadership through *taking responsibility*.

[76] Ronald A. Heifetz & Marty Linsky, Leadership on the Line (Boston; Harvard Business Review: 2002), 30.

VULNERABILITY IN LEADERSHIP: ITS CONCRETE EXPRESSION AND THE COURAGE TO EMBRACE IT

CHLOE LYNCH

Abstract

If Christian leadership is exercised within a relational reality of mutual love, then power must be exercised with others, implying a level of mutual vulnerability. This article first sets vulnerability within a theological context and then gives concrete expression to leadership vulnerability, exploring how leaders can embrace practices of self-chosen vulnerability and even experiences of vulnerability that they did not choose. Finally, we consider the courage required for such an embrace and the leadership practices by which such courage may be formed.

Introduction

Should Christian leaders embrace vulnerability in the practice of their leadership? Is it appropriate to open oneself to progressively greater vulnerability to one's followers? What might this vulnerability look like in practice? These questions are asked perennially by undergraduates in my pastoral leadership classes. Those questions are not far from my own mind, either. For, having committed myself to the idea that church leaders should lead *to* love *in* love — that is, in friendship[1] — I have also committed myself to

[1] Chloe Lynch, *Ecclesial Leadership as Friendship* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019). I proposed Christian friendship as the discourse appropriate to framing incarnational ecclesial leadership. In this friendship-leadership, friendship with God in Christ and with his people is not only the ultimate end toward which the church is being led but also shapes the way power is used.

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the idea that the activity of leadership[2] encompasses vulnerability.

Particularly, if leadership is exercised within a relational reality of mutual love, then power must inevitably be exercised *with* others,[3] rather than only *for* or *over* them.[4] This exercise of loving power necessitates enough mutual vulnerability for parties genuinely to know one another's interests and permit their own needs to become known in the context of a sharing of power.[5]

Yet vulnerability rarely is perceived as a pleasant experience and, though potentially fruitful for leadership, might also be avidly avoided by leaders as being too costly. This avoidance is evident in academic literature as much as it is in practice: There are few considerations that bring theological perspectives to bear upon vulnerability as it might be experienced in the practice of

[2] I begin with leadership as *activity* since this properly precedes, 'Who is a leader?' and 'What is positional leadership?' Leadership activity is, in its barest form, often characterised as a process of influence toward a goal, involving at least one leader and one follower. (Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 7th ed., [Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2016], 6.)

[3] Power used with others is not unilateral. Even where one party retains authority (and thus responsibility) in the exercise of power, power will be used from the perspective of 'us together' rather than only 'me' or 'you' (Mary Parker Follett, *Dynamic Administration*, Elliott M. Fox and L. Urwick, eds., 2nd ed., [London: Pitman, 1973, 72-75], 86); cf. Hannah Arendt's concept of 'communicative power' (cf. Roberto Frega, *Pragmatism and the Wide View of Democracy*, [Cham: Palgrave MacMillan, 2019,] 324-326).

[4] Power-over normally indicates unilateral, albeit not necessarily exploitative, power use (Roy Kearsley, *Church, Community and Power*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2008, 26-27). Power-for indicates power that is used for the good of others yet in a way that may often be unilateral. It has similarities to Kearsley's 'power to' which is power that enables and transforms its object(s) positively but which, again, is not explicitly bilateral (Kearsley, *Church*, 74, 115).

[5] Sharing and pursuing one another's good in the context of a degree of mutual affection and of progressive mutual vulnerability constitutes the essence of friendship (Lynch, *Leadership*, chs.7-8).

leadership.[6] Furthermore, it is rarely seen that to embrace one's own vulnerability presupposes courage, a virtue the formation of which demands concrete practices.[7]

This paper seeks to fill some of these gaps. First, whilst within friendship vulnerability is largely understood as self-chosen and pertaining particularly to disclosure of one's inner life (often with emphasis on emotional sharing), this is not the full picture. Thus, the initial part of the discussion will draw on a definition established by Thomas Reynolds and supported by James Keenan to determine what vulnerability is at its heart, before then developing the theme further within theological context. More broadly than what I will call self-chosen vulnerability, vulnerability will be recognised as a biological, theological, and sociological fact that can be as much a physical category as an emotional one. Vulnerability, in leadership as in life, is unavoidable — and yet it might also prove to be the foundation of loving community.

Notwithstanding its basic unavoidability, leaders can embrace or seek to avoid and deny the fact of their unchosen vulnerabilities. They can even risk greater vulnerability in the context of a deliberate choice to do so. Accordingly, after the preliminary theological groundwork, the paper's second and major section will give more concrete expression to vulnerability within leadership, considering what it might entail in practice. I will consider how and when leaders might appropriately embrace self-chosen vulnerability (exploring there also what might be meant by vulnerability that is self-chosen). I will also give brief attention to embracing unchosen

[6] Secular perspectives on vulnerability in leadership abound. Some of these writings appear in subsequent footnotes. Theological perspectives on vulnerability, often in the context of (dis)ability, also abound. Again, see footnotes further below. Yet to constellate leadership and vulnerability within a theological frame is much rarer. The best work I have seen on the subject is Andy Crouch's *Strong and Weak: Embracing a Life of Love, Risk and True Flourishing* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2016), albeit that as a popular-level work this is disappointingly short on academic detail. I reflect on aspects of his contribution below.

[7] Brené Brown recognises the connection between vulnerability and courage in *Dare to Lead* (London: Vermilion, 2018) but, of course, does not do so from a theological perspective. Thus, she cannot offer any kind of discussion regarding how a Christian virtues framework might inform the deliberate development by leaders of courage to embrace vulnerability.

vulnerabilities within leadership. Finally, regarding the nature of the leadership courage required for embracing vulnerability within leadership practice, I will conclude by offering pragmatic suggestions for leaders who wish to develop this virtue in greater measure.

Vulnerability in Theological Context

Conceptually, vulnerability need not be reduced to the emotional and self-chosen vulnerability of self-disclosure, which is the vulnerability typically emphasised in accounts of friendship. Rather, vulnerability also can be physical as well as emotional; it can be unchosen; and, even where self-chosen, it need not be limited to the vulnerability inherent in the disclosure of one's inner life to another. Indeed, risk of harm, not self-disclosure *per se*, is at the centre of vulnerability.[8] For to be vulnerable is, at its core, to suffer – that is, to be affected by – the being or activity of another.[9] This definition makes clear there is a broader human reality of vulnerability, which encompasses self-chosen vulnerability but recognises also that unchosen vulnerability is at the heart of human experience.

Biologically, we need to eat and sleep. As babies, we depend utterly on others for all of our needs whilst, even in adulthood, we are never truly independent. We are subject to becoming affected by others' being or activity and even, in the context of our need, by their *in*activity. This is true of all people, although some are more vulnerable than others in particular respects. For example, physical or mental disability might make a person susceptible to

[8] Cf. Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, *Leadership in the Way of the Cross: Forging Ministry from the Crucible of Crisis* (Eugene: Cascade, 2018), 6 (especially n.3).

[9] Thomas E. Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality*, (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2008), 165. Cf. James F. Keenan, 'Linking Human Dignity, Vulnerability and Virtue Ethics,' *Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society* 6:1, 2020, 56-73, 58): "When we recognize that the word vulnerable does not mean being or having been wounded, but rather means being able to be wounded, then it means being exposed to the other; in this sense vulnerability is the human condition that allows me to encounter, receive, or respond to the other, it allows us to be aware of others and their dignity, to take risks in meeting and recognizing others."

the effect of others' (in)action in the specific respects in which that disability operates to reduce the person's autonomy. Similarly, sociological factors, though privileging some with types of social power, can disadvantage others and render them more susceptible to particular (in)actions of those around them. Whilst such factors might include gender, race or class, the particularity of this kind of vulnerability is most likely to be located at the intersection of more than one of these structural realities.[10]

Whether chosen or unchosen, vulnerability as a liability to being affected by others means that we cannot limit or focus the effects of their being and activity — or indeed inactivity — to such as are conducive to our flourishing (however such flourishing might be conceived). Accordingly, though vulnerability may open us to receiving from others what we need or desire, it may also open us to suffering emotional or physical wounding or material loss.

Where the other to whom we are vulnerable is God, we can rest in the assurance that the effect of his being and activity upon us will be for our good.[11] Where, however, the other is not God but another human, then although we might hope that this other will act in relation to us in a manner that promotes our good, the pre-eschatological reality of sin means that this outcome is not guaranteed and is sometimes not even the other party's intended or desired outcome. Vulnerability to another may subject us to great loss, even loss of a kind that we will never become able to interpret in such a way as to frame it with positive meaning.

In such cases, we might prefer to eliminate all that threatens our sense of security, all that is other, in the hope of avoiding pain or loss. We might perhaps respond by projecting this fear of vulnerability

[10] See Kimberlé Crenshaw's work on intersectional vulnerability, which notes that social structures can impose 'one burden that interacts with preexisting vulnerabilities to create yet another dimension of disempowerment' ('Mapping the Margins of Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,' *Stanford Law Review* 43:6 (1991), 1241-1299, 1249).

[11] To be divinely determined — affected by God's being and activity upon us — is what it is to be fully human, albeit that even this experience may not be without some initial pain, the losing of our life to gain it. See Ray S. Anderson, *On Being Human: Essays in Theological Anthropology*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982).

upon others: We may judge them, avoid relationships, or even attempt to leverage power over them to reinforce our sense of self-sufficiency.[12] Even if we do not succumb to such obvious projections or power games, fear of vulnerability may still lead us to hold the other at arm's length, wanting to love only from a safe, invulnerable distance.[13] This is understandable and even, perhaps, justifiable. For what seems to be only avoidance of vulnerability might sometimes be better seen as an assertion of personal boundaries to protect the self against physical or emotional incursions that are guaranteed to cause pain or other harm.

All human relationships are necessarily boundaried to some degree: to be in relationship does not mean to merge with the other. Expressed differently, in our togetherness "we" does not cease also to be "you" and "I," persons clearly differentiated from one another. Our discriminating choices, including choices about how much we open ourselves to another, are intrinsic to our identity.[14]

Yet despite its obvious costliness and risk of pain, which might justify employing protective boundaries in relation to certain persons or groups, vulnerability is not itself the result of a sinful and broken world. Theologically, humanity was never created to be complete in ourselves; instead, God made us subject to the being and activity of others so that we might both need and receive from others. This mutuality is the foundation of our capacity to encounter and respond to one another:[15] We were intended to receive from God primarily and, as overflow of this reality, human others.[16] That is, true human relatedness in all its created goodness

[12] Reynolds, *Vulnerable*, 108-111.

[13] Love from a distance, of course, is not love at all: described often in popular parlance as charity, distanced love does not attend to a person's particularity, the uniqueness of who they are, nor does it share personally of the lover's self (Helen Oppenheimer, *The Hope of Happiness: A Sketch for a Christian Humanism*, [London: SCM, 1983], 124, 133).

[14] Anderson, *Human*, 58ff.

[15] See Keenan's definition in n.13 above.

[16] Ray S. Anderson, *Historical Transcendence and the Reality of God: A Christological Critique*, (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1975), especially 233-234.

requires a personal openness, or vulnerability, to the other.[17] It requires this precisely because human being is "received" rather than something we have in and of ourselves.[18]

Thus, though sin corrupted this original reality, human vulnerability is not bad in itself. In Christ, God himself embraced vulnerability to redeem it from sin's corruption. Jesus entered the frailty and dependency of human reality, plumbing its depths, even as far as his own death, demonstrating his deity in the vulnerability of relationship rather than independence.[19] The Son chose the same human obedience to the Father that Adam and Eve had refused, saying a new "Yes" on humanity's behalf to dependence upon God. Inevitably, this "Yes" of incarnation, and eventually death, opened Jesus to the possibility of human pain. For this is the reality of becoming vulnerable, of relationship with others. Nevertheless, Jesus was able "to be naked and vulnerable" before humanity because "he [also] stands naked before the Father's love."[20]

The reality of this pain and of Jesus' embrace of vulnerability are most clearly visible at Gethsemane. For here we see the God-man weep, sweating blood and pleading with the Father in hope that there might be another way to accomplish the cosmic redemption for which he had come.[21] We see him abandoned by his friends who could not stay awake with him despite his expression of need that they would do so. Then, though the bitterness and vulnerability of the cross are finally swallowed up in glory, the resurrected Christ

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[17] Sturla J. Stålsett, 'Towards a Political Theology of Vulnerability: Anthropological and Theological Propositions,' *Political Theology* 16:5 (2015), 464-478, 468; Ray S. Anderson and Dennis B. Guernsey, *On Being Family: A Social Theology of the Family* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 123.

[18] Anderson, *Historical*, 238-251. Cf. Nico Koopman, 'Vulnerable Church in a Vulnerable World? Towards an Ecclesiology of Vulnerability,' *Journal of Reformed Theology* 2 (2008), 240-254, 245.

[19] Reynolds, *Vulnerable*, 18-19, 197. See also C.F.D. Moule, 'Further Reflexions on Philippians 2:5-11' (264-276) in W.W. Gasque and R.P. Martin (eds.), *Apostolic History and the Gospel* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1970), 265).

[20] Vanessa Herrick and Ivan Mann, *Jesus Wept: Reflections on Vulnerability in Leadership* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1998, 8).

[21] Jan-Olav Henriksen and Karl Olav Sandnes, 'The Vulnerable Human and the Absent God: The Stories about Gethsemane as a Possible Source for Theological Anthropology,' *Kerygma und Dogma* 64:3 (2018), 163-177, 172.

continues to bear his wounds (John 20:24-29), evidence perhaps of continuing vulnerability and also prophetic of God's power to transform vulnerability from something that often subjects humanity to (the risk of) pain and loss into something that, one day, will exist only for its true purpose of making possible human interdependence within the love of God.[22]

Accordingly, notwithstanding the risk of harm that it entails, vulnerability as "susceptib[ility] ... to suffering, corruption and death" is the context in which the glory of God seems to be received and carried by humanity.[23] For the vulnerability intrinsic to having been created as interdependent beings is also the place where we can know love and the joy that accompanies this highest of all gifts.[24]

Something of this, indeed, can be seen in the friendship literature: vulnerability and love grow together progressively. This is because chosen relationships involve opening oneself to influences outside of one's control. Friends open themselves in this way because they pursue a shared connection, union even, yet one that does not compromise their differences.[25] As they develop progressively in vulnerability toward one another, depths of intimacy become possible, in which love, healing and relationship can be enjoyed: the friends rely on one another for their needs and disclose to one another aspects of their inner life. Thus it is that, as their vulnerability grows, so also does their love for one another. And as that love grows, so the friendship is proven to be a safe context for ongoing, deepened vulnerability.

The friendship literature does not, however, gloss over what we have already seen to be vulnerability's cost. Depths of mutuality

[22] Reynolds, *Vulnerable*, 19.

[23] Kristine A. Culp, *Vulnerability and Glory: A Theological Account* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2010), 2, 150.

[24] Reading Aristotle, Martha C. Nussbaum argues that human virtues are only available within the realm of vulnerability, *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 341-342.

[25] Graham Little, *Friendship: Being Ourselves With Others*, Melbourne: Scribe, 2000, 245; Samuel Southard, *Theology and Therapy: The Wisdom of God in a Context of Friendship*, (Dallas: Word, 1989), 212-213.

also inevitably render friends vulnerable to potentially destructive wounding should the friendship be broken.[26] Furthermore, even where the friendship is not broken but remains healthy, there is still potential vulnerability to suffering. Particularly, there might be pain felt in sympathy with the friend as a response to their troubles. Then, in addition to this emotional weight of bearing another's pain there is — possibly worse for many of us — the emotional vulnerability involved in not hiding our own pain but choosing willingly to share it with the friend.[27]

For all its cost, vulnerability gives meaning to human life.[28] It makes us capable of living not only *for* but also *with* another. Because we are capable of being affected by one another (that is, we are vulnerable), we are also able lovingly to affect one another in ways that are fruitful for that other's good. Vulnerability, despite its intrinsic risk, becomes also potential gift — in life generally and, by implication, also in the practice of leadership.

Leadership Vulnerability in Practice

Admittedly, the embrace of vulnerability inherent within a friendship-leadership construct may appear unlikely in a world in which so-called heroic theories of leadership hold sway. Lifting up the one Superman leader high above their followers, heroic leadership trades on the image of *in*vulnerability, presenting the leader as somehow especially gifted with strength and wisdom above their peers. Similarly, leadership that deals mostly in authoritative and/or coercive power would suggest no place for vulnerability,[29]

[26] Paul Wadell, *Becoming Friends: Worship, Justice, and the Practice of Christian Friendship* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2002), 64.
[27] Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches, *Christians Among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 48.
[28] Elizabeth O'Donnell Gandolfo, *The Power and Vulnerability of Love: A Theological Anthropology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2015), 97.
[29] Cf. John R.P. French, Jr. and Bertram Raven, 'The Bases of Social Power' (150-167) in Dorwin P. Cartwright (ed.), *Studies in Social Power* (Ann Arbor: Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan, 1959).

concluding that it would represent an incomplete grasp by leaders in relation to their position or their capacity to coerce follower compliance.

Nevertheless, not all theories of leadership operate in this way. Those approaches that perceive leadership as a relationship in which influence operates episodically, sometimes through one person and then through another, as well as approaches that recognise power used *with* others (rather than only *over* or *for*), are more open to the place of vulnerability within leadership practice, albeit tending to focus on vulnerability as limited to self-disclosure. Thus, proponents of authentic leadership theory consider the open sharing of information and of personal thoughts and feelings between leader and follower to establish growing trust, which occasions greater follower-loyalty and respect alongside increased productivity.[30] Leader-member exchange theory, too, perceives trust — understood in terms of a willingness to risk mutual vulnerability — as correlated with higher commitment and better performance from followers.[31] Such self-disclosure may also transform organisational culture to the extent that follower-loyalty will be born of wholehearted adoption of the organisation's values and principles rather than simple dutiful compliance.[32] This higher degree of commitment may flow from followers' perceptions that the leader who shares vulnerably of their "perception of uncertainty,

[30] Bruce J. Avolio and William L. Gardner, 'Authentic Leadership Development: Getting to the Root of Positive Forms of Leadership,' *The Leadership Quarterly* 16:3 (2005), 315-338; Northouse, *Leadership*, 199. N.B. Vulnerability and trust in leadership are closely related (A-M. Nienaber, M. Hofeditz and P. D. Romeike, 'Vulnerability and Trust in Leader-Follower Relationships,' *Personnel Review* 44:4 (2015), 567-591).

[31] Gary Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations*, global ed., Harlow: Pearson Education, 2013, 222-225. Vulnerability itself (rather than vulnerability-as-trust) has been only rarely considered empirically in the fields of leadership and management (Nienaber et al, 'Vulnerability,' 567).

[32] C. Richard Panico, 'Naked Leadership: Lead to Win Hearts and Minds,' *Business and Professional Ethics Journal* 32:3-4 (2013), 259-270.

risk, and insecurity" can be trusted as being similar to them (and perhaps even "one of them"?).[33]

Whilst secular leadership theories — and, indeed, a theology of vulnerability — might celebrate the potential of our vulnerability to open us more fully to loving community, this is not the whole story. Vulnerable self-disclosure is not always unmixedly a positive thing. Particularly, risking deliberate vulnerability without any purpose or potential for benefit is simply unnecessary and can even prove (unintentionally) manipulative.[34] Furthermore, whilst disclosures by a leader that occur for the sake of naming anxieties present within that leadership context, which others have not felt able to admit in themselves, can be a way of creating psychological safety by way of starting a conversation,[35] the positivity of such self-disclosures is not clear-cut. For even in these cases, leaders' disclosures can still be self-serving rather than loving and might sometimes constitute a major leadership error, affecting the structural integrity of what Ronald Heifetz calls the holding environment which the leader has established to contain the anxieties of those being led.[36]

Andy Crouch affirms Heifetz's position that sometimes self-disclosure is not appropriate, noting that leaders' vulnerability must be hidden in certain circumstances.[37] Followers may need to see that the leader is able to bear the vulnerabilities of the community, impervious to any hint of personal vulnerability. For though true leadership uses its authority to seek the good of others, even to the point of real risk (vulnerability) to the one exercising it,[38] actually

[33] Ai Ito and Michelle C. Bligh, 'Feeling Vulnerable? Disclosure of Vulnerability in the Charismatic Leadership Relationship,' *Journal of Leadership Studies* 10:3 (2017), 66-70. Cf. Brown, *Dare*, 19-43. Furthermore, followers are more likely to see things through the leader's eyes and, potentially, to welcome a less hierarchical and more egalitarian relationship with that leader.

[34] Ito and Bligh recognise this possibility: 'leaders may use vulnerability to manipulate followers or to achieve individual rather than collective outcomes' ('Feeling,' 68).

[35] Brown, *Dare*, 36-37.

[36] Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership Without Easy Answers* (Cambridge: Belknap, 1994), 104-110.

[37] Crouch, *Strong*, 116-141.

[38] Crouch, *Strong*, 48.

to *see* this vulnerability can, in certain cases, operate to disempower and paralyse the followers (because of the high levels of existing vulnerability that those followers and/or the wider community already bear). Disclosure of vulnerability in leadership thus should not increase at a rate greater than the capacity of others to bear it — and that capacity will depend upon factors inside and outside the leadership relationship.[39]

Thus, vulnerable disclosure should be boundaried: quite apart from the kinds of personal boundaries discussed above, which leaders, at times, may need to employ for their *own* protection, it might be necessary for a leader to withhold altogether certain self-disclosures to protect *others* within the leadership context. So, rather than using disclosure "as a mechanism for hotwiring connection or trust," leaders should give due recognition to the relative roles of the parties involved.[40] Also helpful in discerning the appropriateness of self-disclosure are matters of timing and the emotional intensity of the disclosure for the leader and its effect on the hearers. Care should, furthermore, be given to any accumulation of disclosures by the leader — that is, what is the wider pattern of disclosures and is yet another appropriate? Additionally, the effect on others whose privacy is affected by the leader's sharing must not be forgotten in discerning appropriateness.[41]

When considering such boundaries on self-disclosure, questions of purpose should also come into play. Leaders should ask why they are being vulnerable in this leadership relationship and whom they are serving in doing so.[42] Sometimes a leader might be serving themselves in such a choice: for example, Brown warns against leaders "shirking the responsibility of attending to the team's fears and feelings by oversharing and sympathy seeking."[43] Instead, vulnerability in terms of self-disclosure must be directed

[39] Crouch, *Strong*, 130.
[40] Brown, *Dare*, 38.
[41] Ian Hussey and Allan Demond, 'Vulnerability in Preaching: How Far Is Not Far Enough?', *Journal of the Evangelical Homiletics Society* 18:2 (2018), 5-18, 10-12.
[42] Brown, *Dare*, 40.
[43] Brown, *Dare*, 38.

by the degree to which this serves others within the leadership context. What matters is respecting the ethical demand of another's vulnerability[44] and not leveraging it to the leader's advantage.

However, just as there is danger in inappropriate self-disclosure, there is also risk in leaders withholding their weakness. To go too far in withholding one's own weakness, after all, is to risk falling into the kind of heroic model that celebrates leadership *in*vulnerability. Though leaders may consider their first responsibility to be service of their followers, they, too, are affected, sometimes painfully, by the being and activity of others. Indeed, being-for-others in the midst of being-with-them leaves leaders vulnerable, open to (sometimes great) risk. Thus, because, at its best, leadership involves mutuality of vulnerability and of care, leaders must be aware that, sometimes, followers may helpfully return the favour of care, supporting their leaders to contain their anxieties too.

Leaders can help followers, over time, develop this ability to return the offer of care to the leader. Such development may be assisted, in part, by leaders encouraging mutuality of care throughout the community in such a way that the work of love and concern is not understood to be attached so much to those with designated 'leading' or 'caring' *roles* as it is a responsibility of all community members. By making care a function primarily of personhood rather than of role, there is then the possibility that followers will consider themselves also responsible to offer a level of mutuality of care to their leaders.[45] However, this is not the whole picture and the other major factor in forming a community in the capacity to care for its leaders is perhaps even more significant: Leaders must open themselves to receiving such care. Hiding

[44] Stålsett, 'Vulnerability,' 469.

[45] Reciprocating care with leaders may not come naturally to followers who 'may have become conditioned to prefer the comfort of the reduced responsibility concomitant with reduced power and to perpetuate the relational distance between them and those perceived to have power (perhaps even idealising power-holders and being unable to handle experiencing their vulnerability)' (Lynch, *Leadership*, 188). It may also be problematic for followers for other reasons to do with their own needs or pain: in this case, leaders must find that loving support from those outside of their leadership context in order not to burden unduly those who are within the context (182, especially n.12).

behind their role is not an option and yet will often be the default movement that leaders will be tempted to make. For this inversion of typical roles can be hard indeed for leaders to accept and it might take time for these leaders to develop this kind of openness-to-receiving from others.

Notwithstanding my focus on it so far, self-disclosure is not the whole of self-chosen vulnerability in leadership. It is also possible as a leader to engage in a kenotic emptying of focus upon one's own need and fragility in order to make space in the leader-follower relationship for the followers' vulnerabilities and needs. By this, I mean a willing choice to lay aside one's own concerns so as to become affected by, or vulnerable to, the presence and/or activity of the other. The leader chooses to attend to the person in front of them as fully as possible, setting aside their own anxieties and preoccupations to be free to receive the "needs and sorrows … joys and hopes of the other."[46]

Whilst this deliberate practice of vulnerably making space for another encompasses the making of appropriate disclosures regarding one's own vulnerabilities and the judicious withholding of such disclosures, it is broader. This kind of vulnerability may also consist in leaders choosing to work collaboratively, listening more than speaking. It might mean leaders choosing not to use their power to coerce compliance nor even their positional authority as a means of leveraging their own goals but, instead, laying down power to make space for the preferences or vision of another.

My own experience of this kind of leadership vulnerability has been as a follower. Whereas it was quite clear that the leaders in this context had intended a recruitment process to end in a particular appointment, the wider group of stakeholders did not agree. Although initially somewhat surprised (and perhaps frustrated), those leaders quickly pivoted to a stance of listening carefully to the reasons and arguments, as well as emotional responses, being offered in favour of another approach. Eventually, they accepted the will of the wider team and acted accordingly. It should be noted that,

[46] Neil Pembroke, *Renewing Pastoral Practice: Trinitarian Perspectives on Pastoral Care and Counselling* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), 46.

in such circumstances, vulnerability means not only a vulnerability to the will of another but also a vulnerability to the consequences of such leadership decisions. For it is one thing to submit one's power to the ends advocated by someone else but another degree of vulnerability entirely also to bear in solidarity any negative outcomes of such a leadership decision. Though it might not always be so, in this case — with a year of perspective on the event — I think all parties would agree that the consequences of this vulnerability have been wholly positive. Courageous vulnerability on the part of the leaders in laying aside their own needs and preferences established a stronger foundation upon which the mutual vulnerability of leadership could begin to flourish.

Yet another kind of self-chosen leadership vulnerability may seem, in fact, to be no vulnerability at all. Sometimes a leader chooses to use their authority apparently unilaterally. Having listened to their followers, they decide to act in a manner inconsistent with what those followers perceive as being toward flourishing. Such actions will occur where a leader, perhaps because of position, has a different standpoint within the landscape of the leadership context, with a possibly more comprehensive outlook, such that they feel constrained to interpret communal flourishing differently than their immediate followers might. Though situations like this may not appear to involve vulnerability at all, they might better be construed simply as the embrace of a different *kind* of vulnerability, that of being misunderstood by one's followers.

Leaders who have experienced being misunderstood will not deny its costliness.[47] Indeed, on one occasion in my own experience, a leadership decision like this resulted in relational damage. A couple of church members wanted to advance a particular agenda and asked the leadership team (of which I was part) to give them significant and repeated communication opportunities in Sunday services. Yet, as a leadership team, we did not feel the agenda was appropriate for the whole church, being better suited, instead, to a subcommunity of members. Thus, we refused as kindly as

[47] On the importance of mutual trust between leaders and at least some followers for leaders' wellbeing, see Lynch, *Leadership*, 191.

possible the degree of communication "airtime" being requested, offering other (lesser) communication channels in its place. This choice, which we believed to be for the sake of the flourishing of the community as a whole, produced the vulnerability of being misunderstood and, eventually, the cost of damaged relationship in that this couple were hurt and chose to leave our community.

It is a powerful thing for leaders deliberately to embrace a vulnerability that they themselves are choosing — voluntarily to risk the possibility of being negatively affected by others — whether as a result of greater self-disclosure, of self-emptying or of being misunderstood by these others. Self-chosen vulnerability is always significant. Yet this should not eclipse consideration also of the kinds of vulnerability in leadership that are not chosen and, so, the final reflections of this section must be reserved for those things inherent to the leader's being or social and leadership contexts that render them liable to be affected by the being or activity of others in ways unique to them. More specifically, these vulnerabilities might arise, for example, from: power differentials of any kind that have become calcified so as to become unchangeable;[48] the kinds of sociological and structural dynamics mentioned in the previous section, which disadvantage this leader whilst privileging others around them; or perhaps historic wounds, that is, occasions of suffering that have created an ongoing sensitivity to pain in the context of certain relational interactions.[49] Because of limited space and because the first two of these examples tend also to produce these historic wounds, I shall focus attention on these wounds.

Where a leader has a painful experience, whether in leadership or in life more broadly, and where the painful effect of that experience remains unreflected upon by the leader, essentially hidden from them, it is more likely that certain of their leadership actions may

[48] See: Alistair L. McFadyen, *The Call to Personhood: A Christian Theory of the Individual in Social Relationships* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), 147; Letty M. Russell, *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective – A Theology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 67-68.

[49] Wounds defined thus represent a susceptibility to the being and activity of others that is particular to the person and which derives from their specific experience of suffering. In other words, wounds are places of unchosen vulnerability.

be informed by that wounding experience in a manner that is pathological.[50] Conversely, whilst the effects of such experiences might never fully be erased and thus could remain a particular vulnerability of the leader, making space to face this vulnerability and the experience that produced it — to embrace rather than avoid or deny it — increases the likelihood that the related pain will move "from blind spot to an area of increased awareness and sensitivity."[51] This level of self-awareness tends to make for a better leader, meaning that the leader's "woundedness can function as a unique conduit of sensitivity and attentiveness," such that they become not only more congruent in being and action but also more attuned to the wounds in others.[52]

In this way, the unchosen vulnerability of woundedness can represent a powerful dynamic to be engaged by leaders.[53] It can become a vehicle of relationship, in the context of which the whole community being led can begin to explore the possibilities of loving interdependence. For facing such unchosen vulnerabilities can equip a leader for "feeling-along-with" a follower:[54] Processing, or coming to terms with, such wounds can give leaders "access to the space between persons where ethical responsibilities shape the persons and the leaders that we become."[55] Such a leader might become better disposed toward others,[56] welcoming, rather than seeking to minimise or control, mutual difference. As a result, the leader is better able to recognise the contribution within the leadership relationship made both by their followers and by other beneficiaries of their leadership. The leader can give these others space not only to be themselves but also to determine for themselves the nature of the common good toward which leadership should

[50] David Goodman, 'Leading with Wounds: A Liability or Gift?', *Journal of Religious Leadership* 6:1 (2007), 39-69, 46-47.
[51] Goodman, 'Leading,' 51-52.
[52] Goodman, 'Leading,' 52, 58-64.
[53] As we have seen, how and whether leaders choose to do this is a matter for the individual: in some cases, they may prefer to establish boundaries around these wounds for their own protection.
[54] Reynolds, *Vulnerable*, 114.
[55] Goodman, 'Leading,' 59.
[56] Reynolds, *Vulnerable*, 124.

be directed — permitting truly the exercise of power *with* these others rather than only *for* what the leader thinks that other should perceive as good.

Courage for Vulnerability

Though I have contended that vulnerability in leadership is potentially a fruitful gift, I do not deny that it also entails risk. Embracing the potential physical and emotional costs of subjection to the being and activity of another is primarily a risking of self and thus, in addition to wisdom and discernment, vulnerability in the context of leadership requires courage.[57] Courage is not, however, just a convenient concept for limiting this kind of leadership to the graced few. Leaders cannot use it to excuse themselves from the call and the cost of leadership vulnerability, claiming that they are not blessed with the courage needed. Rather, courage is a virtue, and the Christian tradition establishes that virtues are to be developed by all believers through intentional practice even as they are, at the same time, gifts of God's grace.[58] What, then, is courage and how might those committed to leadership vulnerability develop this virtue? Broadening the question even further: How can those who participate in Christian communities (whether with assigned leadership position or not) develop a capacity for embracing the practice of vulnerability?[59]

Courage is the virtue that enables human beings to face risk to themselves and yet not turn away in fear. It does not idealise suffering or loss but recognises that there are certain ends that make risk worth taking and loss worth bearing. In his discussion of the virtues, Thomas Aquinas noted that love for God and others

[57] This paper focuses on courage through a theological lens; for a business ethics lens, see Sheldene Simola, 'Understanding Moral Courage Through a Feminist and Developmental Ethic of Care,' *Journal of Business Ethics* 130 (2015), 29-44.
[58] See Jennifer A. Herdt's discussion of the interaction between virtue as infused and acquired in Thomas Aquinas (*Putting on Virtues: The Legacy of the Splendid Vices*, [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008], ch.3).
[59] This question is the logical outworking of my conviction that leadership is fundamentally activity (see n.2) and can thus be engaged by those without formal leadership position. I continue to use the language of 'leaders' below but intend this language to encompass more than simply the positional leaders.

can be the greater good that justifies the genuine evil that is loss of self. Courage is "love bearing all things readily for the sake of the ... beloved."[60] It does not vanquish fear, nor does it soften the reality of the risk and possible ensuing loss. Rather, courage is an intentional alignment of our fears with our greatest love: we discipline our hearts to fear God more than our own loss of control and even life.[61]

Courage is thus associated with vulnerability: it is precisely "because we are embodied beings who are physically liable to injury and capable of feeling pain" that we need the virtue of courage.[62] Where it is possible to protect ourselves from that injury or pain without jeopardising another, greater good — here, the love of God and others — we may defend ourselves against vulnerability in an act of what Thomas calls courageous aggression. However, if this is not possible, then the task is one of courageous endurance.[63]

Courageous endurance of vulnerability is, as we have seen, sometimes called for in the practice of leadership.[64] Its possibility depends on the extent that courage has already been worked into the fabric of a leader's life.[65] This working, enabled by divine grace, involves — at a human level — both deliberate reflection on one's priorities (in more Thomistic terms, the ordering of one's loves) and the adoption of particular intentional habits. The former might occur best in conversation with mature believers gifted in the work of soul care and spiritual direction, although it can also be discussed fruitfully within the particular Christian community

[60] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* (2nd ed., trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province), www.newadvent.org/summa, II-II 123.4 obj. l.

[61] Rebecca Konyndyk DeYoung, 'Courage as a Christian Virtue,' *Journal of Spiritual Formation and Soul Care* 6:2 (2013), 301-312, 310; Aquinas, *Summa*, II-II 123.4 ad.2.

[62] DeYoung, 'Courage,' 303.

[63] Aquinas, *Summa*, II-II 123.6.

[64] Leaders must, nevertheless, use discernment when determining what is 'called for'. As discussed above, there are certain kinds of self-chosen leadership vulnerability that will not be for the good of the other, just as there may also be a need for appropriate personal boundaries when such vulnerability would be inappropriate for the leader. Love of God and others (Thomas' 'greater good') is what is in question for discernment of what is 'called for' on each occasion.

[65] DeYoung, 'Courage,' 310.

being led. Indeed, these wider discussions probably should take place, subject to earlier comments about appropriate boundaries, for such conversations will not only serve to focus on identifying the leader's central motivations, that is, their conception of the ultimate good.[66] They will also operate to form the whole community better to talk about vulnerability, the courage its embrace demands, and the kinds of mutual care required to hold one another's vulnerability graciously, with honour rather than judgment.

In these reflective conversations, leaders might explore questions along these lines: To what end is my life really directed? Does my ongoing leadership practice indicate a consistent intention to honour God first and to overflow in love for others? Do I pursue the flourishing of others over my own preferences? Do I fear God more than I fear market and political forces? Do I hold God and his will in higher esteem than my professional reputation? And finally: Where in my life do I currently have opportunity to practise choosing to hold fast to what is truly good in the face of other goods that are, nevertheless, lesser?

As to those habits that might serve to reorder a leader's heart toward what is truly good — that is, love of God and others — and thus to develop the courage to choose endurance of one's own vulnerability, perhaps one habit is more fundamental than any other. This is the practice, first, of remembering Jesus' own chosen vulnerability before God and humanity in his life and death as a man, an attitude of loving dependence which typified him as the beloved. This remembering involves a parallel awareness that our own experience of being human is no different: we are just as vulnerable to being affected by God and others but, equally, just as much God's beloved. Alongside regular meditation upon this dual reality, a related habit of silent prayer, waiting on God in surrender and responsivity, may serve to deepen leaders' awareness

[66] Although not technically relevant to the question of developing courage, spiritual directors and mentors might also raise the question of what is 'called for' (see n.64) since not all self-chosen vulnerability might be wise within a leadership context.

of both these truths:[67] on the one hand, that, rather than being independent, they are in fact liable to being affected by God's being and activity and, on the other, that God's being and activity toward them is love.

For leaders to surrender themselves so deliberately to the reality of their own vulnerability is a kind of space-making not unlike that described above, albeit here practised in relation to God rather than others. Indeed, silent prayers of surrender can empty us, over time, of our pretensions to strength. Yet their effect does not end here: instead, those who pray in this way discover that their vulnerability can become, paradoxically, a channel of God's strength,[68] even in the context of vulnerability experienced in relation to others. Particularly, external silence for the sake of setting one's gaze on Christ can serve to make space for the reordering of one's loves by the Spirit,[69] such that vulnerability in relation to others now becomes something less to be feared but rather embraced as the true reality of interdependence.[70] This is because prayers of silence and stillness, though contrary to a Western leadership tendency of wanting to make things happen, can be powerful indeed. Their power lies in the fact that they reorientate us toward receptivity.

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[67] Sarah Coakley, *Powers and Submissions: Spirituality, Philosophy and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 34-35.

[68] John of the Cross indicates something of this in his discussion of the soul's 'nighting': Vulnerability becomes the vehicle of a deeper union with God, which itself produces neighbour-love (John of the Cross, *The Dark Night* in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, 3rd ed., trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez [Washington D.C.: ICS, 2017], 1.12.1-2; John of the Cross, *The Living Flame of Love* in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, 3rd ed., trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez [Washington D.C.: ICS, 2017], 2.7; John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* in *The Collected Works of St. John of the Cross*, 3rd ed., trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez [Washington D.C.: ICS, 2017], 3.23.1).

[69] Teresa of Avila writes of this: e.g., *The Way of Perfection*, trans. Kieran Kavanaugh and Otilio Rodriguez (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 2000), 26.1-3; 28.6; 29.5.

[70] By reorientating us to God, a practice of silent surrender can "reframe our 'self-understanding in solidarity with the neighbour' " (Shannon Nicole Smythe, "The Way of Divine and Human Handing-over: Pauline Apocalyptic, Centering Prayer, and Vulnerable Solidarity," *Theology Today* 75:l (2018), 77-88, 86).

They dispose us, in the context of regular practice, to receive the infusion of God's grace, a grace that comprises all of the virtues we might need for a life in him.

If Christian leaders then can learn sometimes to set aside self-directed activity in favour of a leadership activity that flows from a prior listening receptivity to Jesus, an embrace of their own vulnerability will become easier to bear. This intentional practice of surrender positions them to receive the gift of divine grace that is courageous endurance. By embracing the reality of their vulnerability, leaders will also be opened to the possibility of a courage that no longer fears loss or harm. What is more, these prayers need not be practised alone. They can be engaged in community with those being led, a mutual submission to the formation of the Spirit in the courage required for a life marked by loving vulnerability both to God and to one another.

In honestly grappling with this practice (for it is indeed difficult!), and with discerning guidance from others regarding how their leadership priorities relate to God and his concerns, Christian leaders can confidently expect to receive the empowering grace of courageous endurance. Vulnerability, then, need not be feared but can be willingly embraced as fruitful gift, the place in which friendship with God and with his people is made real and in which Christian leadership can, therefore, thrive.

EMBODIED INFLUENCE: USING A POWER AUDIT TO REFLECT ON THE DISTRIBUTION AND ENACTMENT OF SOCIAL POWER IN GROUP CONTEXTS

SUSAN L. MAROS
ROB DIXON

Abstract

This essay considers the social nature of power, proposes a power audit tool and the framework of a change process, and illustrates these through three case studies. It suggests tangible steps leaders can take to make conversations about power concrete, embodied, and personalized.

Case Studies Introduction[1]

Abigail served as the executive director of a small missions agency engaged in relief work around the world. Over time, Abigail could tell that there were some unhelpful dynamics on her executive team. Initially, this sense was more of an intuitive thing; something just felt off to Abigail during the team's times together. Eventually, Abigail noted some disconcerting signs: Several team members looked disengaged, even frustrated, during the meetings, and those same team members would leave right away at the end of the meetings without engaging in the social banter that marked the group's experience when it was originally formed. She also noticed the tendency of two or three team members to interrupt others while they were speaking. Abigail began to ponder how she might help her team identify and then address these tensions.

[1] These case studies are based on the authors' experiences with specific organizations of the types described—missions, campus ministry, church. Names and identifying details have been changed.

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Bob had served for years as a college campus minister. Part of his role was guiding a diverse group of students who were responsible for facilitating small-group ministry for their community. Each student on the team led a small group filled with students from the university. Their team met weekly to share personal updates, ministry reports, and any conundrums each were facing.

Midway through the year, it became clear to Bob that many of the small groups were struggling because of unbalanced sharing. For example, the student leaders would come to the weekly meetings lamenting how some students in their groups would talk too much, while others were essentially mute. Bob knew that he would need to figure out a way to help these leaders care for the students in their groups by effectively balancing out the participation.

Mateo was the pastor of a small, bilingual (Spanish-English) church. One of Mateo's challenges was to foster a cultural shift, allowing church members to see themselves as leaders. Most of the members came from cultural backgrounds where the pastor was the only person in the church who had authority to make decisions. Church members tended to look to Mateo to be the one to initiate any ministry. If someone were sick and in need of prayer, they sought Mateo, seeming to see the prayers of other church members less valuable.

Likewise, many members were from cultures in which *machismo*[2] is a strong dynamic, focusing on the value of hypermasculine men and silent, submissive women. Mateo desired to help the church leadership team and the church members grow in their capacity to see themselves as developing leaders, able to engage the church community, their local communities, and their families with gospel-rooted care.

In these case studies, individuals and teams would do well to consider how they embody power in their interactions. Yet, because power is a rather vague term with a lot of cultural baggage, conversations about how we wield power with one another can

[2] For a discussion of *machismo*, see Wilmer G. Villacorta. *Unmasking the Male Soul: Power and Gender Trap for Women in Leadership*. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2019), 14.

trigger misunderstanding and conflict. So, how can leaders strategically design a process that helps people have a concrete, localized, and nonbinary conversation about embodied power? How can we come to recognize the power we embody and reflect on it theologically and spiritually for the sake of cultivating greater communion and enhancing missional effectiveness?

To address this need, we first define power in light of leadership literature. We then outline a power audit exercise, considering examples of how this exercise might be used in a workplace or faith community to enable individuals and teams to reflect on power dynamics present in their particular context. This exercise is set in the broader context of a five-step change process for leaders who are seeking to change the power dynamics in their teams and ministries. We conclude with a return to the three cases and consider how a power audit assists Abigail, Bob, and Mateo to address power dynamics in their teams.

Considering Power

In any attempt to define and discuss power, we need to acknowledge the inherent, long-standing complexity and evolution of the concept. In much of the social scientific literature, power has come to be understood as influence, as "the capacity of some persons to produce intended and foreseen effects on others."[3] In one of the first essays to characterize power as influence,[4] sociologists John French and Bertram Raven devised a five-part framework, largely individualistic, having to do with the "base" from which one person influences another through the use of reward power, coercive power, referent power, legitimate power, and expert power.

Jeffery Pfeffer's best-selling book, *Power: Why Some People Have it and Other's Don't,* however, focuses instead on power as the agency and capacity of an individual leader to succeed in their

[3] Dennis H. Wrong. *Power: Its Forms, Bases, and Uses*. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2017), 2.

[4] John R. P. French and Bertram Raven. "The Bases of Social Power." In *Studies in Social Power*, edited by D Cartwright. (Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, 1959), 150-167.

organizational roles.[5] Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal define power as "the capacity to make things happen" in the context of what they refer to as the "political frame" of leadership.[6]

In all these instances, and indeed in most books about leadership and power, the emphasis is on the individual influencing other individuals or groups. Rarely in this literature is there any attention paid to the power of the collective let alone the power inherent in social structures and how these dynamics play a part in how groups of people work together.

In addition to focusing primarily on an individual's influence or agency, conversations about power tend to demonstrate three characteristics. First, discussions of power are generally abstract, dealing with high level conceptualizations and frameworks rather than on how power is experienced in concrete situations and locations. Most of the scholarly literature falls into this category. Second, discussions of power are frequently externalized. Discussion focuses on the power held and exercised by individuals and groups that are situated somewhere "out there" in the world and do not include the author or individual speaking.

Power is seen as fundamentally something held by *other* people. This dynamic is affected by the third characteristic of much of the conversation: Power is treated as a binary dynamic between the powerful and the powerless. The boundaries around these two groups are seen as immutable. If someone has power, they are seen as powerful with no attention given to areas in which they are not. The powerless, on the other hand, are entirely without power, without acknowledgment of how a powerless group or individual in one context might have power in another. Powerful

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[5] Jeffrey Pfeffer. *Power: Why Some People Have It--And Others Don't*. (New York, NY: HarperBusiness, 2010).

[6] Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal. *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership. 6th Edition*. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2017), 186. Concerning the political frame, Bolman and Deal identify a number of social power tasks leaders engage, noting, "the leader as politician needs to master at least four key skills: agenda setting, mapping the political terrain, networking and forming coalitions." Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal. *How Great Leaders Think: The Art of Reframing*. (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2014), 81.

and powerless become fixed categories, and individuals are treated as if they belong in one and only one group.

We believe that thinking about power should reflect the complexity and fluidity in real communities. We are particularly concerned with the work of teams: how power is embodied and experienced within a team and by the individuals making up a team. We offer a practical framework for a *power audit exercise* that reveals how power is enacted in the team. In turn, the power audit functions as the basis of a larger change process by which teams are better able to adapt power dynamics within it. Before considering the practicalities of a power audit exercise, we turn to consider the nature of embodied power as a form of social engagement.

Embodied Power

Our thinking about power has been greatly influenced by MaryKate Morse, who takes seriously the embodied nature of the enactment of power. Morse observes, "Power is constituted between persons in a group through myriads of little body cues and instinctual decisions. Power, which gives an individual or a group the right to influence, is created through the small decisions groups make about who will be entrusted with the leadership baton and who will not."[7] Morse utilizes the metaphor of social space to talk about power: "Space is alive and relational. A person's identity in a particular gathering is directly influenced by the interactions that happen there. In the spaces where we interact, we are constantly shaped and formed by what happens there."[8] She further notes how power is expressed in physical space, writing, "Interactions in physical space define who is seen and heard and valued, and who is not; who has power, and who does not. Power is not brought into the space as an abstract concept. Each individual's sense of self is constructed in physical space."[9]

The emphasis on physical space is particularly important. "Because power is constructed through relationships in physical space,

[7] MaryKate Morse. *Making Room for Leadership: Power, Space and Influence*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 16.
[8] Morse, Making Room for Leadership, 66.
[9] Morse, Making Room for Leadership, 66.

then naturally it is physically perceived through those interactions."[10] Generally speaking, the more physical and psychological space a person takes up, the more power they have, and vice versa.

Morse's treatment of power is useful for avoiding abstraction because it takes power out of the realm of the theoretical and situates it in the lived and embodied experiences of individuals and groups. Noting different experiences within a group allows leaders and team members to consider how power is actually expressed in their specific context. Concretely dealing with power also helps us avoid "othering" power. Engaging in conversations as a group or team that allow for both individual and collective reflection will aid in taking the conversation from "out there" to reflect on how power is enacted "in here" in the context of the group, team, or ministry. Likewise, contextualized reflection about the variable and fluid exercise of power combats the "all or nothing" tendency of many power conversations.

Creating a Power Audit Tool

Leaders play a key role in helping communities understand and navigate the reality of power, and one tool they can use is a power audit. The aim of the power audit is to offer a structured reflection that allows a person and team members to consider the nature of power in the physical and psychological space they share. Utilizing this tool, a leader sets aside space for a community to intentionally reflect on how power is embodied in the context of their life together. Fruitful power audits borrow from Morse's notion of social space as a metaphor for power. For Morse, how much space a person embodies in a social setting is an amalgamation of physical and social factors, including:

> *Position or title*. In most communities, a title means that a person takes up more space in a social setting. A person with a formal leadership role often functions with legitimized authority, recognized by the group as having capacity to set the agenda and influence the direction of

[10] Morse, Making Room for Leadership, 73.

the group in a way that is not available to other members of the group.[11]

Age and generation. The effect of this factor can vary widely. In some contexts, older individuals are honored and respected, taking up more social space due to their perceived wisdom and experience. In other contexts, youth culture and a value for youthfulness is sufficiently strong that a younger person's voice will be heard more readily than an older persons.

Nationality. In intercultural organizations, a person who is from the national background from which the organization was founded or who represents the group that has the most members or has the most financial resources tends to take up more social space. In other contexts, natural-born citizenship and immigrant-status influences the exercise of social power.

Racial-ethnic-cultural identity. Similar to nationality, a person who is from a majority group in a given context is likely to take up more space while a person from a marginalized group is likely to take up less space.

Gender. Almost universally, men take up more space in the majority of social settings. Some of this has to do with men generally being physically larger, a point Morse emphasizes. Some of this has to do with men occupying a majority of positions of authority in many settings.

Marital status. In Christian contexts in particular, if a person is married, they tend to take up more space. Despite changes in social norms around marriage, even

[11] Bolman and Deal note, "positions confer certain levels of legitimate authority. Professors assign grades, judges settle disputes. Positions also place incumbents in more or less powerful locations in communications and power networks." Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations*, 192.

a cursory look at US politics shows that being married is seen as a desirable quality in a leader.[12]

Work or ministry experience. If a person has been serving in an organization for a significant length of time, they likely take up more space. People who are distinctly skilled or seen as especially competent, particularly in areas of endeavor central to the group's mission, are likely to be accorded more influence by the group.

Giftedness and competency. People with teaching and leading gifts often take up more space in religious organizations. The Apostle Paul says all spiritual gifts are useful,[13] but in many settings, some tend to mean just a bit more in terms of space and power. This dynamic is affected by the group's impression of the individual's capacities and competence, what Wrong refers to as "personal authority."[14]

Personality: In many contexts, particularly in the United States, charisma is considered a highly desirable leadership quality. As a result, extroverts tend to take up more space. On the other hand, sometimes the quiet guru who only speaks occasionally takes up a great deal of space when he or she speaks.[15] Different personality traits are valued in different ways in specific contexts, with social space being granted more readily to people who embody the qualities valued by the group.

Disability: Able-bodied people tend to take up more space in a world that is literally constructed for them. Likewise, neuro-normative individuals have fewer barri-

[12] For example, almost 80% of the 117th congress was married with only one single parent serving as a representative. Capitol Canary. "Meet Your New Congress." December 3, 2020. Accessed January 13, 2023. https://capitolcanary.com/blog/meet-your-new-congress

[13] See Romans 12:3-8.

[14] Wrong, *Power*, 64.

[15] For an exploration of the power of the introvert for effective leadership, see Susan Cain, *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking*. (New York: Crown, 2012).

ers to exert influence than individuals who have cognitive disabilities or mental health challenges.

Physical Stature and Health: Many cultures show a preference for leaders who are tall.[16] People who are taller and larger take up more physical space. The social value for tall and large people allows them to take up more social and psychological space as well. Similarly, people who are thin or physically fit often have greater social value associated than people who are obese or simply not physically active.

This is a partial list; there are doubtless other factors that could be in a play in particular situations. Indigenous heritage, sexual orientation and gender identity, or, in some contexts, religion and spiritual orientation might be categories that are significant to consider.[17] Determining categories and expressions valued within these categories is an important starting point for a power audit. A leader might consider what categories are significant in a given context and facilitate reflection on this point by the group.

Note the social space scores are a consideration of how much attention is given to a particular trait or how much that trait is valued and sought out in each context. This is *not* an assessment of the intrinsic merit of a person who identifies with a particular descriptor. The point of the score is to consider which characteristics are more seen, acknowledged, and valued in a particular context, allowing people with those traits to take up more of the social space. For example, in some spaces, a Black woman might score low on social power as a female and as a person of color while scoring high

[16] Note, for example, that people elected as president in the US are generally taller than the norm, even taking into account that, thus far, only men have been elected. For a discussion of this point, see Stulp, Gert, Abraham P. Buunk, Simon Verhulst, and Thomas V. Pollet. "Tall claims? Sense and nonsense about the importance of height of US presidents." *The Leadership Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (2013): 159-171.

[17] For another set of categories with helpful reflective questions, see Pamela A. Hays. *Addressing Cultural Complexities in Practice: Assessment, Diagnosis, and Therapy*. 3rd ed. (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2016), 42-43.

as an able-bodied person and team leader. Scores are a way of noting how persons with particular characteristics take up space in a given community or team.

The following sample chart is one possible collection of categories and descriptions of those categories. Having a starting point can be helpful for a leader to consider the particular categories that are significant in their organization, ministry, or team. Likewise, the descriptors are a starting point for a conversation about power. Leaders should adapt these descriptions to fit the particularities of their context. As we return to the case studies that opened this essay, we will show how this chart was adapted to specific situations.

For each category, note the description and score yourself depending on whether you have the characteristic with the most influence in context (+2), some of the characteristic (+1), some characteristic that is low power or low influence (-1) or a marginalized identity in that category (-2).

Sample Chart

Category	Description	Self-Score
Position/Title	The extent to which a role is understood to carry legitimized authority to influence the course of the team or organization.	
Age	The age considered "normal" for people with influence. Which generation has the most influence in the organization.	
Ethnicity	A person's racial-ethnic-cultural background, both externally perceived and internally identified.	
Nationality	Country of birth and citizenship status.	
Gender	Identity as cisgender man or woman. Where applicable, gendered identity as trans or nonbinary.	
Ministry Experience	Length of time in the organization and perceived expertise.	
Marital Status	Married, single (never married, divorced, widowed).	
Personality	Intrinsic inclination of temperament.	
Giftedness and Competencies	Spiritual gifts, natural abilities, and acquired skills.[18]	
Disability	Physical or mental challenges.	
Physical Stature and Health	Characteristics that identify a "fit" person.	
Total Score		

[18] J. Robert Clinton. *The Making of a Leader*, 2nd edition. (NavPress, 2012), 179-180.

A leader desiring to facilitate a power audit should think through categories that are meaningful for their context and identify particular traits associated with that category. A leader might utilize this point of reflection with key members of the community collectively agreeing on what categories should be included. Alternatively, asking what categories are missing or what edits the group thinks should be made to the categories and traits can be a generative component of the reflection provoked by this exercise.

Creating a power audit tool is itself a part of a larger process. The tool creation prompts reflection. With that in mind, we offer an overview of how such a tool might be used in a larger change process before offering three case study examples of such a tool in use.

Power Audit as a Part of a Change Process[19]

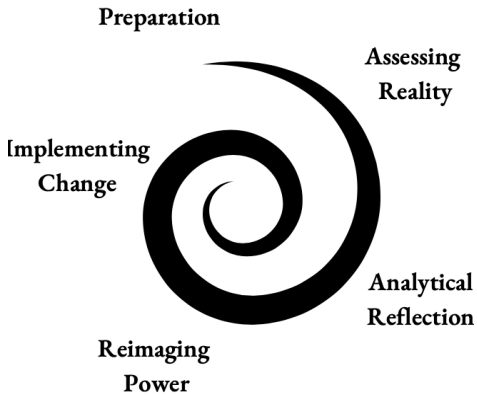
As displayed in the stories shared in the introduction, the purpose for engaging a power audit is to provide a space to consider power dynamics in a group, team, or community. The purpose of the audit is to bring these dynamics to the awareness of the group in a way that the group can process. Naming the reality of what is experienced by group members is an important step but only one step toward engaging power in more just and equitable ways within the community.

Power audits can be a part of a larger change process that includes preparation, assessing reality, reflection, reimagining power, and implementation. This change process is iterative rather than linear, and the elements of this process can be revisited at any time. This five-fold change process might consist of one conversation, or conversations spread out over multiple days, but these five components will help leaders and the communities they

[19] This process does not directly reflect but is influenced by Mark Lau Branson's practical theology cycle. To consider his approach to leading people through a process from praxis to theory and back to praxis, see Mark Lau Branson and Juan Francisco Martínez. "A Practical Theology of Leadership with International Voices." *Journal of Religious Leadership*, 10 No. 2, Fall 2011.

serve understand, reimagine, and then redesign the power dynamics in play in their systems.

Figure 2: Power Audit Change Process



Preparation

Faith communities and organizations generally don't talk openly about power, particularly the interpersonal power experienced within the group. Facilitating a constructive conversation about a topic that people have limited experience with requires thoughtful preparation for the one doing the facilitating and careful preparation for the individuals who will participate. To aid with preparation, a leader should seek to give plenty of lead time ahead of the conversation(s). Letting the community know what is coming can help them prepare emotionally and mentally for the experience.

In communicating before the conversation, a leader could offer a sense of their goals for the time and what the time will entail. Additionally, they might consider offering some questions that people could use for reflection, both in terms of how they think about power and how they experience power within the group.

For instance, leaders could ask:

> When you hear the word "power" what words or images come to mind?

> Give an example of a "powerful" person. Think of a biblical example, a historical example, and a contemporary example. What characteristics do these individuals have that make them powerful in your mind?
>
> What books, sermons, classes, or other content have informed your perspective of power?
>
> How would you describe your sense of power in this community's life together? Where do you feel powerful (seen, heard, given space)? Where do you feel powerless (unseen, unheard, resisted)?
>
> Notice your state of mind and how your body feels as you anticipate a conversation about power in our community. Where are you carrying tension? Where do you sense ease or relaxation?
>
> What do you need from the Lord and/or from the group's facilitator in order to fully enter into the conversation?

In addition to preparing the group for the conversation, a leader should be prepared to pastor community members who might feel tension or even trauma in the face of a power audit. People also might be initially resistant to discussing power, and it is important that they are pastored into a place where they are able to talk about it. As Richard Foster writes, "Power touches us all. We cannot get away from it even if we wanted to. All human relationships involve the use of power. Therefore, rather than seek to run from it or to deny that we use it, we would do well to discover the Christian meaning of power and learn how to use it for the good of others. All who follow Christ are called to the 'ministry of power.' "[20] Some extra pastoral care would be prudent particularly where team members have had significant adverse experiences with power.

The preparation step in the process is important. Not taking time to prepare people for a power audit can be detrimental to the

[20] Richard Foster. *Money, Sex and Power: The Challenge of a Disciplined Life*. (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1985), 213.

process, particularly where the community has not had an open conversation about power before or has experienced the topic as contentious in past conversations.

Assessing Reality

The power audit process continues with an examination of the community's existing philosophy or theology of power. The goal is to identify the community's "default setting" for how it considers power. In his book *Good to Great*, Jim Collins notes that one of a leader's key responsibilities is to face reality. He writes, "you absolutely cannot make a series of good decisions without first confronting the brutal facts."[21] In the context of a change process around power, this confrontation with reality happens in a step of assessing reality. Before a group can reimagine its view and practice of power, it must reckon with the sometimes brutal facts of what actually exists with the group's interpersonal dynamics.

Coming to a concrete identification of the conceptualization of power in a given context is a challenging task. Chris Argyris identifies the space between a group's espoused theory and their theory-in-use as both a significant element of conflict as well as an important arena of discovery.[22] Groups will often identify their espoused theory of power, naming what they consciously value or what they sense is socially acceptable in the context rather than being able to identify the underlying biases and assumptions that are at work. These assumptions are demonstrated in the group's behaviors and interpersonal engagements.

Engaging the power audit tool at this stage can be helpful in bringing these underlying assumptions to the surface. This process of leading a group to assess a default setting in order to potentially exchange it for something different brings to mind Scott Cormode's concept of mental models. Cormode writes, "the essence of Christian leadership is to transform people's mental

[21] Jim Collins. Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... and Others Don't. (New York, NY: HarperBusiness, 2001), 70.
[22] Chris Arygris. "Teaching Smart People How to Learn." *Harvard Business Review* 69, no. 3 (1991).

models so that God's people use Christian categories to make sense of their lives."[23]

At this stage, a leader might simply adapt the power audit tool according to their sense of what is significant in context and offer the tool for the group's reflection, preceding to the next stage of the process. On the other hand, a leader might use the task of adapting the power audit tool as part of the process of bringing a group's mental models of power to the surface for conversations. To do so, the leader might invite individuals or the group into a discussion of how to adapt the power audit tool. Such a discussion could include conversation about the categories, considering which are most significant, and what additional categories should be added. Group members might also offer examples of behaviors or characteristics for each category, possibly considering what might constitute +2, +1, etc., as well as how the category might be best described within their context.

As a leader desiring to facilitate a conversation to identify the realities of the group's experience with power, consider the following strategies:

> Pray, both individually and corporately, for wisdom and clarity to see what is actually true about how power works in your community. Pray also for grace in the process, particularly when self-image or values are at odds with what is being seen.
>
> Have a smaller group work together to wordsmith a definition of power that they feel captures the community's existing view of power. Consider offering the group a definition as a starting point, such as "People have power when they have the ability to affect others' beliefs, attitudes, and courses of action."[24]

[23] Scott Cormode. *The Innovative Church: How Leaders and Their Congregations Can Adapt in an Ever-Changing World*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 22.

[24] Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 6th Edition. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2013), 9.

> Invite individuals to share their responses to the reflection questions about how they view power in your community and, as a group, look for common themes and patterns. From your vantage point as a leader, bring your own observations about how power tends to work in your community and invite input and even critique.

Before a community can reimagine its view of power, it must reckon with what is already there, and this step of the change process makes space for that to happen. The fruit of this step in the process is a greater self-awareness within individuals and in the group collectively about the beliefs and assumptions present in context. This sets the context for constructive analytical reflections in the next step.

Analytical Reflection

The next step in the power audit process is analytical reflection, and there are two components to this part of the process. First, the community should carefully reflect on what they notice about the existing perceptions of power and how they are enacted interpersonally.

Questions the group might consider include:

> How do people feel about the definition the community has articulated? In particular, is there dissonance? If so, why?
>
> What about the working definition resonates with the lived experience of people in the group? What doesn't? The more particular and specific the group can be about this, the better.
>
> What biblical and theological principles affect how the group defines and engages power?
>
> Notice particularly where an espoused theology of power that is different from how power is lived out in practice.
>
> Where does a group's theological tradition help the group toward living out power in generative ways? Where does a group's theological tradition hinder engaging power generativity?

Second, the community needs to make space to discern how individuals in the community tangibly experience and wield power. This is where the power audit exercise particularly comes into play. This exercise specifically invites individuals to consider the power that they embody. Discussing the exercise as a group fosters the team's consideration of how various members experience social space dynamics of power within the group. Having a frank conversation about how much space individuals take up and, crucially, why they take up the space they do, can yield fruitful insights as a part of a power audit. Blend a conversation about social space with the conceptual discussion of a community's definition of power, and the door opens to healthy evaluation.

The reflective aspect of the change process can be challenging. In many ways, it often involves a confrontation with the brutal facts and that confrontation might provoke a multitude of emotional responses from the group. A leader's role in helping the group to stay in the process is critical at this point. The "temperature" of the conversation needs to be high enough to help the group maintain focus while keeping the heat low enough that the group can persevere in the midst of discomfort.[25] Being able to name reality is a necessary step if a group is going to effectively wrestle with the ways in which power is being expressed in the community.

Reimagining Power

In the reimagining step, community members take what they have learned through the analytical reflection step and begin to think about how they would like to embody power in their life and work together. This step involves drawing from the stories of the group, both the personal stories of individuals and the narratives significant to the community, to imagine a new way of being. The group may also draw from the experiences of people outside the group through books, podcasts, or other media that expose group members to stories about the experience of power and the expression of embodied power.

[25] For more on this point, see Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky. *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive Through the Dangers of Change*. (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 2017), 107-116.

Some activities toward reimagining power as a group might include:

> Explore the Scriptures on the topic or power, looking in particular at how Jesus stewarded power and how power dynamics were enacted through Acts.
>
> Read a book together. Some options include MaryKate Morse, *Making Room for Leadership*; Andy Crouch, *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power*; and Dominique DuBois Gilliard, *Subversive Witness: Scripture's Call to Leverage Privilege.* Consider also the classic Howard Thurman text, *Jesus and the Disinherited*.
>
> Tell stories of the organization or community, focusing on positive examples of power enacted in ways that felt life-giving. Focus on particular people and concrete examples. Reflect on naming specific behaviors.
>
> Set aside time for group members to tell their stories. Consider these story prompts:
>
> - Tell us about a time when you felt powerful. What happened? What emotions did you experience? How did you interpret this experience?
> - Tell us about a time when you felt powerless. What happened? What emotions did you experience? How has this experience affected you over time?
> - Tell of a time when you felt like you were welcome to "take up space" in this group.
>
> Returning to the group wordsmithing exercise idea from above, how would the group articulate its updated definition of power?

The goal of reimagining power is to promote constructive imagination of what a positive embodiment of power might look like in the group. The point is to welcome and articulate pain points while not becoming stuck in this reflection. Part of the process is to identify positive characteristics, and particularly positive examples that can be affirmed and valued by the group as a whole.

Implementing Change

The final phase of the change process focuses on implementation. This step assumes that change is an iterative process. The goal here is not to create a comprehensive plan so much as to identify practical ways the group can move together toward enacting and embodying power. The leader seeks to help the group identify small "experiments" that can be enacted and assessed, allowing for continued reflection around the ways the group embodies power. Having discerned what it hopes to be in its interaction, the group considers together what constitutes their next faithful step toward that hope. That is, once a community has made the decision to reimagine their perspective on and practice of power, they begin to identify and take tangible actions to embody their newly articulated convictions.

Some elements to consider in the implementation step include:

> What tangible next steps will the community take to shift the organizational culture to better express their new perspective on power?
>
> How might structures or programs need to change to align with the community's reimagined view of power?
>
> How might social space on various teams need to be reallocated and what are the concrete things a group would need to do to reallocate power?
>
> How will the community introduce its reimagined perspective on power to constituencies who weren't a part of the power audit process but would benefit from understanding the shift?

The action steps the group identifies should be small and concrete, taken with an attitude of exploration and experimentation. Both the unrealistic expectation to accomplish a massive overhaul of a community's behavior and the demotivating pressure to be perfect in implementation get in the way of making concrete progress. Next steps should be concrete, practical, and time-oriented.

Specific action items a group might include:

> Brainstorm small, concrete ways to redistribute power in the day-to-day life of the team or community. For instance, a leader could delegate leadership of specific meetings to those with less social power.
>
> Decide that people with less organizational and social power will be the ones to speak first in any group discussion.
>
> Choose to platform people with less social power in public-facing roles.
>
> Make space for debrief in real time. In one instance, a leadership team agreed that at any time, a team member could call "time out" to reckon with perceived harmful power dynamics.
>
> Identify when the group will follow up on the power audit. How and when will this take place?
>
> Consider what will trigger the next iteration of the change process for the group. Will this be a part of a quarterly cycle, for example?

The expectation is not that a conversation about embodied power will be a one-and-done exercise but that this conversation will be iterative. When a group can identify small, actionable steps that are integrated into the group's ongoing work together, the likelihood of substantive progress is greatly increased over a single theoretical discussion. Ideally, leaders will guide their communities into the articulation of a change plan, one that captures the decisions made in the implementation step. Then, the community can focus on concrete action steps, before returning to this change process in the future.

Case Studies Revisited[26]

To further illustrate the use of a power audit, we return to three case studies describing the experience of an audit in the real world of ministry. The case studies demonstrate the use of a power audit in three contexts: a parachurch organization with a focus on global missions, a North American college ministry, and an intercultural church. These case studies demonstrate ways in which the power audit might be adapted for a particular context as well as how the conversation might evolve as a result of engaging in the exercise.

Case Study #1: Power in an International Missions Agency

Noticing disconcerting dynamics in her team members, Abigail, executive director of the mission organization, took steps to engage with the dissonance she was perceiving. With the hope of exposing whatever under-the-surface dynamics were present, Abigail decided to conduct a power audit. She began by explaining the concept of a power audit to the team, in the process naming her belief that there was something amiss in the context of their team's life together. A chorus of affirmative head nods greeted this observation.

Next, Abigail introduced the power audit tool, explaining Morse's concept of social space. She was careful to ask team members if they were willing to explore the power dynamics on the team. Thankfully, team members indicated their willingness, even if several seemed somewhat hesitant. Abigail then sent each team member off to reflect individually on how much space they saw themselves as taking up on the team. To facilitate this processing, Abigail had prepared this worksheet:

Missions Organization Chart

How much social space do you think you take up? Give yourself a 2, 1, 0, -1, -2 on the chart's metrics. Depending on your social location or role in our organizational culture, how you gauge this might vary. For instance, age might be a positive in some situations in the organization but not in others.

[26] These case studies are based on the authors' experiences with particular organizations. Names and circumstances have been changed to preserve the privacy of the organizations and individuals involved.

Metric	Number Score
Position/Title	
Age	
Ethnicity	
Nationality	
Gender	
Ministry Experience	
Marital Status	
Physical/Mental/Emotional Wellness	
Personality: Introvert/Extrovert	
Giftedness and Skills	
Physical Stature	
Other:	

After allowing time for team members to complete the worksheet, Abigail reconvened the team and hosted a conversation using the following questions:

> How did it feel to do this exercise?
>
> Did you experience dissonance? If so, why?
>
> Was the number you came up with for yourself what you expected intuitively? Higher? Lower? How might you account for the difference between your expectations and the actual number?
>
> What other metrics might have been good for this simulation?

As a part of answering these questions, each team member was invited to share the number they had generated during their time of reflection. This communal sharing elicited some mixed reactions. Members sometimes expressed surprise at their teammate's number, other times there was quick agreement. In several cases, numbers were subtly adjusted as teammates asked questions or made observations that helped bring clarity to the perception of how much space someone took up.

As they debriefed the experience together, several themes emerged. First, there were indeed some metrics that were missing on the worksheet. For instance, there was nothing explicitly about language. The team learned together that members for whom English was a second (or third) language felt disempowered as there was less space for their views in the fast-paced conversation conducted in English. Second, they realized that some of the scoring on the social space worksheet needed to be adjusted. For instance, nationality was such an important factor on their team that it warranted a range from 3 to -3. Third, the exercise allowed the team to talk about systemic injustice embedded in their organization as individuals lamented the reality that space was inequitably distributed. Finally, the team achieved clarity about why certain individuals felt dissonance on the team, and that reality became something that they could address together going forward.

In the end, the team generated some ground rules for how they'd like to function. For example, individuals with higher numbers (i.e., those who took up more space) resolved to exercise restraint, being slower to jump into conversations to afford their colleagues more opportunities to speak. The team agreed that they would leave space for everyone to speak and facilitate this by giving one another permission to note who had already spoken on a particular question and who had yet to speak.

One team member suggested the use of a bell to "ding" people who interrupted other team members as a way to remind all of their commitment to hear every voice. In addition, the team commissioned Abigail to make a power audit a regular part of the team's life together, with the hope of reassessing the social space every three months.

Case Study #2: Power in Campus Small Groups

Returning to Bob's concern with his small-group ministry campus leadership team, Bob decided that he would help the leaders navigate the problem of disproportional participation by having each leader conduct a power audit that examined the students in their small group. To guide the conversation, Bob explained the concept of a power audit in a team meeting. Together with the

small-group leaders, Bob created the following chart. This chart included both categories the team felt were important as well as "scoring" examples they identified as significant. The use of tongue-in-cheek humor was reflective of the team as well as the students they were leading.

Campus Small Groups Chart

Category	You	Co-lead	Group Mem 1	Group Mem 2	Group Mem 3	Group Mem 4
Gender (plus two for men, minus two for women)						
Ethnicity (plus two for White, zero for African American, minus two for Latino and Asian)						
Personality (plus two for extrovert—life of the party, zero for what you judge to be "normal" social impact, minus two for the painfully shy)						
Socioeconomic Status (plus two for someone who uses their parents gas card and has Chipotle often, zero for works part time and eats out once in a while, minus two for never eats out and works a full-time job alongside school [in addition to financial aid])						
Spiritual Gifts (plus two for leadership or preaching gifts, zero for pastoral or administrative gifts, minus one for gifts in service or helps)						
Ministry Experience (plus one for any previous leadership experience, minus one for no previous experiences)						
TOTAL						

After making space for his leaders to reflect individually, Bob followed up with some robust group processing. Several things became clear. First, those that talked in the small groups tended to have the higher scores, thus taking up the most social space. The converse was also true, and those that were quiet during the small

group meetings often scored lower. Second, one throughline was that people of color were particularly absent in conversations. Dynamics around the experience of people of various racial-ethic-cultural identities was clearly something that merited focused attention.

For Bob, these insights were a revelation. He suddenly knew exactly what to train on at subsequent meetings. Bob spent time discussing the value of connecting one-on-one with quieter folks to help them feel more comfortable in their groups. He helped group leaders learn how to direct verbal traffic in the group meetings, reallocating the space by winsomely inviting talkative students to say less and quiet students to take risks to share more. He also helped them understand the power of delegation, encouraging his leaders to share leadership, so that others in the group began to take up a bit more space. And, finally, he knew he needed to facilitate focused training on ethnic/racial dynamics.

Over time, Bob helped his leaders focus on implementing change. For example, the leaders on Bob's team became proficient at balancing the sharing in their small groups, using subtle but important verbal cues to facilitate equal sharing. Social power began to be redistributed in the small- group communities, and, as a result, the small-group experience became more satisfying, for the members, for their leaders, and for Bob as well.

Case Study #3: Power in an Intercultural Church

Mateo sought to foster a collaborative style of leadership, sharing responsibilities among the pastoral team and the five lay leaders who made up the church's elder body leadership team. This kind of egalitarian approach to leadership was somewhat at odds with the cultural norms for the nationalities represented in the church but nonetheless appealing to church members who desired to be an active part of the faith community.

Mateo raised his concerns about the power dynamics he had noted in the congregation with the pastoral team and set aside time with the leadership team on a one-day retreat to reflect and consider how they might address it in the coming year. As a basis for conversation, Mateo gave the pastoral and leadership team some time at the retreat to fill out this chart.

Intercultural Leadership Team Chart

Category	Description	Score
Position/Title	Who do the church members see as having spiritual authority? +2 pastor, +1 leader, -1 congregation member	
Age	The age that is considered "normal" for people with influence. Which generation has the most influence in the organization. +2 for a preferred age for the role +1 "average" age -1 for being significantly younger than the "average"	
Ethnicity and nationality	Among the nationalities represented in the church, which are most valued and which are most marginalized…in the culture and in the church? +2 US citizen +1 naturalized US citizen -1 immigrant with green card -2 undocumented immigrant	
Language	What languages are spoken and understood? What is valued in the culture and in the church? +2 bilingual: fluent in Spanish and English +1 functional in both Spanish and English -1 fluent only in English -2 fluent only in Spanish	
Gender	Identity as cisgender man or woman. +1 male, -1 female	
Marital Status	Married, single (never married, divorced, widowed). +2 married with kids, +1 married, -1 single	
Ministry | Experience	Length of time in the organization and perceived expertise. +2 pastoral ministry experience +1 leadership experience 5 or more years -1 new to leadership	
Personality	Intrinsic inclination of temperament. +1 extrovert, life of the party, highly sociable 0 ambivert —able to be sociable or reserved -1 quiet, introvert, reserved	
Giftedness and Competencies	Spiritual gifts, natural abilities, and acquired skills. +2 teaching & preaching +1 worship leading, pastoral care 0 administration -1 mercy	
TOTAL		

In the conversation that followed, a number of women on the team noted how they felt affirmed by Mateo yet overlooked by members of the congregation. One woman recounted that when she was trying to arrange logistics around a church lunch and had a hard time getting help until Mateo asked people to assist. Another

issue the team raised was the challenge of bilingual ministry, particularly as more English-only speakers joined the church and Spanish-only speakers were crowded out of conversation and decision-making.

Mateo and his team identified the importance of giving women in the church platform space, particularly to serve in ways traditionally limited to the pastor, specifically preaching and praying. Mateo committed to ensure that, in sharing the pulpit ministry, at minimum of one sermon a month would be preached by one of the women pastors and leaders and that he would seek out other women in the congregation to preach at least twice a quarter. The team also arranged for the women on the leadership team to participate in every Sunday service in giving announcements, leading the prayers of the people, praying for the offering, and so forth. The team also determined to do further reading, thinking, and praying together about the ways in which *machismo* was expressed in their congregation's culture.

Conclusion

When talking about power, the temptation is to keep the discussion abstract, lamenting disparities of power, and functionally treating these disparities as persistent and unyielding dynamics of a given context. With the use of an exercise like a power audit, particularly when conducted in the context of a larger change process, the conversation becomes concrete, embodied in the lived experiences of the members of the community. As Max De Pree has said, "The first task of a leader is to define reality…"[27] What is unnamed cannot be addressed. Facilitating a power audit is a strategy a leader can utilize to become aware of how their own power is experienced and expressed as well as helping their team to consider the same individually and collectively.

[27] Max De Pree. *Leadership Is an Art*, reprint edition. (New York, Doubleday, 2003), 11.

Resisting The Moving Sidewalk: Ministry As Christopraxis And Metanoia

John Senior

Abstract

How might a theology of Christian ministry account for and work against the structural reality of white supremacy? Writing as a white male situated in a predominantly white, mainline Protestant tradition, I examine the structural character of white supremacy and pose a theocentric understanding of ministry as participation in divine action. Practices of subverting white supremacy are illuminated in a case study: New City Church and its liberationist commitment to "center marginalized voices". An adequate theological understanding of ministry holds a tensive space for human participation in divine action, on the one hand, and divine revelation that invites transformation of personal and systemic practices.

United Methodist pastor and church planter Tyler Sit in his recent book, *Staying Awake: The Gospel for Changemakers*, compares white supremacy to a moving sidewalk at an airport. "If you walk, you head to racism. If you do nothing, that nothing consents to the moving walkway underneath, and you head to racism." One can even choose to turn in the opposite direction, "use all of the politically correct words," and still move toward racism, "except now you feel like you're better than the other backward-facing ones." The moving sidewalk always moves in the direction of white supremacy. To move against it, one must "move in the other direction." The counter movement is not a single action; it's a process, an "active choice."[1]

[1] Tyler Sit, *Staying Awake: The Gospel for Changemakers* (Chalice Press, 2021), 30.

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In 2017, Sit planted New City Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota. At New City Church, the Christian community is more like a dynamic social movement than a static ecclesial organization. Integral to the work of the church, Sit believes, is training resistance to the moving sidewalk of white supremacy. In some ways, the church has traditionally been an unlikely site for this training to happen.

Recent scholarship points to the ways in which predominantly white Christian traditions in the US have been instrumental in fostering and continuing to nurture white supremacy. Drawing on survey data generated through the work of the Public Religion Research Institute, sociologist of religion Robert P. Jones shows that in 2020 "an increase in racist attitudes independently predicts an increase in the likelihood of identifying as a white Christian, and identifying as a white Christian is independently associated with an increased probability of holding racist attitudes." Contrary to popular belief, Jones argues, higher rates of church attendance do not have a mitigating effect on racist attitudes; in fact, the opposite seems to be the case. Jones' research reveals that racist attitudes, identities, and practices are inextricably bound to the identity of predominantly white Christian traditions (mainline Protestant, Evangelical, and Catholic) in American life.[2]

White supremacy, it appears, has profoundly shaped the identities and practices of these traditions. Inflected through political, legal, economic, and cultural realities, white supremacy nourished the once robust and now waning religious and cultural hegemony that mainline Protestant Christian traditions enjoyed in the twentieth century. While these traditions have lost cultural

[2] Robert P. Jones, *White Too Long: The Legacy of White Supremacy in American Christianity* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020), 183. See also Kristopher Norris, *Witnessing Whiteness: Confronting White Supremacy in the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020); Kelly Brown Douglas, *Stand Your Ground: Black Bodies and the Justice of God* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2015); Jennifer Harvey, *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliat*ion (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014); Willie J. Jennings, *The Theological Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010).

influence, they carry the legacies of white supremacy that continue to determine the basic terms and conditions of American life.

The Structure of White Supremacy

Kathleen Belew and Ramon Gutiérrez define white supremacy as "a complex web of ideology, systems, privileges, and personal beliefs that create unequal outcomes along racial lines across multiple categories of life including wealth, freedom, health, and happiness."[3] White supremacy is best understood as a structural reality, a logic encoded in the formal and informal arrangements of social, cultural, and political life. To say white supremacy is "structural" is to suggest that the conditions that promote or diminish human flourishing are created, intentionally or unintentionally, through formal and informal political, legal, economic, social, and cultural systems and processes.

Structures, sociologist William Sewell argues, "are sets of mutually sustaining schemas and resources that empower and constrain social action and that tend to be reproduced by that social action."[4] "Schemas" are power-laden patterns that determine how social action and coordination happen. "Resources" are material and virtual media through which schemas are realized for the purposes of coordinating social action. Structures require the participation of human agents but also act independently of them.

For example, I might work to actively renounce white supremacy. Even so, in many spaces, advantages will be granted to me, whether I want them or not, simply because I am racialized as white. In such cases, white supremacy is a schema that determines how resources and power dynamics are distributed and used in certain spaces when people like me are present in them.

Approaches to theorizing the structural nature of white supremacy abound. For example, drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva theorizes such formative contexts as a "white habitus." For Bonilla-Silva and

[3] Kathleen Belew and Ramon Gutiérrez, eds., *A Field Guide to White Supremacy* (University of California Press, 2021), 5.
[4] William H. Sewell, Jr., *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (University of Chicago Press, 2005), 143.

his colleagues, white habitus is "a radicalized, uninterrupted socialization process that conditions and creates whites' racial taste, perceptions, feelings, and emotions and their views on racial matters."[5] For sociologists like Bonilla-Silva working on patterns of socialization in the U. S. context, white habitus is worked out in intentional patterns of white isolation from communities of color.

Patterns of *de facto* geographical, residential, and political segregation strengthen a sense of white normativity that includes an understanding that whites do not have a distinct racial identity. Seen from the perspective of white habitus, whiteness is simply the "objective" standard against which the shape of otherness is discerned and named.[6] Other scholars extend Bonilla-Silva's work to show how forms of white normativity embodied in white habitus are fostered even in neighborhoods and other social settings characterized by a degree of racial and ethnic diversity.[7]

Another layer of white normativity is a conception of individual agency disconnected from the support of and commitment to community. Christian social ethicist Miguel A. De La Torre critiques the "hyperindividuality" of Eurocentric virtue ethics. He argues that "for virtue ethicists, personal piety or the demonstration of virtues is equated with ethics."[8] In the Eurocentric model, virtue is attached to individuals. Theologian Willie Jennings calls this

[5] Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Inequality in America* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2010), 105. The idea of "white *habitus*" is one among several similar approaches analyzing how people are formed in whiteness. For example, sociologist Joe R. Feagin explores the "white racial frame," a structure for meaning-making that is "embedded in individual minds." See Joe R. Feagin, *The White Racial Frame: Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter-Framing* (Abingdon, UK: Taylor and Francis Group, 2013), 9-10.

[6] Bonilla-Silva writes: "By appearing objective, white habitus creates an atmosphere in which white hypersegregation seems proper, thereby justifying inequality and maintaining the existing social hierarchy." Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Carla Goar, and David. G. Embrick, "When Whites Flock Together: The Social Psychology of White Habitus," *Critical Sociology* 32:2-3 (2006), 233f.

[7] See for example Meghan A. Burke, "Discursive Fault Lines: Reproducing White Habitus in a Racially Diverse Community," *Critical Sociology* 38:5 (2011), 645-668.

[8] Miguel A. De La Torre, *Latino/a Social Ethics: Moving Beyond Eurocentric Moral Thinking* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 28.

conception of human agency the "white self-sufficient man." The individual agency of the "white self-sufficient man" is taken to be the male-gendered norm against which human agency is measured and found wanting when people are unable to "pull themselves up by the bootstraps."[9] Corporate and collaborative forms of agency are critiqued and devalued. Wisdom and insight are individual achievements rather than intergenerational resources.

White habitus runs deeper than political ideology, spatial organization, normative schemes, and conceptions of human agency. Several recent discussions in philosophy and practical theology identify the deeply habituated nature of formation in whiteness, white privilege, and white supremacy. Drawing on Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, philosopher Helen Ngo argues that racism is more than "conscious words and actions" or "a set of attributes held in thoughts." Rather, racism can be analyzed as habit and habituation, "deeply embodied in our bodily habits of movement, gesture, perception, and orientation."[10] Similarly, drawing on pragmatist philosophies of habit and psychoanalytic treatments of the unconscious, philosopher Shannon Sullivan argues that white privilege is an unconscious and "environmentally constituted habit." For Sullivan, the habits of white privilege are "dispositions for transacting with the world" that "make up the very beings that humans are." Such habits operate as "nonexistent," and "actively [work] to disrupt attempts to reveal [their] existence."[11]

The habits of white privilege cannot be undone simply through individual commitment and practice, in the way that one might undo "bad habits" like putting one's elbows on the table or talking over another person. Individual commitment is necessary, Sullivan argues, but not sufficient for people to undo the habits of white privilege. Instead, she writes, "changing unconscious habits of

[9] Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2020), 7.
[10] Helen Ngo, "Racist Habits: A Phenomenological Analysis of Racism and the Habitual Body," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 42:9 (2016), 848.
[11] Shannon Sullivan, *Revealing Whiteness: The Unconscious Habits of Racial Privilege* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2008), 2.

white privilege requires altering the political, social, physical, economic, psychological, aesthetic and other environments that 'feed' them."[12]

In a similar vein, practical theologian Keith Menhinick critically engages the work of William James to theorize racist habits as "scars" and "grooves," durable neural pathways readily activated in response to relevant stimuli.[13] The white habitus thus engenders deeply embodied racist habits, the performance of which in turn reinforces white habitus. Menhinick recommends both individual and corporate responses to the scars of white supremacy. Individuals committed to changing racist habits need to practice mindfulness — "the fusion of attention and effort" — as well as "critical reflexivity": "the practice of constantly scrutinizing one's reflections, a practice that denaturalizes our experience as something to be racialized, historicized, and recoded in nonhabitual analysis."[14] At the same time, church communities must create corporate practices that train attunement to racist habits and encourage the formation of anti-racist ones. The various practices of Christian communities, "preaching, liturgy, care, and activism," Menhinick writes, can all be "reflexive practices that help us pay better attention to new experiences and reflect on our racial biases, potentially unsettling what has become habitual and helping us build new habit pathways."[15] Critical reflexivity in this way becomes a corporate in addition to an individual practice.

The idea of the white habitus and other related theoretical frames flesh out the metaphor of the moving sidewalk. Social and political spaces are arranged in ways that embody white normativity, and white normativity, in turn, shapes the experiences and moral formation of persons and communities that occupy and navigate such spaces. Such forces are not easily resisted. Even when white communities work to dismantle white privilege, social

[12] Sullivan, 9.
[13] Keith Menhinick, "Confronting Racist Habits: Practical Theological Implications of William James's View of Habit Change," *Pastoral Psychology* (June 2019), 667-680.
[14] Menhinick, 676.
[15] Menhinick, 679.

and political structures embody white normativity and confer its benefits on people who are racialized as white anyway. What, then, does ministry in predominantly white spaces need to be and do to move against the moving sidewalk of white supremacy?

God's Arrival in White Habitus

So far, I have argued that white supremacy exerts a profound pull, giving shape to complex and intersecting structural realities that in turn deeply condition experiences of whiteness. I turn my attention now to a vibrant conversation in some North American theological circles about secularism and its impact on Christian ministry. Under the conditions of secularity, religious experience is elusive. Experiences of a divine reality external to individual experience are increasingly replaced in secular modernity by a preoccupation with the individual's feelings, experiences, and preferences. Thus, in an increasingly secular age, these theologians argue, it isn't clear what ministry is or what it is for. However insightful this conversation is, I am concerned that it has largely failed to wrestle with the ways in which white supremacy has shaped Christian ministry in the North American context. For this reason, we should examine it closely for what it says and doesn't say.

A Christocentric theological response to secularization literature emphasizes that ministry is not ultimately about what ministers do but what Jesus Christ is doing. Christ is the subject and the object of Christian ministry; both the One who ministers and the One who determines the ends and purposes of ministry. For Edwin Chr. Van Driel, for example, Jesus continues to be present in his absence: "the victoriously ascended Christ [is] present and active in the midst of his people … in his ascension, he goes to do work that radically reshapes creation."[16]

Andrew Purvis argues that ministry does not ultimately belong to ministers. Instead, "Ministry should be understood as a sharing

[16] Edwin Chr. van Driel, "What Is Jesus Doing? Christological Thoughts for an Anxious Church and Tired Pastors," in *What Is Jesus Doing? God's Activity in the Life and Work of the Church*, ed. Van Driel (3.

in the continuing ministry of Jesus Christ, for wherever Christ is, there is the church and her ministry."[17] The minister's job is to hold space for and position faith communities to participate in the ongoing ministry of Christ in the world. Thus, a proper theology of ministry should not center a modernist understanding of the individual and individual agency. That is, ministers should not worry about what they can or need to achieve in their ministry; to do so would be to make ministry about themselves. Instead, these authors argue, ministers need to discern what Jesus Christ is doing and invite others to join Jesus Christ in his ministry.

One contributor to this conversation, practical theologian Andrew Root, has provided a thorough and compelling articulation of a Christocentric framing of Christian ministry, which he calls a "Christopraxis practical theology of the cross." Root shifts the focus of practical theology from theological reflection on the practices of faith and ministry to God's action in the world. Divine action, in other words, is the subject of practical theology. God's being is becoming, Root argues. He writes that "theology is practical because God's being is given in God's act."[18] God is the author of ministry. Ministry is the act of God's coming to humanity that invites human participation in divine action and thus in the very being of God. Ministry is "an ontological encounter of the divine with the human … God's being as becoming is God's very ministry."[19] Ministry belongs to God, and to participate in ministry is to participate in the very being of God.

God's being as becoming, Root argues, takes a cruciform shape in the world. That is, the death of Jesus Christ on the cross and his resurrection reveal the very nature of God's being and "the very shape of God's ministry."[20] The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the interpretive lens, the "hermeneutic" through which God's being and ministry in the world is interpreted, which reveals

[17] Andrew Purvis, *The Crucifixion of Ministry* (InterVarsity Press, 2009), 11.
[18] Andrew Root, *Christopraxis: A Practical Theology of the Cross* (Fortress Press, 2014), 93.
[19] Root, *Christopraxis*., 94.
[20] Root, *Christopraxis*, 105.

that God's being arrives in the world in a cruciform shape in "the movement through death to life."[21]

To participate in the ministry of God to the world, then, is to journey with God through death into new life. God's being as becoming is "released" in places of weakness and death, "where the eternal God gives the divine name to one in time," Root writes. In a Christopraxis practical theology, change and growth are necessary conditions of ministry properly understood. In experiences of suffering, which Root calls "the ex nihilo," God's being as becoming is revealed in a cruciform shape in which death, while painful, ultimately begets life.[22]

In his more recent book *The Pastor in a Secular Age* (2019), Root deploys his Christopraxis practical theology of the cross to address challenges posed by secularization. Here again, the work of ministry is God's work, "the very event that unveils God's action in the world."[23] Drawing on Charles Taylor's work in his *A Secular Age*, Root argues that the "immanent frame," the complex set of historical and cultural developments in the West in the last millennium that replaced a supernatural worldview with a natural one, calls the very meaning of Christian ministry into question. In the naturalistic immanent frame, God is no longer the indubitable ground of existence. Divine action, if it exists, is effectively invisible in the immanent frame.

Root argues that the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition is a "God who arrives." The biblical account witnesses a God who is known because God arrives in history and announces Godself to creation. God is "an event, a living happening," Root writes.[24] The pastor cannot dismantle the immanent frame, Root argues, but the pastor can, "as a primary element of his (*sic*) vocation, help his people to be open to God arriving, even in his immanent frame."[25] The locus of ministry is divine action, which is "the event

[21] Root, *Christopraxis*.
[22] Root, *Christopraxis*, 64.
[23] Andrew Root, *The Pastor in a Secular Age: Ministry to People Who No Longer Need a God* (Baker Academic, 2019), xvi.
[24] Root, *The Pastor in a Secular Age*, 198.
[25] Root, *The Pastor in a Secular Age*, 189.

of ministry."[26] The pastor's primary work is to give attention to, be present to, and invite others into the event of God's arrival, what Root calls "the divine impingement."[27] Ministers position others to participate with God in divine action.[28] Thus, ministry is an unveiling of divine action and an invitation to participate more fully in it.

Root's practical theology is distinctive in part because he reshapes the category of practice. A dominant approach to practical theology in North America takes the concrete practices of faith and ministry performed by human beings in human communities as starting points for practical theological reflection. For Root, practice means something different. The subject of practical theology is the experience of divine action that takes a cruciform shape in the lives of those who encounter God. What makes practical theology practical for Root is that God acts, and then human beings participate in God's action and thus in the very being of God.

In his book *Christopraxis*, Root reports on interviews from two different congregations situated in the Pacific Northwest. His interviews invite participants to reflect on times in their life when they experienced God. Often, participants offer reflections on challenging seasons of life in which they were ministered to by others or offered ministry to others: the passing of a spouse, the experience of mental illness, etc. — seasons in which participants in Root's study find themselves "in the hole," as he says. God shows up in these experiences, and, Root interprets, his participants share in God's ministry to them, the being of God that brings new life out of death.

Root's Christopraxis approach to practical theology offers a powerful challenge to secularization. Root's examples of Christopraxis, which he takes from his interview work, mostly feature God's action and ministry that is happening *to* his interviewees. Some participants report offering ministry to others,

[26] Root, *The Pastor in a Secular Age*, 174.
[27] Root, *The Pastor in a Secular Age*, 206.
[28] Root, *The Pastor in a Secular Age*, 228.

though often these situations have unintended outcomes when God arrives. God arrives in discrete moments or seasons in which persons find themselves in crisis, and God brings new life to individuals as they navigate these crises.

One challenge to Root's approach is that it doesn't account for the structural conditions of whiteness and white supremacy. White people certainly have powerful experiences of coming to awareness of their deep formation in the white habitus and are thus reoriented to their own white privilege. One might think that such experiences could be examples of cruciform divine action as Root imagines it. God acts to put racialized identities into the grave and brings forth new life in forms of critical consciousness, political activism, and the like.

Even in such cases, however, the structural conditions of white supremacy — the white habitus — persist, imposing white supremacy on white people whether they want it or not. White people enjoy advantages simply by virtue of their presence in certain spaces. Viewed in a structural perspective, white supremacy, like divine action, has its own kind of extra-personal agency. Like divine action, structural injustice operates apart from the actions of any individual, although unlike divine action, structural injustice also requires human participation to exist.[29] Root's Christocentric approach, in short, does not account for the moving sidewalk of white supremacy, even as it addresses people moving on it.

Another challenge to Root's approach is that divine action as the locus of ministry threatens to reiterate the logic of hyperindividuality, the "white self-sufficient man," as Willie James calls it, in its conception of divine action. While divine action invites human participation for Root, God seems to do all the work, or at least all of the meaningful work, leaving human beings to reflect and process what God has done to them. In Root's view, divine action might be participatory, but it is not deeply collaborative or cooperative. God goes it alone.

[29] As Christian ethicist Cynthia Moe-Lobeda writes, "structural injustice continues regardless of the virtue or vice of people involved." Moe-Lobeda, *Resisting Structural Evil: Love as Ecological-Economic Vocation* (Fortress Press, 2013), 60.

The pull of white supremacy is formidable. White supremacy is not simply a challenging season in one's life from which one can emerge through the grace of God. It's difficult to know what a cruciform experience of death and new life means in a structural frame because structures persist, exercising agency, even as individuals move through crises into new identities and ways of being Christlike. And while divine action can be said to exist in the lives of individuals, as in the examples provided in Root's field research, it is unclear what it would mean for cruciform divine agency to be active on structural levels. What does it mean to participate in God's ministry, in the very life of God, when the structures around us belie the very transformations that God works to bring about? One wonders how God can be present in the white habitus.

Root rarely engages the structural conditions of human experience. It is telling, for example, that Root doesn't wrestle with the deeply intertwined genetic codes of secularity and white supremacy. The distinguishing features of the secular age in Charles Taylor's analysis — the immanent frame, the buffered self, exclusive humanism, etc. — are also necessary conditions of white supremacy. White supremacy requires a modern conception of moral agency that positions human beings, rather than God, as the ultimate authorizers and interpreters of their experience.[30] White supremacy is an extension of a modernist logic that privileges constructions of white identity as the ultimate norm of human agency and experience. White supremacy, in other words, is implicated in the imminent frame.

Recent research indicates that ministry in white-led Christian traditions isn't doing enough to dismantle the legacies of white supremacy that have shaped and continue to shape these traditions. An adequate theology of ministry needs to be clearer about how Christian ministry, especially in predominantly white ecclesial spaces, responds to white supremacy, not only as an individual

[30] Many authors have charted the development whiteness and white supremacy through the histories of Western modernity. See for example Jennings, *The Christian Imagination* and Kelly Brown Douglas, 3-130.

challenge but as a structural reality. More, in other words, needs to be said about how Christian ministry as a response to the event of God's arrival contemplates the work of dismantling structural forms of injustice rooted in white supremacy. New City Church is a good example.

Ministry as Permanent Revolution

Tyler Sit understands the church in part to be a training ground that prepares people to move against the moving sidewalk of white supremacy. In a recent interview, Sit explained that a lot of what happens at New City Church emerges in its liberationist commitment to "center marginalized voices" in worship and the life of the community.[31] New City congregants regularly participate in Sacred Witnessing Time during worship, in which groups of three discuss a question related to that week's sermon.

To introduce Sacred Witnessing Time, worship leaders tell congregants that "this is your chance to center marginalized voices." For those who inhabit "certain privileged identities," Sacred Witnessing Time is an opportunity to "create space and yield" to marginalized voices. "You step closer to freedom when you learn how to yield when there are people who are marginalized," Sit says. Conversely, a spiritual practice for those who inhabit marginalized identities is "to meaningfully show up and to know how to appropriately take up space, and that's part of liberation as well." Sacred Witnessing is one among many community practices that connect inward and outward transformation. Sit says:

> God shows up in the lives of marginalized people, in church, we practice centering marginalized people, and then in the world, when we encounter situations of violence … we do what we practice in church, and then, like Jesus predicted, as we're out in the world, we get kind of beat up, we loop back to the church and find our feet underneath us and recall that we are part of something larger than ourselves and then we go back out.

[31] This section refers to an interview with Tyler Sit, July 29, 2020.

For Sit, the work of ministry is about positioning communities to "stay awake" to God's liberatory work in the world. Staying awake, though, is not a static state; it's a dynamic movement. Practices like Sacred Witnessing prepare participants to participate more fully in God's liberating work. Sacred Witnessing reorients people to the corporate space they create with others through deepening awareness of how much space they take up or how much they might constructively fill. These practices and others construct the ministry of New City, Sit says, as an "inward-outward" movement. Individual participants and the community as a whole are formed through liberatory spiritual practices. The community then moves into the world to practice what they've learned in church. And then the church is a place of recentering and renewal that again prepares participants for the work of liberation in the world.

Sacred Witnessing and other practices that center the voices of marginalized community members sharpen critical self-awareness and prepare richer experiences of both God and neighbor. Sit lifts up the practices at New City of centering marginalized voices as a practice of freedom for everyone by way of the experience of one of New City's regular participants, "Joe M.". Joe reports that he grew up in "white evangelical spaces" where he was on a path to formation as "the white male pastor talking at a room full of people for over an hour, and that would be the word of God." In contrast to his experiences in evangelical spaces, at New City Joe has experienced faith as "embodied and relational." He writes that "freedom means reconnecting with my body and learning to recognize the ways white supremacy lives in and around me, then interrupting it with Gospel truth." For Joe, the work of centering marginalized voices offers healing for all: "The Gospel is proclaimed more boldly when the mic is passed to marginalized voices in the room and we all get healed."[32]

White supremacy shapes selves like Joe M. in profound ways. The inertia of the moving sidewalk of white supremacy is considerable. White supremacy is a structural reality that operates independently of individual and community efforts to dismantle it.

[32] Sit, *Staying Awake*, 48.

The ministry of New City Church creates spaces where participants can practice walking in reverse, as it were, moving against the pull of white supremacy on the moving sidewalk. That counter-pull happens in spaces and through practices that allow people to step outside of themselves, evaluate their own formation, and practice relating to neighbors and the world differently.

In Root's Christocentric framework, ministry is the work of positioning individuals and communities of faith to participate in divine action, in the myriad movements from death to new life throughout the human journey that disclose the very being of God. But what does it mean to die to white supremacy and be born to more liberative ways of being in the world when white supremacy is a persistent structural reality? Moving against the pull of white supremacy is not a one-and-done achievement. There is no one death to white supremacy and resurrection to liberation because structures all around us rehearse the logics of white supremacy whether we want them to or not. Surely, persons can develop critical self-awareness of their formation in the white habitus and anti-racist attitudes, habits, and practices.

New City Church is one example of that work. But even anti-racists live, for the time being at least, in the white habitus, and the white habitus racializes all of us. To walk against the moving sidewalk of white supremacy, communities need to engage in the kind of continual cycle that Sit describes: the church prepares the community to face white supremacy, the community goes into the world to work against white supremacy, and then the community returns to the church, which provides the resources to sustain the work.

Sit's ministry creates a counter-pull to the formidable movement of white supremacy by making space for persons to step outside of and critically evaluate the identities and formations they bring with them to church. Sit writes that while the Kingdom of God is near, it "depends on our consent and action, meaning that we continually have the choice to accept it or not, promote it or not."[33] Practices like Sacred Witnessing create spaces in which people can do the

[33] Sit., 40.

self and relational work needed to better imagine and more fully embrace the kingdom. The kingdom is revealed in bits and pieces through that hard, day-to-day work that frees the body, mind, and imagination from the grip of white supremacy.

Divine action at New City is complex: it works in the formation of individuals, practices that center the leadership of marginalized voices, ways in which members bring their learning into the world, and the congregation's engagement in its neighborhood and city. Movements through death to new life amid systemic realities are not discrete episodes of divine action. Divine action isn't passive; it doesn't happen *to* members of New City Church. Rather, divine action happens in the active and complex exercise of individual and corporate agency, all against the backdrop of durable systems that reproduce structural injustice even as communities like New City work to challenge them.

Ministry at New City is about creating opportunities for personal and corporate transformation in the context of systemic realities that resist transformation. The movement from death to life as the community moves toward liberation from structural racism is a slow, halting, and multilayered process. To frame ministry as participation in God's arrival in the world, as Root does, is not to say enough about how God works in response to structural forms of injustice. It is difficult to know what an "event" of God's arrival in the context of structural realities would mean since structure always already contravenes liberation in multiple and complex ways.

Divine action toward liberation under the conditions of structural injustice must be understood less as an event or an arrival but as a process of continuing, nonlinear transformation for people, communities, and systems. H. Richard Niebuhr in his *The Meaning of Revelation* (1941) argues that revelation is a transformation of the ways in which we experience and interpret our own histories. Niebuhr calls "internal history" a site of a community's meaning-making that reveals how the stories of the community are meaningful to the community. Revelation, Niebuhr argues, "means that part of our inner history that illuminates the rest of it and which is itself intelligible … the intelligible event that

makes all other events intelligible."[34] Revelation is a site of faith, the faith that a moment of revelation transforms the meaning of one's experience is real. Revelation, Niebuhr argues, is a moment of "divine self-disclosure," in which human beings experience being known by a divine knower. Revelation is not static; it is continual and often sudden and even painful, for God makes Godself known in ways that revolutionize our understanding of God, ourselves, and the shape of our lives: "God's self-disclosure is that permanent revolution in our religious life by which all religious truths are painfully transformed and all religious behavior transfigured by repentance and new faith."[35]

God's presence in the world is a continuing revelation that elicits "permanent revolution." It continually pulls people and communities away from the frames through which they interpret and experience their lives and toward new orientations and practices that better reflect the flourishing that God intends for them. Through revelation, God continually transforms human perspectives on self, others, and the world. Revelation relativizes the human point of view. Revelatory moments remind human beings that their view of the world and their experience is limited and always in need of revision as God's vision comes more fully into view. Revelation elicits *metanoia*, the critical awareness of human limitation, a stepping outside of one's perspective, and a turn to embrace more expansive ways in which God is calling human beings to join in God's work.

At its best, ministry creates space in which to experience God's very being through participation in divine action in the world, collapsing the distance between human and divine being. At the same time, ministry also creates spaces that reveal the distance between divine and human being, clarifying the nature of each. The practice of sacred listening, for example, encourages participants to create critical distance from their deep formation in the white habitus. Revelation discloses the finite and fallible

[34] H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (Westminster John Knox, 2006 [1941]), 50.
[35] Niebuhr, 95.

nature of human beings in the face of a transcendent divine nature. God paradoxically relativizes human endeavors to understand and respond to God, even as God identifies with human beings through cruciform divine action.

To respond to white supremacy and other forms of structural injustice, ministers need to facilitate opportunities for Christian communities to step outside of the structures that claim them so profoundly. Ministry that facilitates revelation and *metanoia* positions communities to walk against the moving sidewalk of structural injustice. That is what is happening at New City Church.

Christopraxis implies a nearness to God's being through participation in divine action. Revelation discloses the distance between God and human creation in ways that invite deeper experiences of being human, and in particular, the need to grow through critical awareness of human finitude. A theology of Christian ministry that accounts for the structural reality of white supremacy requires both.

BOOK REVIEW

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE 2.0

By: Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves
San Diego: California, Talentsmart, 2009
280 pp. hardcover
ISBN 978-0-9743-2062-5

Emotional Intelligence 2.0 is based on two premises. First is that emotional intelligence (EQ) is a crucial component of success. Second, although the authors subscribe to fixed intelligence, EQ is something that can be cultivated and grown. The authors define EQ as the ability to understand one's emotions, the emotions of others, and the ability to manage one's behavior and relationships with others. Citing a research study conducted at the University of Queensland, the authors claim that by working to improve EQ, even the reversal of low job performance is possible.

Based on these premises, *Emotional Intelligence 2.0* advances a practical approach to building emotional awareness and developing skills through sixty-six "time-tested strategies." Each copy of the book provides a link to an online EQ appraisal designed to measure the reader's EQ score and establish a starting point to engage the reader with the practical approach to their EQ and to grow it. The book suggests taking the appraisal before reading and applying the strategies, then retaking the assessment to measure personal EQ growth.

Chapters 3-8 describes four EQ skills: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. These four skills interact with two primary competencies of EQ: personal and social competence. Personal competence is the awareness of emotions and the ability to manage one's behavior. Social competence is the ability to understand others' moods and behaviors in a way that improves relationships.

Each of the four skills is described in chapters 5-8 and linked to strategies for self-improvement. Self-awareness, the ability to know one's true essence inside and out, is accompanied by fifteen strategies for learning. The general idea behind the strategies is to gain an understanding of one's emotions, so they do not surprisingly surface at inopportune times. Self-management is the ability to control the behavior that emotions might trigger. Seventeen strategies in the self-management chapter provide tools to help choose how to respond to one's emotions. Social awareness is an outward perspective that enables a person to recognize and understand others' emotions. The authors supply seventeen strategies to help the reader learn social awareness, including the ability to identify and interpret the feelings and nonverbal communications of others. Relationship management, what the authors call "the final EQ skill," is accompanied by another set of seventeen final strategies critical to meaningful and lasting relationships.

In the epilogue, the authors advance their reasons why EQ is something in which the reader should engage and invest. The authors claim, presumably through their research, that EQ has increased in the workforce because more people are attuned to their and others' emotions. Over the same period, fewer people have allowed anxiety or frustration to influence their behavior. To account for the change, the authors make an audacious claim that because of the number of people with a strong EQ in the workforce, emotionally intelligent behavior is "infecting" people who previously never heard of it. Claims like this, and others, lead to two striking weaknesses of *Emotional Intelligence 2.0* that require attention.

The first weakness is that the authors make many statistical and scientific claims throughout the book, often without citations or sources. Presumably, some of the claims come from research by the authors or their organization. However, many claims are presented as scientific conclusions but come with no implied or explicit references to research. For example, in chapter 1, the authors include the pathway in the brain responsible for EQ, complete with a brain and spinal cord diagram. The diagram separates the limbic system, the part of the brain that provides feelings, from an

unspecified region of the brain that appears to be near the frontal lobe responsible for rational thinking. This claim about how the brain physically works includes no reference. From where does this information originate? Is this common knowledge? In short, readers accustomed to engaging scientific or research-oriented literature might sometimes be frustrated with this book.

A possibly more problematic claim is in chapter 2, a second issue requiring attention. As mentioned above, the authors subscribe to a fixed intelligence, meaning IQ remains static throughout a person's lifetime. This belief is also known as a fixed mindset. The issue with a fixed mindset is multifaceted. Most importantly, according to Carol Dweck in *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, a growth mindset, which directly opposes a fixed one, is essential for understanding the type of person you are and how to change. Consequently, a fixed mindset becomes prohibitive to such change, which the authors claim to espouse and is the antithesis of the goals in the book.

Despite the above issues, *Emotional Intelligence 2.0* reaches its goal of providing practical engagement to EQ, supplying an opportunity for the reader to increase their self-awareness and grow in their relationships with others. Cultivating good relationships in the workplace, the final EQ skill, is a crucial part of leadership. Applying the multiple practical strategies in this book might help readers do just that. Students in a leadership course could use a book like this for critical reflection on the theological study of leadership.

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BOOK REVIEW

CIRCLES IN THE STREAM: INDEX, IDENTIFICATION & INTERTEXT - READING AND PREACHING THE STORY OF JUDAH IN GENESIS 37-50

By: Paul E. Koptak
Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock, 2022
133 pp. paperback
ISBN 978-1-6667-3532-1

The title, *Circles in the Stream,* imagines the concentric, expanding ripples formed by a stone dropped into water. If the stone is scripture and the water a reader, then the expanding circles are the way scripture ripples through that reader's life. The book is written for preachers. Its intention is that preachers will gain a deeper understanding of a particular dynamic of scripture.

Drawing on this, their sermons will invite listeners into a deeper engagement with God and a richer understanding of the way scripture connects to daily life. Paul Koptak draws on literary-rhetorical criticism and in particular the work of Kenneth Burke (1897-1993). The dynamic he focuses on is the way that "poetics" (how a text is put together), reveals its "rhetoric" (the effect the text is intended to have). According to Koptak, "Analysis of the work will reveal its structure, which in turn will reveal its function" (36).

Koptak explores three types of expanding circles — index, identification, and intertext. First, he explains the theory behind each word. *Indexing* involves discovering the connections within a particular text; for example, observing which words are repeated and how the text is organized. *Identification* begins by noticing the life issues within the text and then seeks to connect these to common life experiences today. *Intertext* is the task of tracing connections between one text and other texts within the same body of work, since all texts, whether knowingly or not, draw on, allude to and quote other texts.

Second, Koptak uses the Genesis 37-50 narrative of Joseph and Judah as case studies to demonstrate that working with these three ideas produces deeper insights.

The verses about his brothers selling Joseph (Genesis 37) introduce the three words. Judah and his interactions with Tamar (Genesis 38) show how indexing can be revelatory. The rapprochement between Joseph and his brother (Genesis 45) illustrates how powerful identification is. Jacob's blessing of his sons on his death bed (Genesis 48,49) demonstrates how intertexting can uncover the significance of an obscure passage. I found the application of the ideas to all the passages enlightening, offering fresh insights into these texts, some of which I knew well and others much less so.

The third strand in *Circles in the Stream* is comprised by three short sermons Koptak preached on specific occasions to actual congregations on the Genesis passages mentioned. In short, *Circles in the Stream* explains a theory, works through the application of that theory with case studies, and then demonstrates the fruit of the theory.

My exposure to literary-rhetorical theory has been limited. But I found the genius of the book in its demonstration of theory over its explanation of it. Koptak is the professor emeritus of communication and biblical interpretation at North Park Theological Seminary and has spent many years teaching homiletics to seminary students. I assume he discovered that many struggle with literary-rhetorical theory and so he devised an accessible way of showing what some of the key elements of the theory are and how it works in practice.

At just 121 pages of text, *Circles in the Stream* offers a concise, accessible and practical introduction to a way of reading Scripture. It will be valuable for anyone who wonders how literary-rhetorical criticism can be usefully applied to understanding Scripture. It will also assist seminary students to learn the craft of preaching.

I suspect, however, that the greatest benefit might be gained by people who have been preaching for many years. As someone who preaches to a congregation most weeks, I noticed an immediate effect on my practice. Preparing to preach on the genealogy of Jesus

(Matthew 1:1-17) while reading *Circles in the Stream*, I realized I was indexing, identifying, and intertexting in a new way. One of the challenges in ministry is remaining fresh; I know that unless I am interested, I will not be interesting. *Circles in the Stream* offers tools that will assist all who preach gain fresh insights into familiar passages, and then preach sermons that lead to a "deeper engagement with the stories and poems of the Bible" and prompt us "to name and pray for the transformation they depict" (121).

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BOOK REVIEW

LOSS & DISCOVERY: WHAT THE TORAH CAN TEACH US ABOUT LEADING CHANGE

By: Russell M. Linden
Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2021
272 pp. paperback
ISBN 978-1-6667-0111-1

> *Change involves both loss and discovery. That's especially true when change is disruptive. It was certainly the case for the Israelites after escaping Egyptian bondage, only to discover that the path to freedom is uncertain and involves losses* (1).

With these opening lines Linden charts his course. For the last thirty-five years he has helped lead organizations through change and, by teaching and consulting, assisted others through change. Throughout he has been attending synagogue. The story of Israel, particularly as recounted in the first five books of the Bible, has both sustained and informed his work.

Loss & Discovery is ambitious in scope and content. It weaves stories from Scripture and insights from organizational management, with stories of change from Linden's own life and the organizations with which he has worked. The book is divided into four sections. Part one, "Focus on the 'Main Thing,'" explores communication, building trusting relationships, and understanding resistance to change. Part two, "Pay Attention to External Voices and Also Your Own," explores how to utilize and make sense of the reactions of people who disagree with you, and how to speak truth to power effectively. Part three, "Lead Indirectly When a Direct Path Isn't Possible," explores the wisdom of dealing with some issues obliquely, and redirecting energy that presents itself in a hostile way. Part four, "Create a Culture That Fosters Learning, Growth and Change," explores the importance of changing ourselves,

prioritizing the recruitment of the right people, and leading in a world where disruptive change is the norm.

Loss & Discovery concludes with seven appendixes that unpack some of models cited, an extensive bibliography and index. These create the impression of a book designed for study and research. My sense, however, is that this is not likely to be the audience that finds it most helpful. The strength of *Loss & Discovery* is its accessibility due to the breadth of topics it covers, and the different types of material used to explain and illustrate them. Its corresponding weakness is a lack of density; the range of materials drawn on precludes any being explored at depth. Its introductory nature and accessibility could leave the serious student feeling frustrated and disappointed.

For this reason, however, *Loss & Discovery* could prove useful to students wishing to gain an overview before engaging in a deeper study of particular topics; the footnotes, bibliography, and index providing useful signposts. It might also be beneficial to lay leaders in a congregation or board members in a nonprofit. The presentation of the material does not require reading from cover to cover but lends itself to reading chapters as they would be helpful in specific circumstances.

During my ministry I have discovered how useful stories can be to illustrate principles and processes of change. Stories bring ideas to life and help people appreciate their relevance. For people of faith, biblical stories are doubly powerful, serving also to legitimate change. Since change is difficult, that legitimation is needed and effectual. Weaving scriptural stories with change theory likely will help those charged with facilitating change and those who are trying to make sense of the changes their organizations are navigating.

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BOOK REVIEW

NAVIGATING THE FUTURE: TRADITIONED INNOVATION FOR WILDER SEAS

By: L. Gregory Jones And Andrew P. Hogue
Nashville, Tennessee: Abingdon Press, 2021
272 pp. paperback
Isbn 978-1-7910-1595-4

In *Navigating the Future: Traditioned Innovation for Wilder Seas*, L. Gregory Jones, president of Belmont University, and Andrew P. Hogue, associate dean of Engaged Learning at Baylor University, have provided a theologically grounded and theoretically rich vision for institutional leadership in challenging times. Their writing is full of wisdom gained from years of studying the literature of leadership, observing well-led institutions, and practicing the approach they commend in this book.

Two common threads weave through the chapters. The first is the basic approach the authors take, which they call "traditioned innovation." They believe that in bewildering times like these, institutional leaders are tempted in two directions: toward "traditionalism" on the one hand, a nostalgic idealizing of the past coupled with the attempt to replicate what work in the past in the present, and on the other hand, "futurism," the fetishizing of innovation and technological ingenuity unmoored from the wisdom of the past.

In contrast, Jones and Hogue advocate traditioned innovation, a "way of seeing that holds the past and the future in creative tension, animated by both wisdom and improvisation, aimed toward the cultivation of human and institutional flourishing" (79). The second half of the book, chapters 47, explore the practices that support traditioned innovation.

The second thread is the authors' sanguine view of institutions themselves that are often reviled in leadership literature and in the culture more generally. "We love to hate the institutions we need,"

they write (1). Following James Davidson Hunter and others, Jones and Hogue recognize the necessity of institutions to pass on wisdom and sustain social innovation that contributes to a world of human flourishing. They claim that institutions are not the enemy. Their theological approach allows them to commend institutions without denying that institutions often have perpetrated and passively permitted injustice and harm. Traditioned innovation forces us to identify the sins of the past while discerning the best of the past that can be adapted and handed on to create a thriving future.

Chapter 1 offers a brief overview of traditioned innovation. Chapter 2 advocates that we ground all that we do as leaders and institutions in "a transcendent sense of purpose" (20). Here the writers critique the tendency of organizations to focus on mission, vision, and strategy without those tactics being grounded in a broader purpose aimed at human flourishing. This is the most theologically rich chapter, as they see purpose arising from the story of God's creating and re-creating the world and informed by God's coming reign that leaves no sector of society untouched. Though nonreligious institutions can benefit from this emphasis on purpose, a theological anthropology guides their approach: "[A] significant part of the human vocation is to fulfill the deep yearning we share for creation to flourish and for all of us, along with our institutions, to be the best we can possibly be" (23).

To be our "best," traditioned innovation involves at least four practices: imagining (chapter 4), traditioning (chapter 5), collaborating (chapter 6), and improvising and sustaining (chapter 7). The practice of imagining acknowledges that humans are unique in their capacity to consider the future and imagine possible scenarios. Fruitful imagining arises out of the virtues of curiosity, which "leads past information to wisdom" (105); humility, the epistemological modesty that acknowledges the depths of our unknowing; and hope, which "looks with optimism for the future, even as it accounts realistically for the brokenness and limited capacity of human beings" (115).

The practice of traditioning looks to the past and discerns what needs to be handed on, adapted, or left behind. It requires storytelling that "immerses us in faithful reception of the past" (141) and discernment. Traditioning is grounded in the virtue of gratitude, as it involves a positive appreciation of the gifts of the past.

Traditioned innovation that promotes a flourishing institutional future can't happen without collaboration. Leaders need holy friendships that are "intimate, enduring, and formative" (149). Holy friends "help us dream the dreams we otherwise wouldn't have dreamed, they help us affirm gifts we would be afraid to claim, and they challenge the sins we have come to love" (150). While leaders need holy friendships, institutions need dense networks with multiple kinds of diversity, collaboration across sectors, and interactions that are frequent and sustained if the reinvigoration of institutions and the promotion of "durable forms of common life" (163) are going to occur.

The final chapter addresses the practices of improvising and sustaining. Though improvisation is becoming increasingly popular as a cure-all for ailing institutions, I found their account of improvisation energizing. The authors begin by exploring the challenge that mental models and dominant metaphors create by constricting what we deem possible and recommend analyzing the metaphors and models that shape our work of institutional leadership. Then they draw on the comedy of Stephen Colbert, the practice of "yes-and," and the theological work of Samuel Wells to offer a helpful account of improvisation in an institutional context.

Improvisation is needed because the "tradition hasn't seen it exactly like this before. The story is unfolding in a dynamic environment, and our 'work forward' is full of opportunity to improvise new life (195)." While improvisation seems like the fun part, they also acknowledge the necessity of good administration for sustaining traditioned innovation: "Proper governance, oversight, and administration of organizations... prove essential" (195) to sustain innovation that is rooted in a transcendent purpose and emerges from the best of the past.

I appreciated this book for a number of reasons; two stand out. First, while the authors hope their work might reach beyond religious leaders, their approach to traditioned innovation is deeply formed by their theological understanding of God's story of creation and redemption and what that means for life and leadership in the present. Second, their apologia for institutions is refreshing. Any who spend their days in institutions, frustrated at the slow pace of change and the seeming inability to address intractable problems, will be heartened by an account of leadership that affirms the necessity of these very institutions for advocating a flourishing common life and gives guidance for how to uncover the best wisdom these institutions have to offer and hand it on.

There is one area in which I would ask for more: "Discernment" shows up again and again, and it is critical to the task of sifting the gifts of a tradition to improvise well into a flourishing future, but little guidance is given about the *how* of discernment. Given the authors' willingness to engage theologically, I believe the book would have benefited from a fuller account of discernment in an institutional context and how the riches of the Christian spiritual traditions could inform that discernment.

This book itself is useful in inspiring the imagination. Full of stories of traditioned innovation in action, the principles and practices here will be useful to leaders in various institutional contexts. I have used the book fruitfully with Doctor of Ministry students and benefit from it in my congregational leadership.

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BOOK REVIEW

NORMALIZING NEXT: A POST-COVID-19 RESOURCE FOR CHURCH LEADERS

By: Olu Brown
Atlanta, Georgia: Culverhouse, 2022
177 Pp. Paperback
ISBN 978-1-0880-3820-8

As we emerge from the COVID-19, church leaders all over the world are wondering what our new normal will look like. Yet it is too early for any leader to fully understand just how much the world, and the church, has shifted. Olu Brown offers an insight into why some churches survived the pandemic and why others are faltering. He also ponders the near future to give us practical insight into how we need to shift to embrace our new normal.

To begin, part of the power of this book is its rawness. Brown opens his book by outlining how we find ourselves "living in a new unconventional reality where everything has changed or is changing" (10). He calls this a season of next. While this is a raw season when everything seems new, it should not be unfamiliar territory for the church. As has been said many times, change is the only constant. Through Jeremiah 29:11, Brown reminds us that "if we take this scripture to heart and understand that God's future for us is dynamic and where we started is not the place where we will end, we can see our lives beyond our current careers, vocations, and stations and know that there is more development, evolution, and growth ahead of us" (11).

COVID-19 plunged the world into a generational, seismic period of change. It forced change upon the healthcare industry, businesses, churches, and—most importantly—the world views that we held. Brown likens the shift in the church to that of the Protestant Reformation more than 500 years ago. Just like the reformation, the church suddenly finds itself changed seemingly overnight. We can either see this as "abnormal and problematic"

or "refreshing and…a time of great renewal and opportunity" (25). As he outlines in the subsequent chapters, leaders who see the pandemic as an opportunity are best prepared to embrace this new normal.

Chapter 1 opens with a review of where we are now. Churches had lost the ability to meet in person. Then came possibly the largest shift, the move to virtual worship. We can see this as either a loss of in-person church or recognize that it was a significant opportunity for the church to reach a new segment of the population.

Brown points out that, prior to the pandemic, online church was novel. Now, 45 percent of Americans say they have watched a Christian service online, including some who say they don't normally physically attend. New opportunities have opened for the church to radically increase its effect on the world as the internet can now reach people in an instant.

In chapter 2, Brown first gives a gentle reminder that vision is the heart of leadership. Simply put, "vision is absolutely essential" (32). I doubt any leader today would deny the critical role of vision. Brown notes that vision gives clarity, provides a path, motivates, and engages people in community. "Churches that had a clear vision before the pandemic continued to press forward during the pandemic, and although they had to pivot and adjust some of the ways of doing ministry, their momentum continued, and their ministries thrived" (39). Inversely, churches that suffered the most during the pandemic potentially lacked vision. But it is not too late for leaders to bring a vision to their church. Brown outlines several steps for not only restoring your vision but reengaging congregations with that vision.

If you read nothing else, flip to chapter 3. Here, Brown outlines how the nature of leadership has shifted. One important distinction he makes is that this shift was well under way prior to the pandemic. It just took the pandemic for most leaders to finally wake up to the shifted reality in which we now find ourselves. He points out that "the initial trauma of the pandemic was so shocking to leaders in the church that it caused some leaders and churches to become stuck and afraid" (65).

The reality is that "the state of the church was shifting long before" COVID-19 (65). He then walks through two leadership paradigms that church leaders need to embrace to continue leading in a post-pandemic church. These paradigms are centered on the sharing of power. Leaders can no longer pretend that they can lead in isolation or that church leaders can somehow manage all aspects of the contemporary church.

The following chapters are deep dives into five key areas of church leadership. The first, chapter 4, is technology. As we know, technology is evolving at a staggering rate. As such, church leaders need to have a basic understanding of the technological needs of their congregation. Brown offers advice on making sound decisions in this realm. Chapter 5 is noteworthy in that it is a call for leaders to make church simple again. Not simple in theology. Rather, simple in processes. The church has found ever-increasing ways to complicate programming, systems, processes, and even buildings. He offers the words of Habakkuk 2:2 as a guide. "Make it plain" (107). As Brown writes, "it is necessary to declutter and simplify the structure and operations of churches" (107). Complexity drives people away.

Chapter 6 is a useful dive into the new world of hybrid worship (balancing in-person experiences with online church). Church online became the only platform leaders had to reach their congregations. As we return to in-person ministry, the need and the reach of church online will not go away.

Powerful and prophetic preaching is the focus of chapter 7. In possibly the most poignant section of the book, Brown outlines why and how leaders must lean into this area. "Preachers… have a unique responsibility and opportunity to speak life and hope into the world and be part of God's transformative work" (136). The reality is that all the previous chapters hinge on this idea. We can build the best technological systems, the leanest processes, hire the best leaders, and cast the clearest visions. If, however, those in attendance are not finding life and hope in your congregation, they will soon seek it somewhere else. To that end, Brown draws from his own experiences and gifting in speaking to guide the reader through their own craft. It is a needed contribution to church

leadership. Perhaps I should take back my previous comment about only reading chapter 3 and make this chapter the must-read section of the book.

Chapter 8 is a subject area that many church leaders would rather not talk about from the platform—giving. Again, Brown draws from his experience in growing generous churches to offer strategies for leaders to take the chore out of giving. It is no secret that churches were struggling financially prior to the pandemic. It is no secret that many churches continue to struggle. Brown suggests that the first step is to rethink generosity. Leaders need to move from thinking about generosity as just financial and to thinking about it as time and talents as well. We did this in my own church, and it makes room for everyone to contribute, not just those with money.

This book is a necessary contribution to the conversation about church leadership in our new reality. The post-COVID-19 church is just beginning to emerge. Olu Brown offers us an early glimpse into what leaders need to do going forward. As Brown acknowledges throughout the book, culture is quickly and continually shifting. This book might only be relevant for a year or two. It might be relevant for the rest of my time in church leadership. Either way, it is a good first step as we emerge into this new world.

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BOOK REVIEW

THE CHURCH AFTER INNOVATION: QUESTIONING OUR OBSESSION WITH WORK, CREATIVITY, AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP
BY: ANDREW ROOT

Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2022
242 pp. paperback
ISBN 978-1-5409-6482-3

Professor Andrew Root's critique of innovation's allure emerges from the cruciform themes for which he is known. He argues that "plundering of the Egyptians"[1] in pursuit of innovation for its own sake runs counter to the mission of the church (6). Christian leaders should resist the "glorification of singularity and its apotheosizing of creativity and uniqueness" (229).

Root comes to the issue via a particularly interesting story: A synod received millions of dollars from churches exiting the denomination who were required to negotiate financial settlements for their buildings since they were legally owned by the synod. Rather than use those funds for maintaining buildings, the synod committed the money to catalyzing innovative mission to reverse its decline. "What do you do when you're left with the pain of divorce but an influx of cash from the settlement? What's the best

[1] Albert Outler attributes this willingness to learn from all sources of wisdom to John Wesley as well as Origen and St. Augustine before him. See Outler's *Theology in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville, TN: Discipleship Resources – Tidings, 1975), p. 3ff.

way to spend the money? The cultural answer is that you innovate and therefore reinvent yourself" (7).[2]

The author weaves economic theory and management history to illustrate how the concept of innovation gradually came to be identified with the reinvention of individual selves. Through the effect of free-market theory on the workplace since the 1800s (40ff), entrepreneurship and innovation become critical values, especially during the 1970s through the influence of Peter Drucker and other business gurus. Since then, innovation has become a driving theme throughout society (99) particularly with respect to the emerging class of "influencers" in social media. "We are bound inside the conundrum of late modernity, which tells us to be concerned only with being our unique self" (126). "When creativity becomes king, the self becomes a star" (137).

Calling upon a few of the great saints, Root offers practices to counter the seductions associated with self-promoting innovation. St. Francis of Assisi's denunciation of his father's money, standing naked in front of the bishop, models the rejection of "money and its spectral ability to inflate the self" (195). Root encourages us to follow the mystical path of Meister Eckhart and reclaim the power of epiphany that comes from outside oneself. When we embrace Eckhart's four themes of "the negative, nothingness, letting go, and the ground" (212ff), we realize we cannot find God in ourselves.

Faced with this negative realization, we "confess that the self—in itself—is incomplete. This incompleteness is a nothingness that

[2] Compare the testimony of the Rev. Eric Huffman, pastor of The Story Church in Houston, TX. He convinced his denomination's church development committee that he would grow his church plant to 500+ by having the hottest rock bands doing concerts in the sanctuary and preaching edgy sermons. Yet, the church never exceeded 180 in attendance. Huffman lamented that the denomination invested $250,000 and he worked countless hours, noting "how easily our church systems can be polluted by pride, politics, and sentimentality…" as we scramble "to claim even the appearance of vitality." Huffman testified that he was "reconverted" to Christianity in 2013 and moved away from conventionally flashy innovation and creativity. See "Five Principles for Church Planting in the New Methodist Revival," in *The Next Methodist Methodism: Theological, Social, and Missional Foundations for Global Methodism*, Kenneth J. Collins and Ryan N. Danker (eds). Franklin, TN: Seedbed Publishing, 2021, pp. 69-71.

the self can never escape" (216). By embracing this nothingness, the self lets go of its self-sufficiency. "When we let go, we find ourselves on the ground of being in Christ—and this alone is what saves the church" (223). On this ground, one is drawn into an "epiphanic aesthetic" of creativity that comes to us graciously from outside of the self (232).

Root's engaging argument avoids jettisoning innovation altogether. Yet, one wonders how large-scale organizational stewardship embraces an epiphanic aesthetic. The individual practices feel attainable. Implementing broad corporate practices in the face of institutional complexity feels less so.

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BOOK REVIEW

A POSTCOLONIAL LEADERSHIP: ASIAN IMMIGRANT CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP AND ITS CHALLENGES

BY: Choi Hee An
Albany, New York: Suny Press, 2020
296 Pp. Paperback
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Since its inception, leadership theory has been dominated by the modernist impulses of western civilization. Despite claims to objectivity within positivistic research models, the tenets of the modern world are deeply ingrained in both the theory and praxis of leadership research in American scholarship. The rapid pace of globalization questions the cultural homogeneity of modern leadership theory, resulting in interpretivism models of leadership that are less reliant upon the dominant norms of American culture.

One such theory is espoused by Choi Hee An in her book *A Postcolonial Leadership: Asian Immigrant Christian Leadership and Its Challenges.* Choi Hee An rightly observes that despite religious organizations being the primary environment where leadership is performed in minority communities, until recently the role of religion was absent from leadership discourse in the academy (xiii). She contests that a postcolonial model of leadership allows for the experiences of the community, specifically religious experiences, to play an influential role in shaping the expressions of leadership.

Within a postcolonial model of leadership, Asian immigrants are no longer bound to conform to the dominant, often agnostic expressions of leadership forged by the modern western world. The increased trends toward diversity within American culture ensures the relevancy of Choi Hee An's book for the foreseeable future.

Through comparative analysis of her native Asian culture against the dominant culture norms of American society, Choi Hee An exposes systemic challenges that confront Asian immigrants striving to exercise leadership within American culture. Against

this backdrop, a comprehensive but succinct overview of leadership studies is conducted by grouping leadership studies into the three broad categories of transactional, transformational, and collaborative. Having established a working understanding of leadership theory in chapter 1, Choi Hee An narrows the discussion in chapter 2 to Christian leadership, noting its long historical tradition which dates back to Moses.

Critical readers will grasp the implicit contrast from the previous chapter, which opens by noting that modern leadership theory is just over one hundred years old. Juxtaposing the opening chapters should raise concerns about how religious expressions of leadership are largely absent and often ignored in modern leadership theory.

The next two chapters, which consist of the second division of the book, highlight the role that culture has in shaping leadership. Choi Hee An lays the groundwork for proposing a postcolonial theory of leadership by asserting that culture impacts both the methods and the outcomes of scholarship related to leadership. This allows her to challenge the declared objectivity embedded within positivist methodologies utilized in scholarly pursuits. Narrowing the discussion and serving as a pivotal chapter in the text, chapter 4 displays the influence that culture has in shaping leadership praxis, by assessing how Asian culture impacts the performance of leadership among Asian immigrants in America.

The final section is dedicated to practical applications for implementing postcolonial leadership among Asian immigrants within America. The practical applications are designed to demonstrate how Asian immigrants have subconsciously utilized postcolonial leadership, and provide tools that allow the key postcolonial expressions of leadership to be practiced more consciously (page xvii).

Choi Hee An does a brilliant job of proposing a postcolonial leadership praxis, while simultaneously acknowledging that the systemic opposition built into the leadership theories that inform the performance of leadership in American culture will remain present. The acknowledgment of the tension between traditional approaches to leadership and postcolonial approaches serves as one of the key strengths toward allowing the exercise of leadership

without the pressure to abandon or ignore cultural norms within Asian immigrant communities. This is done primarily through a comparison of differences in how religious images are portrayed in both the dominant American culture and among Asian immigrants. With this tension fresh in the reader's mind, the book proceeds to a discussion of postcolonial leadership and how it has the potential to serve as the expression of leadership that allows Asian immigrants to effectively exercise leadership within western culture.

The book provides a strong case for the importance of pursuing diversity in leadership theory research by calling to task the positivistic and utilitarian research methodologies that dominate research in the western world. Such methodologies have diminished and suppressed attempts to define leadership which do not hold fast to the idea of objectivism and universal truth.

While the text makes clear that dominant expressions of Christian leadership are not friendly to the diverse experiences of minority communities, and that a postcolonial expression of leadership would be friendlier, it fails to provide a strong theological argument for postcolonial leadership. Choi Hee An missed an opportunity to construct a strong theological argument for the tenant of postcolonial leadership that could have challenged the dominant Christian expressions.

A Postcolonial Leadership: Asian Immigrant Christian Leadership and Its Challenges by Choi Hee An provides a roadmap for embracing diversity in Christian leadership that is much needed. As Christian leaders, we have an obligation to embrace and build leadership models capable of reflecting meaningfully the diversity of human expression. *Postcolonial Leadership* provides a roadmap from which to accomplish this mandate.

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