Retraining Ourselves in Thought and Action: A Thematic Exploration of Leadership Literature

DAVID T. GORTNER*

> *It is difficult to look in the mirror and like what we see unless we can combine—in our lives, in our work—the full development of individual potentials with commitment to a greater whole.*[1]

In my previous article, "Looking at Leadership Beyond Our Own Horizon" (*Anglican Theological Review*, Winter 2009), I focused on essential mental disciplines and habits of effective leaders: perceptual choice, interpretation of what is perceived, motivations for engagement, and interpersonal interactions. I identified four essential practices that restructure thought processes not only of the leader but of the organization: (1) Perceiving, naming, and expecting people's best; (2) Examining values that underpin (and potentially undermine) intentions and behaviors; (3) Developing multiple "tools" and frameworks for analyzing human enterprises; and (4) Practicing Socratic interactions to strengthen self-reflection on ways of perceiving, relating, and acting.[2] These practices facilitate and encourage organizational change. The mental practices and habits associated with

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* David T. Gortner is Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program and Professor of Evangelism and Congregational Leadership at Virginia Theological Seminary, Alexandria, Virginia. He has taught at Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, the Church Divinity School of the Pacific (where he was Director of the Center for Anglican Learning and Leadership), and the Graduate Theological Union. Professor Gortner's longer bibliography on leadership can be found at www.Anglican TheologicalReview.org.

[1] Howard Gardner, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and William Damon, *Good Work: When Excellence and Ethics Meet* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 244.

[2] The challenges of building learning organizations, which Chris Argyris detailed in *Overcoming Organizational Defenses: Facilitating Organizational Learning* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1990), can be introduced more affordably and basically with two other resources: Chris Argyris, *Teaching Smart People How to Learn* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Business Review Classics, 2008); Anita Farber-Robertson, *Learning While Leading: Increasing Your Effectiveness in Ministry* (Herndon, Va.: Alban Institute, 2000).

effective leadership are intensely developmental, and, as suggested in the epigraph, they intertwine with deep transformation of character. Their effect transcends the momentary work with individuals to the broader good of whole communities and societies.

Such disciplines and habits can be learned. But grandiose theories of leadership, one-note solutions, idiosyncratic "on-the-job" learning, consultant reports, and even reading the best of leadership literature and theology do little to change the ongoing lack of intentionality and reflection in day-to-day functioning in all human systems. New mental habits are fostered through intentional practice, with feedback from others: "Leaders need mentors, coaches, mentoring communities, and disciplines to follow in the company of peers who will keep them accountable and offer mutual challenge and support."[3]

In this article, I focus on leadership literature in communication and behavior, identifying competencies for conflict engagement, leadership development, and community development. I discuss the ultimate aims of deep and long-term transformational mission, with a focus on the deep work of integration. I then return to matters of formation and best practices for the leader in relation to time, objective-setting, anxiety management, self-differentiation, and creativity. I conclude with a suggestive approach for holistic training and formation of leaders, religious and otherwise.

The Leadership Milieu

Conflict Negotiation, Resolution, Engagement, and Agitation

Two of the most useful books on conflict resolution are Roger Fisher's and William Ury's *Getting to Yes*[4] and Bernard Mayer's *Dynamics of Conflict Resolution.*[5] *Getting to Yes* provides a solid introduction to conflict and the process of negotiating a decision in conflicted contexts. The authors' description of a kind of "middle way" between hard (competitive) and soft (acquiescing) approaches

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[3] David Gortner, "Looking at Leadership Beyond Our Own Horizon," *Anglican Theological Review* 91, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 141.

[4] Roger Fisher and William Ury, with Bruce Patton, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving In,* second edition (New York: Penguin Books, 1991).

[5] Bernard Mayer, *The Dynamics of Conflict Resolution: A Practitioner's Guide* (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

helpfully provides a checklist for self-evaluation of one's leadership behavior in challenging situations. In a principled approach to conflict, a leader's best practices involve:

- viewing participants as neither friends to soothe nor enemies to beat, but as problem-solvers
- shifting people's focus from hardened positions to inherent interests
- preventing continued hiding of conflict, and pressing for collaborative solutions
- anticipating possible non-resolution by knowing and mustering resources for the next-best alternatives.[6]

Expecting and playing toward the best in opponents for the sake of finding solutions changes the game of conflict and engages a form of the Pygmalion effect (an invitation which an opponent may or may not accept, depending on the level of conflict intensity). The emphasis on openness, honesty, and diminishing value-ridden, heel-digging positions resonates with Chris Argyris's Model II Socratic leadership.

Fisher and Ury's outline of effective conflict engagement contrasts with patterns John Dreibelbis and I found in our national study of Episcopal clergy leadership in congregations. Inventories completed by 456 priests revealed avoidance and accommodation as favored conflict engagement styles,[7] as well as excessive motivation to offer affection to others but low motivation to exercise control or direction of groups.[8] Over 50 percent of priests surveyed indicated they needed help managing their own anxiety in the face of real or anticipated opposition. This, combined with a tendency toward interpersonal dependency and a perception of themselves as neither confident nor decisive, renders Episcopal priests as relatively challenged leaders in conflict resolution and negotiation.

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[6]   Fisher and Ury, *Getting to Yes*, 13, 103–104.

[7]   Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument results compared to national norms of employed adults. In John Dreibelbis and David T. Gortner, *Talented but Tenuous: A Profile of Clergy Temperaments and Leadership Skills,* research report (Evanston, Ill.: Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, 2002).

[8]   Dreibelbis and Gortner, *Talented but Tenuous.* FIRO-B™ Interpersonal Motivations Instrument results compared to national norms of adults and of business professionals; from Allen Hammer and Eugene Schnell, *FIRO-B™ Technical Guide* (Mountain View, Calif.: Consulting Psychologists Press, 2000).

Such patterns suggest something amiss in the process of formation for religious leadership—something not just about the disposition and character of individual priests, but about what the ecclesial system (congregations, dioceses, and seminaries) implicitly affirms and seeks in its ordained leaders.[9] Even the most effective priests (as identified by peers and diocesan superiors), who showed higher confidence and decisiveness, did not describe themselves as much more assertive than their peers. In interviews, effective priests described more successful navigation of conflicts and fewer unresolved conflicts in their congregations than their counterparts who were struggling in ministry and leadership. But their primary conflict skills were *anticipation* of potential conflict by connecting openly with people on all sides prior to action; and *facilitating structured conversation* between opposing parties. These skills diverted typical problems: "Deferring too much to the concerns of others can deprive you of influence, respect, and recognition. It can also deprive the organization of your potential contributions. . . . Sometimes concerns for others' feelings or anxieties about the use of power cause us to vacillate, which may mean postponing a decision and adding to the suffering and/or resentment of others."[10]

Mayer's *Dynamics of Conflict Resolution* provides a wider array of perspectives, tools, and skills for conflict management. Mayer highlights human *needs* that reside at the heart of conflict, situational and communicative *patterns* that exacerbate problems, the ways in which *values* and *emotions* are used to amplify positions, and the *strategies* of avoidance and engagement that end up making matters worse. "At the center of all conflicts are human needs" (p. 8), ranging from basic survival needs (shelter, nutrition, or safety) to "interests" (desires for "tangible benefits," fair process, or respect) to deep "identity-based needs" (concern to maintain identity and purpose, to exercise autonomy, or to stay connected). Leadership in conflict resolution requires spending time with people on all sides of the conflict. "Only through interacting

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9 John Dreibelbis and David T. Gortner, *Markers of Strong and Effective Clergy Leadership,* research report (Evanston, Ill.: Seabury-Western Theological Seminary, 2000); Dreibelbis and Gortner, *Talented but Tenuous*; John Dreibelbis and David Gortner, "Beyond Wish-Lists for Pastoral Leadership: Assessing Clergy Behavior and Congregational Outcomes to Guide Seminary Curriculum," *Theological Education* 40 (2005): 25–49.

10 Kenneth W. Thomas and Ralph H. Kilmann, *Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument* (Tuxedo, N.Y.: Xicom, Inc., 1974), 12–13.

over time with key players can we understand the roots of a conflict in a practical and usable way. The art of conflict resolution is highly dependent on the ability to get to the right depth of understanding and intervention in conflict" (p. 18).

Other factors contribute to conflict complexity and intensity. Emotion fuels conflict. Conflicts are value-laden, and values used to define a conflict and parties involved can intensify situations and make barriers more impenetrable. The history behind a particular conflict creates momentum. (For example, in a couple dispute one partner—or both—may accumulate and then recite a litany of complaints and frustrations.) Structural and situational elements can either accentuate or alleviate conflict, even if intentions are different. (For example, two nursing shifts may approach patient care differently yet never interact or receive guidance from superiors.) Communication can easily result in increased misunderstanding even in the best of circumstances, and clear speech and listening become much more difficult in the face of threat, stress, or hot emotion. All of these factors, combined with people's beliefs about conflict itself, patterned behaviors of conflict avoidance, approaches to engaging conflict in order to get what they want, and uses of power, create a complex web. And pulling on one strand moves the entire web, for good or for ill.

For Mayer, skilled reframing and guidance in mutual solution-seeking help parties find ways to hear and recognize each others' interests. Thus, leadership in conflict resolution requires constant, artful engagement with warring parties: leaders spend time with differing parties, strive to understand and appreciate their differing concerns and perspectives, and coach them in better ways of expressing their concerns and claims. "Reframing" thinking patterns and beliefs helps people express themselves more effectively so that opponents can hear them. (Mayer cites victim-offender reconciliation work and the South African Truth Commission as examples; p. 99.) Reframing may also provide alternatives to resistant patterns of thought and aggressive emotions. A leader can help opposing parties find commonality in values, stating these values affirmatively rather than oppositionally. And when presenting situations in less toxic or absolute terms, conflicting parties can together consider possible solutions. Reframing is not a gimmick, but part of a holistic approach to building trust and engaging people.

Forgiveness, peace-building, and reconciliation often bring profound release and freedom for all parties to a conflict (although

they also hold potential for unintended damage, for example with abuser-perpetrator relationships). For Mayer, these biblical arenas of religious leadership may contribute to emotional resolution of conflict. Three texts provide a helpful immersion. Frederic Luskin's *Forgive for Good* provides an introduction to psychological research on forgiveness, offering multiple cases that demonstrate some best practices resulting in best outcomes.[11] In *Helping People Forgive,* David Augsburger offers pastoral leaders some tools to guide people away from rage, resentment, and scapegoating, toward reconciliation, bridge-building, and reconnection.[12] In *Victim Meets Offender*, Mark Umbreit, Robert Coates, and Boris Kalanj review the history and experience of victim-offender reconciliation programs, discuss case situations, and outline some essential practices for effective mediation in restorative justice work.[13]

But there is a growing body of activists and scholars who assert that very few conflicts are truly resolved. There are always residual effects and the potentials for reignition. Theresa Edlmann notes that following the Truth and Reconciliation work in South Africa, many who had publicly exposed their inner experience of oppression were left to fend for themselves without many additional resources. They ultimately returned to some prereconciliation behaviors and thought patterns and continue to experience ongoing hatred and racial prejudice.[14] Conflict between parties who for structural and historical reasons have unequal power will often tilt toward "resolution" that favors the more powerful. Helping people discover and exercise power through voice, networks, and affiliation can help them set clear boundaries and define their interactions with adversaries or enduring structures that perpetuate conflict.

Conflict may need to be fomented if change is to occur. A whole community may need to discover its voice, or individuals and subgroups within an organization or community may have concerns that are not being addressed (as was the case with Hellenic Jewish disciples

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[11]   Frederic Luskin, *Forgive for Good* (New York: HarperOne, 2003).

[12]   David W. Augsburger, *Helping People Forgive* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1996).

[13]   Mark S. Umbreit, Robert B. Coates, and Boris Kalanj, *Victim Meets Offender: The Impact of Restorative Justice and Mediation* (Monsey, N.Y.: Willow Tree Press, 1994).

[14]   Theresa Edlmann, "When Conflicts Don't Seem to Resolve: Lessons from South Africa," Summer Leadership Series at Virginia Theological Seminary, July 2009.

in the early Jerusalem church; Acts 6). In such situations, especially with people who do not know how to find or exercise their voice and strength, principles of community organizing come into play. Agitation, or arousing people to action to produce change, includes tapping into people's deep self-interests and passions, identification of problems and roadblocks to be overcome, mustering of strength and alliances, and strategic and artful confrontation of people who have the power to change circumstances. Agitation is a core leadership practice in labor organization, civil rights, and other efforts to address societal problems and inequities.

Conflict arousal and agitation should not be entered into lightly or in simplistic "prophetic" zeal. Nor should leaders blindly assume that they will prevail because they have truth on their side. Agitation and confrontation require wise strategic analysis and planning, assessing power, costs, and benefits, and mapping out pathways for engaging allies and opponents in order to maximize the odds of a "win" for the people who need it and who have gotten behind the cause.[15] Analysis and planning are essential as matters of pastoral concern. In conflict agitation and confrontation we are putting people at risk, and we must assess *with* them whether the benefits merit the risks in both short-term and long-term perspectives. Additionally, leaders need to be prepared to turn down the heat when sufficient change has been obtained.

Leadership Development and Community Development

Community development and leadership development are integrally intertwined. A leader cannot develop new leaders and keep them engaged without clear contributions to make to a greater good. A leader cannot have any enduring impact in a community without engaging its people directly in co-leadership in vision, design, and execution of efforts.

> Solidarity, however, is not a matter of sentiment, but of fact, cold and impassive as the granite foundations of a skyscraper. If the basic elements, identity of interest, clarity of vision, honesty of intent, and oneness of purpose, or any of these is lacking, all

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[15] From a lecture given by Steve Max at the Midwest Academy Community Organizing Training, Chicago, Illinois, July 2009.

sentimental pleas for solidarity and all efforts to achieve it will be alike barren of results.[16]

Community development involves mustering people around common interests, passions, assets, strengths, and needs. It involves engaging a community in its own transformation and advocating for its own good, thereby fostering a sense of agency. It involves helping to articulate and form an identity that is recognized, embraced, and celebrated, thereby demonstrating investment in a community. It involves identification of a community's recognized or untapped leadership, followership, and roles and functions to fulfill community goals, thereby understanding and moving in existing social networks. And it involves developing actions, strategies, and patterns of operation that lead to successful outcomes, thereby drawing upon best practices of community organizing, program design, and volunteer coordination.

Leadership development begins with discernment of strengths, watching individuals as they interact one-on-one and in meetings. It continues with investment in individuals, directly inviting them into leadership roles that match and somewhat exceed their competencies. It means offering direct feedback and inviting the leaders-in-training to practice arts of planning, review, and reflection. It means helping people develop stronger interpersonal and group leadership skills as well as goal-management skills. It involves renewing interest and commitment by continuing to invite further competency at increasing levels of complexity and commitment. And it means frequent public and private celebration of people's leadership contributions.

Organizing for Social Change by Kim Bobo, Jackie Kendall, and Steve Max lays out clear instructions for developing core leadership and wider community involvement around shared community interest, mustering people through effectively planned meetings and gatherings, developing and executing strategic plans, engaging with various publics, creating encounters that leverage public commitments from people in power, and following through with assertive advocacy and partnership until change is implemented and secured.[17] The

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[16]   Eugene V. Debs, *Eugene V. Debs Speaks* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1902/1994), 201.

[17]   Kim Bobo, Jackie Kendall, and Steve Max, *Organizing for Social Change: Midwest Academy Manual for Activists*, third edition (Santa Ana, Calif.: Seven Locks Press, 2001).

book offers a roadmap and tools that help leaders coach others on the planning and leading of energizing meetings, and that guide more advanced leaders in strategic thinking and power analysis. Rooted in principles of power, self-interest, and systemic change, the book helps leaders effectively encourage and use agitation. It provides insights into the effective direction and strengthening of people's investment in and commitment to a meaningful project. The authors counsel groups to identify potential self-interests and benefits for people who lead, create positions explicitly for testing new skills and developing leadership, offer positively framed and instructive evaluation, rotate roles, look for signs of enjoyment in leadership positions, use stronger leaders to mentor and coach new leaders, and help leaders create and follow self-development goals (pp. 122–124).

Particular application of these insights to work with young adults can be found in two projects. *The Basic Guide to Young Adult Ministry* summarizes the highly successful community and leadership development work with young adults of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Chicago.[18] In *Acts of Faith*, Eboo Patel describes how the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) builds the citizenry of tomorrow by bringing together youth and young adults from multiple religions for acts of relief, development, and advocacy in a pattern of action-reflection.[19] These and other books demonstrate how youth and young adults (indeed, people of all ages) respond with increasing energy and commitment when they are sought out for their strengths and potentials, given specific tasks in which to exercise some leadership, allowed to mentor one another, and encouraged to contribute to community transformation.[20]

A small but emerging literature on followership and effective nurturing of volunteers was launched by Ira Chaleff in *The Courageous Follower: Standing Up to and for Our Leaders*.[21] Chaleff maintains

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[18]   John C. Cusick and Katherine F. DeVries, *The Basic Guide to Young Adult Ministry* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Press, 2001).

[19]   Eboo Patel, *Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 2007).

[20]   See also Francisco A. Villarruel, Daniel F. Perkins, Lynne M. Borden, and Joanne G. Keith, eds., *Community Youth Development: Programs, Policies, and Practices* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 2003) and Carol E. Lytch, *Choosing Church: What Makes a Difference for Teens* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2003).

[21]   Ira Chaleff, *The Courageous Follower: Standing Up to and for Our Leaders*, second edition (San Francisco, Calif.: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2003).

that a "courageous follower"—one who can be trusted as a confidant, who will follow through with vigor, and who will challenge leaders when necessary—can be a "partner," rather than simply an "implementer" or "resource," or a rugged "individualist" who does not fully connect with the leader, institution, or project (pp. 43–46). A courageous follower clearly invests in organizational success and, once he or she has established a measure of credibility through contribution, raises questions and challenges organizational or leadership assumptions. A measure of strong leadership is the willful effort of the leader to foster relationships with and invest in the development of courageous followers—to seek and to work with the kind of feedback that these kinds of followers can offer. A leader who listens and takes input seriously benefits because a courageous follower develops fiercer loyalty and, once convinced, backs up a leader's initiatives. Steps remarkably similar to those discussed above can help followers become optimally strong partners.

Volunteer organizations such as the local congregation are notoriously challenging for leaders, both lay and ordained. The typical pattern of 20 percent of the people doing 80 percent of the work crosses a variety of human enterprises. Marlene Wilson notes that volunteers want to be matched to meaningful work that taps their skills; to be trained sufficiently for a successful contribution; to offer their own input into design and/or implementation planning; and to be thanked, recognized, and valued for their contributions, both individually and as team members.[22] Wilson guides leaders and organizations toward practices that deliver these "goods" to volunteers while also addressing the challenges of burnout, general malaise, mismatch of work needed with skills available, and interpersonal difficulties. Wilson's overly structured approach can be adapted into a more integrated, organic one that uses informal networks and everyday conversations to achieve the same ends.

People seeking to change society or at least to have a significant impact in their communities may erroneously attempt to enter their communities as experts or white knights of redemption. This approach

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[22] Marlene Wilson, *How to Mobilize Church Volunteers* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Press, 1983); Marlene Wilson, *The Effective Management of Volunteer Programs* (Boulder, Colo.: Volunteer Management Associates, 1976); and Marlene Wilson, *Creating a Volunteer-Friendly Church Culture* (Loveland, Colo.: Group Publishing, 2003).

has unintended effects of casting the recipients into a passive role. The work of John Kretzmann and John McKnight represents efforts across fields and disciplines to reintroduce powers of self-determination to individuals and communities.[23] Unlike interest-based community organizing, this approach to community development elicits community engagement by working with people to identify their own, others', and their community's assets. *Building Communities from the Inside Out* starts with bringing to light the obvious, hidden, and ignored assets of communities and its people and institutions. This approach then moves to building bridges between people and groups in order to make the most of assets and to allow everyone to contribute meaningfully to the building or rebuilding of their community. The approach resonates well with "Appreciative Inquiry,"[24] but with more expansive connectional aims.

Mission and Community Transformation

Effective nonprofit organizations and their leaders do not spend a lot of time on defining vision and mission because their vision is deeply internalized and at the same time flexible enough to respond to changing contexts.[25] Nonetheless, it is invaluable for leaders and congregations to identify and review their long-term and mid-term intentions for their ministry and their community and leadership development. Such deliberation is best engaged as a matter of habitual action-reflection undertaken in the course of the work of mission and ministry.

For a church to embody a vision of gospel proclamation and transformation of people's and communities' lives, it must connect best practices and general theological frameworks to the vision. Parker Palmer's *The Company of Strangers* offers a corrective vision of how a church can become a vital community that mediates between private

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[23] John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight, *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets* (Chicago, Ill.: ACTA Publications, 1997).

[24] For a solid introduction, see Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom, *The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: A Practical Guide to Positive Change* (San Francisco, Calif.: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2003).

[25] Leslie R. Crutchfield and Heather McLeod Grant, *Forces for Good: The Six Practices of High Impact Nonprofits* (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 2007), 18.

isolation and the anonymity of political society.[26] Palmer's conceptions of church as a place of meeting the stranger in respect (pp. 40–46) and as a "school of the Spirit" (a hub of learning a new way of living; pp. 123–124) can help focus the many directions of ministry that might emerge in an actively outward-focused church.

For a congregation whose work or vision primarily aims at societal transformation, John Perkins's *Beyond Charity* and Dennis Jacobsen's *Doing Justice* offer practical theological frameworks for community organizing and community development.[27] Focusing primarily on issues of social justice from a liberation theology perspective, Jacobsen emphasizes mustering people through the principles of community organizing to pursue systemic changes and confront societal sin. Citing Bonhoeffer, he says that "the accommodation and silence of the church amidst Nazi atrocities are paralleled by the accommodation and silence of the church in this country amidst a calculated war against the poor" (p. 15). Perkins, cautious of agitation models, focuses more broadly on full embodiment of a theology of reconciliation and authentic presence in a Christian group's work with its surrounding community. This includes "wholesome care," service that strengthens people and communities, economic development, and justice built through cooperative relationships. Together, these two books help leaders and congregations consider prayerfully the span and focus of their mission in light of how they understand the *missio Dei*.

Leslie Crutchfield and Heather Grant push the understanding of leadership effectiveness even further—and perhaps most harmoniously—toward a mission-oriented ecclesiology. Their book, *Forces for Good,* describes patterns of effective nonprofit leadership that can take church leaders beyond the walls of the *ecclesia* and foster creative engagement with the public sphere.[28] "Greatness has more to do with how nonprofits work outside the boundaries of their organizations than how they manage their own internal operations" (p. 19). The most high-impact nonprofit organizations employ at least most of six core practices: (1) working on systemic change through service

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[26] Parker J. Palmer, *The Company of Strangers: Christians and the Renewal of America's Public Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1999).

[27] John M. Perkins, *Beyond Charity: The Call to Christian Community Development* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1993) and Dennis A. Jacobsen, *Doing Justice: Congregations and Community Organizing* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Fortress, 2001).

[28] Crutchfield and Grant, *Forces for Good.*

and advocacy; (2) working with people's and businesses' self-interest rather than pure altruism; (3) inspiring "evangelists" among volunteers by connecting them with emotionally meaningful experiences; (4) intentionally collaborating and building networks with other non-profits, rather than competing; (5) adapting efforts and methods in accord with what one learns from the surrounding culture and constituencies; and (6) distributing leadership to people in and beyond the organization. Each of these practices "reinforce[s] the others in a virtuous cycle," and builds on an organizational *habitus* of commitment to societal transformation (p. 209).[29]

In congregations focused on bringing people into contact with the gospel and nurturing personal transformation, there are theological and practical insights to be gained from books as widely varied as Roland Allen's classic *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?*, Rick Warren's *The Purpose-Driven Church*, and my own *Transforming Evangelism*.[30] Each of these books turns common presuppositions on their heads and helps unleash new ways of thinking about and doing ministry, fostering committed discipleship, and forming faithful leaders whose lives are focused on their own spiritual journeys and God's work in their own lives as well as their ongoing ministry and leadership in their communities. In all three books, an emphasis on personal discipleship and habit-formation is linked to strengthening community through mutual commitments, accountability, and support.

When an organization begins to consider the larger context around it, the theme of its work and purpose shifts. It is no longer simply for itself or about its own work, or even about work in a tightly local context. It begins to experience and grasp a new identity linked to images of pilgrimage and journey. In *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, Sharon Parks illustrates how young adults move from dependence, counter-dependence, or overly charged claims of independence into "inner

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[29] In addition to *Forces for Good,* parish leaders may find it helpful to read Paul Wilkes, *Excellent Catholic Parishes: The Guide to Best Places and Practices* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2001); Paul Wilkes, *Excellent Protestant Congregations: The Guide to Best Places and Practices* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2001); Parker J. Palmer, *The Company of Strangers*; Diana Butler Bass and Joseph Stewart-Sicking, *From Nomads to Pilgrims* (Herndon, Va.: Alban Institute, 2005).

[30] Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing, 1964); Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church: Growth Without Compromising Your Message and Mission* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 1995); David Gortner, *Transforming Evangelism* (New York: Church Publishing, 2008).

dependence" constituted by selectively internalized core stories, voices, and messages.[31] In *Common Fire*, Parks and her colleagues outline much more clearly some ultimate aims in transforming young adult lives into lives shaped by courage, compassion, conviction, commitment, and competency, all of which are signs of movement from more basic comfort and inward rejuvenation to deeply internalized patterns of outward public witness and action.[32]

Excursis: The Limited Helpfulness of Biblical and Historical Exemplars

Scripture is no more a handbook on skilled leadership than it is a guidebook for medical practice, scientific inquiry, or architectural design. If anything, narratives of "heroes and heroines" of the faith in Scripture invite a hermeneutic of suspicion about leadership in the hands of fallible human beings. In Exodus, Moses emerges as a significant leader, in response to a direct calling from God. But the narrative highlights his limitations and continuing development as a leader—his hot-blooded reactive response to injustice that initially sets him as an outlaw, his anxiety and self-doubt that tax God's patience, his effort to handle every pastoral and judicial situation individually without delegating responsibility, and his forgetful or arrogant claim of God's power as his own. In the first half of Acts, the apostles stumble over themselves in attempts to establish or impose order and define boundaries for the emerging *ecclesia*, and to avoid conflict through delegation and awkward compromise. Exemplars of leadership in Scripture are flawed. And that is part of the point, to focus people's minds on the purposes of God unfolding with and in spite of human capacities, and to remind people, leaders and followers alike, of their own human fallibility and of the necessity of following the direct leading of God in order for outcomes to be right. This is an invaluable spiritual perspective, calling for a fundamental stance of humility, attentiveness, discernment, and obedience. But when over-applied, it can also lend itself to a lack of self-reflection and discipline in leaders' thoughts, communications, and actions. A resulting belief—that if we simply align ourselves with God's purposes, then God

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[31] Sharon Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in Their Search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith* (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 2000).

[32] Laurent A. Parks Daloz, Cheryl H. Keen, James P. Keen, and Sharon Daloz Parks, *Common Fire: Leading Lives of Commitment in a Complex World* (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 1997).

will provide us with the right methods, tactics, and strategies we need—can allow for undisciplined and anti-intellectual leadership to take the place of a quest to become "wise as serpents" and to "be watchful and ready."

Likewise, Christian historical figures may or may not give us insight into leadership, depending on how we approach the data. Consider Gregory the Great. In the fifth century, he emphasized virtuous living and fearful and humble submission as core qualities for the episcopacy, an office he regarded as an undesired burden. As an inheritor of a system that became established during Rome's last centuries of empire, Gregory focused on the assumed, expected, and sanctioned episcopal habits and functions within Roman society: exemplary discipleship, and instruction and guidance through preaching and pastoral counsel. These functions combined to form a role-image that was part magisterial bureaucrat, part warm and nurturing tribal *pater-familias*, and part contemplative "über-Christian." The assumptions of both *ecclesia* and society were assimilated by Gregory, without critical reflection on how they might themselves be marred or produce unintended results. For leadership in such an assumed context, Gregory focused on virtues of patience and humility in long-suffering, fortitude (a defense-oriented form of courage), tenderness and loving-kindness, and the ability to apply a strict severity in justice. But how do these virtues translate into behaviors and skillful means? Consider this excerpt:

> For one whose estimation is such that the people are called his flock is bound *anxiously* to consider what great necessity is laid upon him *to maintain rectitude*. It is necessary, then, that in thought he should be pure, in action chief; discreet in keeping silence, profitable in speech; a near neighbour to every one in sympathy, exalted above all in contemplation; a familiar friend of good livers through humility, unbending against the vices of evil-doers through zeal for righteousness; not relaxing in his care for what is inward from being occupied in outward things, nor neglecting to provide for outward things in his solicitude for what is inward.[33]

Leaders who are "bound anxiously to consider what great necessity is laid upon him to maintain rectitude" may focus their energy on peace-keeping and good order—that is, placation and containment.

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[33] Gregory the Great, *Pastoral Rule*, Book II, 1.

We may be best served by seeing that Gregory's criteria for episcopal leadership outline some helpful baseline qualities and competencies that are necessary but not sufficient criteria for effective religious leadership. But his views that religious leadership should not be sought, is a painful burden to bear, and is ensured by personal godliness may have contributed to images and assumptions that to this day continue to distort and truncate ecclesial ideas about leadership.

The Quandary of Leaders Beholden to Systemic Assumptions

Leadership is defined contextually, for good or ill. Each human institution in a given culture constrains leadership in terms of its own stated and unstated expectations. Over time, leaders and followers alike develop a set of unquestioned assumptions that operate silently in the background to sustain *modi operandi* in the life of the organization. These assumptions affect communication patterns, role expectations, rituals of exchange, and alliances; and they can become so internalized that they endure even the most aggressive or revolutionary attempts at change. Placing blame and destroying named demons does not necessarily eliminate banal or egregious flaws in systems that call forth repeating patterns of leadership.

Leadership is also recognized contextually and people within a context can distinguish leadership when they see it exhibited robustly. But it may not be recognizable outside this context. In other words, leadership is recognized within a defined domain based on behaviors and outcomes—and is recognized as particularly strong when it results in changes that are judged to be useful, effective, and important.[34]

Religious organizations are very human enterprises in which leadership has been contextually defined in accord with a series of stated and unstated assumptions, some of them contrary to the results we seek in ministry and mission. Studies of leadership and of clergy training in various denominations, recent and from the past forty years, paint a picture of a system perpetuating itself with remarkable consistency.

Using *Pulpit and Pew* survey research, Adair T. Lummis identified common expectations laypeople hold for pastors: (1) demonstrated

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[34] See Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Creativity: Flow and the Psychology of Discovery and Invention* (New York: HarperCollins, 1996); and Howard Gardner, *Changing Minds: The Art and Science of Changing Our Own and Other People's Minds* (Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press, 2006).

competence and experience in males under forty with families; (2) deep religious authenticity and commitment to parish ministry above and beyond self-care and time for family; (3) relevant preaching and entrepreneurial evangelism without the consequence of change; (4) approachability and warmth, with an emphasis on consensus building and lay ministry coaching.[35] Thomas Long summarized ideals seminary professors hold for future clergy: (1) deep spirituality; (2) complete dedication to their particular religious tradition; (3) clear emphasis on functional ministry of word and sacraments; and (4) deep love for God and God's people, to the point of personal sacrifice.[36] These assumptions and expectations, often unexamined and internally inconsistent as they are, define the imaginal and perceptual frameworks of laity and clergy in the church and set in motion a series of ideals and values that are challenging to resolve, if not incompatible with the practices of effective leadership. And they run deep: books such as Jackson Carroll's *God's Potters* and the Carnegie Foundation's *Educating Clergy* indirectly validate these unstated assumptions and expectations, by leaving them and the system they perpetuate relatively untouched by inquiry.[37]

Unquestioned systemic assumptions have consequences. In the early 1970s, major studies of U.S. Roman Catholic clergy by Eugene Kennedy, Victor Heckler, and Andrew Greeley surfaced some patterns disturbing in their consistency. In interviews focused on psychosocial development, Kennedy and Heckler found that most Roman Catholic priests were bright, able, and dedicated, but also underdeveloped as persons—that is, socially and emotionally immature and

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[35] Adair T. Lummis, "What Do Lay People Want in Pastors? Answers from Lay Search Committee Chairs and Regional Judicatory Leaders," *Pulpit and Pew Research on Pastoral Leadership,* online research report (Duke University, 2002); www.pulpitandpew.duke.edu/Searchsummary.html.

[36] Thomas G. Long, "Ingredients of Good and Faithful Ministry," in Jackson W. Carroll and Carol E. Lytch, eds., *What is Good Ministry? Resources to Launch a Discussion,* online monograph by Pulpit and Pew (Atlanta, Ga: Fund for Theological Education, 2003); www.pulpitandpew.duke.edu/DUGood%20MinistryWeb.pdf.

[37] Jackson W. Carroll, *God's Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2006); and Charles R. Foster, Lisa E. Dahill, Lawrence A. Golemon, and Barbara Wang Tolentino, *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination* (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 2005).

given to conformity.[38] Similarly, in his sociological survey Greeley found that Roman Catholic priests were not strong in assertiveness and in dealing with aggression. But inner-directedness was a key indicator both of clergy career satisfaction *and* of leaving ordained ministry.[39] Interestingly, Kennedy and Heckler suggested that "the protective function of the priesthood role for the underdeveloped affects markedly their capacity to implement religious ideals" (p. 12). These patterns recur in religious leaders across Christian denominations, religions, and nations.

Kirk Hadaway summarized results particular to the Episcopal Church from Hartford Seminary's Faith Communities Today study.[40] Hadaway noted that congregation members tend to see their rectors as caring, spiritual, hard-working, and knowledgeable, but not as evangelistic, charismatic, or capable in administration or conflict negotiation. Clarity and building a culture of cooperation were leadership competencies directly related to church vitality. In the study conducted by John Dreibelbis and myself, Episcopal priests rated themselves as highly creative and persevering, but tending toward dependency rather than self-reliance. Episcopal priests also indicated high confidence in some baseline competencies for religious leadership, such as ritual leadership, pastoral presence, and integrity of intentions and pattern of life. But they also showed low confidence in more proactive, engaged, and mindful forms of leadership, such as managing personal anxiety, overseeing and directing goals, understanding patterns and dynamics at play, developing lay leadership, and building community. The results were invariant across gender, race, and education level, and were found whether or not priests had trouble during their ordination processes.

Nevertheless, when people in the church are asked about leadership that has contributed to significant positive change, respondents are remarkably consistent in their judgments, and notably accurate, even though their criteria are different. As John Dreibelbis describes

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[38]   Eugene C. Kennedy and Victor J. Heckler, *The Catholic Priest in the United States: Psychological Investigations* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1972), 7, 16.

[39]   Andrew M. Greeley, *The Catholic Priest in the United States: Sociological Investigations* (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America, 1972), 59, 68–69.

[40]   Kirk C. Hadaway, *A Report on Episcopal Churches in the United States* (New York: The Domestic and Foreign Missionary Society, 2002), from the Faith Communities Today study of Hartford Seminary.

in his article in this issue, people in the church recognize strong and effective leadership with remarkable consistency when asked directly.[41] But this implicit knowledge is not elicited in questions asked during selection, training, and deployment of people for ordained ministry. In this regard, the church lives out what Chris Argyris calls "skilled incompetence": the automatic, smooth practice of a set of well-rehearsed behaviors and thought processes that actually undermine people's own intended work of developing and strengthening the organization.[42] The ecclesial system's dedication to unexamined assumptions about leadership undermines its potential.

Building a Habitus *for Effectiveness*

Leaders develop by fostering and practicing specific skills and competencies of effective leadership, rather than by dwelling on abstracted ideals and ultimate aims that may themselves be in question. Building a *habitus* of reflective practice for effectiveness requires the use of resources outside as well as inside the boundaries of religion. It also requires focused and sustained attentiveness, experimental and committed change efforts, and honest conversation with God and with people who will provide honest and loving feedback. These are the same requirements as those needed for discipleship and for developing and sustaining spiritual practices.

Finitude, Humility, and Discipline of Time and Purpose

In *The Effective Executive,* Peter Drucker asserts that effective leaders are not alike in personality or charisma, but the most effective ones have in common a practice of rigorous and conscientious discipline over their time.

> Effective executives . . . do not start with their tasks. They start with their time. And they do not start out with planning. They start by finding out where their time actually goes. Then they attempt to manage their time and to cut back unproductive demands on their time [i.e., e-mail, multiplication of meetings]. Finally they

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[41] John Dreibelbis, "From Maintaining to Building Communities of Faith," *Anglican Theological Review* 92, no. 1 (Winter 2010).

[42] Chris Argyris, *Overcoming Organizational Defenses: Facilitating Organizational Learning* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1990), 12, 14.

consolidate their "discretionary" time into the largest possible con-
tinuing units.[43]

Drucker's practice of time management can help church leaders move
from a more reactive approach to a proactive approach to the work of
ministry and mission, and help them become clearer in self-direction.
His concept of "discretionary" time as the most valuable time in which
leaders can direct creative energy toward an organization's mission
merits disciplined consideration by every church leader.

Jim Collins's series of books, *Built to Last*, *Good to Great*, *Good
to Great and the Social Sectors*, and *How the Mighty Fall*, is similarly
widely read across professions.[44] Collins draws particular attention to
leaders' ability to focus deliberately and consistently on aims linked
to an organization's strengths and to say no to distracters that include
potentially "worthy" projects not directly related to core aims. He also
differentiates levels of leadership and followership. For instance, a
catalytic leader who stimulates high investment and effort is an im-
portant contributor, but not as skilled in leadership as the executive
who "builds enduring greatness through a paradoxical blend of per-
sonal humility and professional will." These strongest leaders focus on
self-mastery and clear direction of the work. They choose aims that
align what their organizations are passionate about, what they can
"uniquely contribute . . . better than any other organization," and
what energizes and produces commitment of resources (funds, time,
effort, and identification with the organization).[45] The strongest "vi-
sionary" organizations identify their three to four core values and
their particular ways of passionately pursuing these values. They
shape all activities, goals, programs, and structures in accord with
these values and passions, attending to the "small stuff" as well as the

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[43]   Peter F. Drucker, *The Effective Executive* (New York: Collins, 1967/2006), 25.
[44]   Jim Collins and Jerry I. Porras, *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary
Companies* (New York: HarperBusiness, 2004); Jim Collins, *Good to Great and the
Social Sectors: Why Business Thinking Is Not the Answer; A Monograph to Accom-
pany Good to Great* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005); Jim Collins, *Good to Great:
Why Some Companies Make the Leap . . . and Others Don't* (New York: HarperCol-
lins, 2001); Jim Collins, *How the Mighty Fall: And Why Some Companies Never Give
In* (New York: Jim Collins, 2009).
[45]   Collins, *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*, 12, 18–19.

big picture, with a willingness to eliminate projects and practices that do not align with organizing values.[46]

These authors commend disciplines that defend against hubris and grandiosity. Leaders' commitment ought not to be to self-aggrandizement, but to steadily building the organization. Acknowledging that no organization can do everything well, effective leaders choose their focus and their organization's focus in alliance with an organization's strengths. Effective leaders set priorities for themselves and others, and abide by these priorities in service of the project; they do not select a focus and then leave implementation to "lesser beings."

Anxiety Management, Clarity, Detached-Engagement, Facilitating Energy

Effective leadership requires significant attention to one's own habits of the heart, automatic reactions, and character. Personal anxiety management, assertive but non-aggressive clarity, self-differentiation (what we have come to call *fully engaged detachment*), and visible interest in people and projects are critical issues for leaders, perhaps best addressed in spiritual direction, coaching, or psychotherapy. Left unaddressed, these issues become Achilles' heels for leaders: anxiety binds effective assertiveness and decision-leadership, patterns get repeated in continuous cycles of frustration, and subtle lack of interest leaves people questioning leaders' involvement.

Four books help seasoned church leaders examine themselves more closely. In *How to Control Your Anxiety Before It Controls You,* Albert Ellis offers insight into the ways in which anxiety (a raw signal of possible challenge in the surrounding environment) can set into motion well-rehearsed thought patterns that result in false assumptions, catastrophic visions of the future, self-degradation, and the mental criminalizing of others.[47] For Ellis, the problem is not anxiety itself, but the thought patterns which amplify anxiety and severely limit one's response repertoire. Ellis offers strategies for changing thought patterns and disputing internal irrationality. The strategies are simple, and simple is not necessarily easy. The skills, like those for

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46 Collins and Porras, *Built to Last*, 201–219.
47 Albert Ellis, *How to Control Your Anxiety Before It Controls You* (New York: Citadel, 1998).

time management, take mental discipline, honesty about oneself, and committed practice.

Many clergy already are familiar with Edwin Friedman's *Generation to Generation* and *A Failure of Nerve*.[48] Both bring family systems theory to bear on understanding how congregations function and how leaders respond. Patterns of interaction, attachment, and role-identification in families and groups sustain a repeating systemic reality, for better and for worse. Our best efforts and intentions at "fixing" things can backfire, because they end up threatening other relationships that people do not want to disrupt. Furthermore, these "best efforts" themselves come from our own unreflected and automatic learned patterns. For Friedman, effective self-differentiated leadership relies on three practices: (1) staying in touch with others, including those who are resistant; (2) taking a defined, well-considered, but nonreactive stance; and (3) remaining connected and nonreactive (that is, deeply engaged and detached) in the face of sabotage.[49] In *A Failure of Nerve*, Friedman expands his argument for the need for well-differentiated leaders, placing primary emphasis on the need for leadership training to focus on self-awareness regarding leaders' presence in their communities in ways that invite groups away from chronically reactive, regressive, and avoidant postures.

A final book for religious leaders' self-assessment is Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*.[50] Csikszentmihalyi redirects readers from problem-oriented psychology to an exploration of peak experiences in peoples' lives. These are moments of forgetfulness of self, time, and space as one is fully immersed in work or play or relationship; anxious or critical self-consciousness disappears. These experiences of "flow" are marked by vigorous engagement, excitation, and intense concentration. Whatever the specific arena, these experiences all involve high challenge that invites and elicits high skill, taking one to the boundaries of one's abilities. People are anxious when there is high challenge far exceeding one's skill; and they are bored when the challenge is low and one's higher skills are not

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[48]   Edwin H. Friedman, *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1985); Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix* (New York: Seabury Books, 2007).

[49]   Friedman, *Generation to Generation,* 229–230.

[50]   Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1990).

being tested or developed. Csikszentmihalyi's insights can help clergy and other professionals take stock of their own responses in their work as leaders. When have they experienced flow, anxiety, and boredom in their work? What does this suggest for how they might prioritize and engage their work?

These and other resources take leaders beyond the learning of skills and competencies into deeper character change. Essential to change is an openness with others—spiritual directors, therapists, coaches, trusted lay confidants and lay leaders, and peers in religious leadership—about the matters of the heart one is engaging, inviting help through support, accountability, and Socratic self-inquiry.

Leadership through Continuous Development,
Not Omni-Competence

In this review, I have identified a set of competencies, qualities, and habits found and fostered in strong leaders across a variety of human endeavors. These include:

- mental habits of shifting mental frameworks and helping others reframe their perspectives, asking Socratic questions of oneself and one's decisions;
- behavioral habits of focusing energy and effort on projects most valued by the organization, and saying no to distractions;
- directional habits of setting clear paths to meet clear objectives and engaging in review and adjustment as needed;
- interpersonal habits of affirming and calling for people's best, perceiving and making use of people's networks and interests, communicating consistently, and building a culture that seeks intentional feedback;
- emotional wisdom in managing personal anxiety and perceiving others' emotional signals; and
- cultural abilities to perceive and work fluidly and creatively with informal groups and networks within an organization in order to develop new patterns, develop internal leadership, and find new ways to introduce new ideas into the culture.

Given the range of leadership competencies explored in this brief review, it can be tempting for church leaders to become daunted and respond through withdrawal, rebuttal, or a plea to return to Egypt.

But leadership is not a matter of omni-competence. Effective leadership is learned step by step in real situations, through progressive action-reflection and testing of new approaches, building different competencies at different times. And leadership competencies are intertwined and reinforce each other in something like Crutchfield and Grant's "virtuous cycle" of development. Practicing assertiveness builds self-confidence, which contributes to self-differentiation and greater effectiveness in conflict engagement. Practicing honest positive reframing contributes new energy and imaginative investment by self and others, changes the dynamics of social networks, and opens oneself and others to the possibility of non-anxious Socratic reflection on existing patterns and values. Broader perspectives paradoxically help leaders and followers to focus on what really makes a difference, and clarify the partnerships and networks to build inside and beyond the church. Fostering and helping to develop focused leadership, followership, and community vitality help leaders anchor and clarify their own learning, time, and purposes.

The danger of ad hoc learning in the absence of disciplined action-reflection is its highly idiosyncratic results. Intentional mentoring and coaching, periodic self-assessment, and regular reflection with peers on challenging situations strengthen and focus what one learns on the job. Reading books can also be helpful, but runs the risk of producing "head knowledge" without any translation into a new *habitus* of thought, action, and interaction. Direct training experiences with skilled practitioners (such as with the Lombard Mennonite Peace Center, the Gamaliel Foundation, or the Center for Creative Leadership) provide people with opportunities for observation, direct practice, and feedback. Engagement with peers, leaders who serve as mentors or coaches, and mentoring communities can be invaluable, if real situations are discussed and if people foster with each other a culture of mutual Socratic inquiry and self-reflection using a variety of perspectives. Effective mentors invite such reflection on their own actions, asking learners to connect the dots between actions and motivating goals and values—as Jesus asked his disciples, "Do you know what I have done?" (John 13:12).

To shape leadership training and development experiences, it is important for church leaders to engage this tremendous body of literature and training from a generous theological perspective of incarnated truth. De-centering philosophical movements challenge the church to confront its untested ecclesiocentric assumptions, and to

regard anew a fundamental understanding that "all truth is God's truth," that incarnated truth means real gifts to be found beyond as well as within the walls of the church.

Intentionality in leaders' self-development is not antithetical to Christian submission to the will of God, but is a matter of vigorous partnership with God in the gift we are given of becoming. Such intentionality takes to another level Bernard of Clairvaux's notion of the twinship of grace in the movement of God and the human person: we participate with God in grace not only through our will's choosing to assent to God, but through our will's choosing and following a developmental path intended to be in harmony with God's will and fuller participation in God's mission. Leaders can draw on the more intentional Ignatian, Jesuit, and Wesleyan traditions of spiritual development to focus their prayerful efforts to strengthen their own leadership disciplines, call forth the best from people, and foster honest and self-reflective organizational cultures that develop effective leaders and followers, set clear purposes, and gladly enter and embrace new relationships in the public square.