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The Man behind the Curtain: Who is this Covenant Theologian? - Chapter 1 from "Covenant-Making: The Fabric of Relationship"

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The Man behind the Curtain

WHO IS THIS COVENANT THEOLOGIAN?

by MaryKate Morse

IN THE CLASSIC STORY, *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy and her friends travel to the Emerald City to have an audience with the Great and Powerful Wizard. They each have a request and each meets the Wizard, who appears to them in a variety of astonishing and terrifying forms. The Wizard has a reputation for his wisdom and his ability to work wonders, and they believe he can solve their problems. In the end, they discover that the real Oz behind the curtain is an ordinary man from Omaha, Nebraska.

The Wizard is akin to the world of academics. He has an impressive name: Oscar Zoraster Phadrig Issac Norman Henkel Emmanuel Ambroise Diggs. Academics cultivate impressive “names” by detailing their accomplishments in curricula vitae (CV). William H. Bergquist and Kenneth Pawlak, in their book *Engaging the Six Cultures of the Academy*, note that the academy culture is a world “with a strong emphasis on often subtle but nevertheless quite powerful competition and striving for prestige and dominance.”¹ Academicians cultivate their CVs and use them as brands for their accomplishments and status.

Though the curricula vitae become a testimony to greatness and wonders, they do little to reveal much about the true character of the academic behind the curtain. This can create an unhealthy and false self, which is

1. Bergquist and Pawlak, *Engaging the Six Cultures of the Academy*, 33.

presented to students and faculty while the true self stays hidden behind the curtains. This is especially troubling for those who are Christian academics and who desire to emulate the servant leadership of Jesus. The purpose of this chapter is to pull back the curtain and reveal one academic, Dr. Larry Shelton, born in Hooper's Creek, North Carolina, on January 10, 1942. He is an accomplished academic who has put more value on moral authenticity than accomplishments in the academy; thus, he has influenced with his life and not just his words.

Larry Shelton has served in Christian higher education for 45 years, beginning as an Assistant Professor of Religion at Azusa Pacific University in California and ending his teaching career as the Richard B. Parker Professor of Wesleyan Theology at George Fox Evangelical Seminary. Throughout his career he had a unique trifecta of callings. He not only excelled as a scholar, but as a teacher and academic administrator, and as a church pastor.

Shelton is an ordained elder in the Free Methodist church, having served in various pastoral roles including ministry with the Foursquare church, while he worked full-time as a theologian and professor. Shelton also served tirelessly in various administrative roles as a Board member for several Christian camps, in various Free Methodist district positions, and in service to various Christian colleges and universities as department chair or dean. He is committed to promoting those whose voices are marginalized, such as women called to ministry and Latino and Native American leaders and scholars. He is also a devoted husband and father.

From the beginning, Shelton showed promise as a scholar. He graduated as the class valedictorian from Pfeiffer College, where he majored in English and minored in psychology. He received a Master of Divinity and a ThM in Biblical Literature from Asbury Theological Seminary, studying under George Turner and Robert A. Traina and graduating number one in his class. He went on to complete a ThD in Historical Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary. Calvin Shoehoven and Geoffrey W. Bromiley were his advisors, with Bromiley serving also as his mentor. Shelton graduated with a doctoral major in the History of Hermeneutics, primarily under the guidance of Bromiley, and he completed a doctoral minor in New Testament Theology under George Eldon Ladd. He also completed a minor in Christian Ethics under Lewis B. Smedes. Shelton finished his doctorate in five years, writing his dissertation on Martin Luther's Concept of Biblical

Interpretation in Historical Perspective. He published three articles out of that material, and it formed the backbone of his academic work.

Shelton's scholarship includes an important book on covenant theology titled *Cross and Covenant: Interpreting the Atonement for 21st Century Mission* (Paternoster, 2006). His scholarship is purposed towards the church. David Wilson wrote in a review of the book, "*Cross and Covenant* is a fresh and thought-provoking contribution to contemporary soteriology and mission. It is not, however, merely the outline of yet another theory of the atonement. Larry Shelton's own exegetical and biblical-theological intent persists in its implications for mission and praxis where the focus of theology remains in the life of the church as God's covenant community."²

Academics lead with their research and teaching; Shelton has led as a theologian, pastor, and administrator. Much of the current leadership literature and research understands the flawed approach of focusing on the "great man or woman," "the Wizard," and his or her accomplishments. This has proven to be an insufficient understanding of leadership illustrated by the many spectacular moral failures of prominent leaders, pastors, and academicians. When the "great-man-or-woman show" collapses, we see that the person behind the curtain is deeply flawed.

Howard Gardner, professor at Harvard Graduate School, wrote in *Five Minds for the Future* about the importance and nature of the ethical mind. His premise is that because we are living in times of tremendous change and global challenges, we need leaders in business and schools who have the capacity to learn and think differently than leaders have in the past. He proposes five particular cognitive abilities, one of them being the ethical mind.³ He and his research team found that leaders with an ethical mind:

- 1) Had parents who raised their children in an environment where morals and open-mindedness were normative;
- 2) Had values that were not undermined during their school and early adult years;
- 3) Believed in the mission of their organizations and were able to overcome odds for the benefit of the organizations;

2. Wilson, "Cross and Covenant," 222–24.

3. The other four minds are the disciplinary mind, the synthesizing mind, the creating mind, and the respectful mind. See Gardner, *Five Minds*.

- 4) Had mentors or were influenced by anti-mentors (persons they didn't want to emulate);
- 5) Were able to speak truth to power, consulting with others and being prepared to resign or be fired in the process; and
- 6) At the end of the day would do the right thing to contribute to improving conditions in the world.⁴

I spent seven hours interviewing Larry Shelton; the interviews were taken verbatim and checked for accuracy with him. He thought the interviews were in preparation for my part in his retirement party.⁵ I began asking him to tell the story of his life and then I concluded with some specific questions about theological education, the church, and his legacy. From these interviews, I will illustrate each of the above six points by using representative stories from Shelton's life to illustrate his ethical mind; he is a covenant theologian who speaks and walks as one.

Has an Ethical and Open-Minded Upbringing

Bernard Bass and Ronald Riggio, in *Transformational Leadership*, reviewed the research literature on the correlation of one's family upbringing to having a transformational leadership style.⁶ They wrote, "Highly transformational executives came from families who stressed high standards of excellence along with strong, supportive homes."⁷ Persons who grew up with moral and spiritual values as a consistent part of their home life are less likely to act unethically as leaders. Shelton was the only child in a family of ministers in the Wesleyan Holiness tradition:

My life story begins before I was born. Dad grew up in the Appalachian Mountains in Eastern Kentucky in a family of 8. His

4. This synopsis is condensed from Fryer, "The Ethical Mind."

5. I do interviews for persons who want to preserve their story and legacy, so this was my gift to him upon his retirement. I asked Dr. Shelton if I could use parts of his story for an article, and I checked to make sure some stories were okay to tell.

6. Transformational Leadership theory is the most researched, standardized, and reviewed leadership theory found in all parts of the globe and in all types of professions. A transformational leader exhibits idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. For further information, see Bass and Stogdill, *Handbook of Leadership*.

7. Bass and Riggio, *Transformational Leadership*, 144.

mother died when his youngest sister was 11 days old. Father was a mountain preacher and circuit rider, a farmer and brick maker. His mother died during the depression and the family was destitute. My dad, Raymond Samuel Shelton, began preaching when he was 16 in the mountains. He went to God's Bible School in Cincinnati. My dad was in the Pilgrim Holiness tradition. My mother was born in Hendersonville, NC. She grew up and went to college at Marion College Wesley Methodist, and became a teacher. She was a devoted Christian and committed to the church her whole life. She was a leader, an ordained deaconess in the Wesleyan Methodist Church.

We lived in Winnsboro, South Carolina. We went to different churches and my dad preached from point to point. My mother sang and played the piano. I grew up in the very inner belly of the church and that's really the core of the life that I knew. And though the church I grew up in was part of a very legalistic holiness movement known for its notion of separateness, I learned how to find ways around the legalism.

I was an only child. It was a lot of pressure, though I didn't perceive it. I was inwardly motivated. I wasn't greatly athletic, but I could hold my own. In wrestling I always won my weight class in Physical Education, but I couldn't go out for a team because competitive sports were worldly. I remember in 9th grade I realized that I couldn't go to football or baseball games because they were worldly amusements. But if there was a practical purpose connected to education that required me to go, then I could go. So I decided to join the band so I could go to the ball games. I decided to play the clarinet and learned to play. For 3 years I played in the HS band and went to most of the games and had a great time.

When I was a senior and was going to order class rings, it was worldly apparel, so it became an issue for those in our church. We had an active youth group and my mother was the force behind it. We couldn't get the rings. I found out that they had class pins. The issue wasn't the gold but wearing something around the finger, so we proposed to church elders that we order class pins and they approved it.

During the summer between high school and college I came to a real faith renewal. I began to realize that I needed to rethink my values. God was working with me in different ways. I made a definite recommitment to the calling God wanted for my life. I needed to go in the direction of becoming a minister. My mom and dad were ecstatic: "Thank you Jesus, the prodigal has come home." I always knew what they preferred and what they sensed

about my direction, but they never did try to interfere or influence my choices even after I entered the ministry.

Larry Shelton was beloved of his parents and they did not try to force him in any one direction professionally, though they had high expectations for his spiritual and moral behavior. They showed a level of openness in allowing him to pursue his calling, even though the environment promoted an overly legalistic and rigid understanding of what was right and wrong. Despite that, his parents loved and encouraged him. In this setting Shelton credits his parents with influencing him to be a man of integrity and to give his life in service to others.

Overcomes Integrity Challenges during School and Early Adult Years

Iain Mangham, the former head of the School of Management at the University of Bath in a chapter on “Leadership, Ethics, and Integrity,” concluded from his experience and research that integrity and selflessness were “crucial qualities of leadership.”⁸ Referring to the work of Joseph L. Badaracco and Richard Ellsworth (1989), Mangham noted that these leadership scholars and practitioners believed that integrity was “at the very heart of understanding what leadership is. For them, integrity suggests wholeness and coherence. It also suggests ‘rightness, a sense of moral soundness.’”⁹

I learned a major life lesson at Pfeiffer College. I became more focused than I might have been on grades. I wanted the highest grades I could get to go onto seminary and maybe on to a doctorate. Part of my value system was to get straight A's. One semester I took a literature class, World Literature, and the second semester I was to take the American Novel. The professor was extremely rigorous. On the first exam I made a B+, and it rocked my world. I had to buckle down. I did make an A, but I made the decision that for the sake of my GPA I didn't think I could make an A the second semester, so I took a different course. It really gave me a sense of shame that I had let my values to get grades supersede my path for a life-changing, phenomenal course. I shouldn't have worried about grades, but instead focused on the quality of the course. It changed a value in me that reshaped my educational

8. Mangham, “Leadership, Ethics, and Integrity,” 44.

9. Ibid.

journey—don't ever avoid anything simply to get a better grade, which is an absolute distortion of educational values. It was a deep life lesson.

After college I applied to seminaries and went to Asbury and thought it most closely supported my theological direction. I was still in the holiness movement, though I had very strongly rethought the legalistic issue through college years, and I came out with moderate views on legalism. I was bothered by the inconsistencies of external issues like women not cutting their hair or wearing makeup and jewelry, yet men could have expensive watches and suits and cars. The issue of consistency was a theme that mattered to me.

Asbury was really transformational for me. There I encountered inductive Bible study for the first time. I took a course from Robert A. Traina on Romans and another course on the Theology of the Reformation by Kenneth Kinghorn, and I had a gestalt. Somehow, working through Romans 7 on justification by faith and faith alone and studying Luther hit me about midnight one night, and I couldn't go to bed. I was still sitting in my chair at daylight and I was almost in shock. I didn't sleep well for two weeks. One thing after another would hit and things connected, and questions answered, like fireworks going off in my brain. It was probably the most transformational experience I've ever had in my life. My faith took new shape understanding relationship issues, how the text works, what faith is all about. It wasn't subject matter but a whole new methodology of looking at truth through God and Christ's interpersonal relationship and not through propositions. That put me on a completely different path that I was able to follow.

In January 1968 I started teaching in the School of Religion at Azusa. I hit it off with students and had a good time. I was also hired as the Youth Pastor at Reese Memorial Pilgrim Holiness church, which was two blocks from Pasadena College. Vangie and I were right in the middle of the Jesus Movement, and the church gave us a two-story building to start a coffee house. We made bean bags to sit on. We had carpet and black lights. We'd bring in music groups and the thing grew to about 100–120 kids on Friday night, many right off the street. The coffee house was a powerful force. Kids were getting saved every week. Eventually it raised the hackles of the traditional church members—one of the guys on the board was not a fan of the youth programs. He challenged me, "Larry, what are you going to do if some Sunday morning, we start getting all these hippies walking down the aisle of our church?" I

said, "Richard, if you're going to sit beside them in heaven, you might as well get used to sitting beside them now."

Larry Shelton throughout his life has been a man of integrity. Though the legalistic environment of the holiness tradition was troubling to him, he did not waver from a deep sense of purpose to be of service of God, not just in his actions but with an internal compass to walk the talk, especially under pressure to succeed and to conform.

Believes in an Organization's Mission and Is Able to Overcome Odds

Gary Yukl, author of *Leadership in Organizations*, reviews the research and concludes that successful leaders "are more interested in building up the organization than in personal aggrandizement or domination over others."¹⁰ Their personal interests are subordinated to helping an organization fulfill its mission and to building effective relationships. Jim Collins, in his widely read book *From Good to Great*, refers to these humble and mission-oriented leaders as exemplary Level Five leaders.¹¹ Bennis and Thomas, well-known leadership experts and coaches, note that the essential skills needed today include integrity with a strong set of values, commitment to an organization's mission, as well as an adaptive capacity, which is "an almost magical ability to transcend adversity, with all its attendant stresses, and to emerge stronger than before."¹² Even as a young man, Shelton showed promise as a leader and was willing and able to help an organization grow, even at personal cost. He believed in their missions, whether camps or colleges.

During my sophomore year at Pilgrim Bible College, I was the district youth president. One thing we accomplished was to purchase a youth camp. It was just a piece of land that had a lake and seven acres. I gave leadership to the Board that developed it, and then I left and went to seminary before it was totally developed. We contacted a professor at North Carolina State in public recreation, and he designed the youth camp for us, and we began to implement the plan. It's still being developed. It's a major conference center in the south, and now it has 100 acres in prime area in NC, very

10. Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations*, 202.

11. Collins, *Good to Great*.

12. Bennis and Thomas, *Geeks and Geezers*, 121.

rural (though accessible at the time) known as the NC Wesleyan Youth camp.

My first year teaching at Azusa was hard because I was trying to dig out as I went. I had large classes, 30–50 college students, and I clicked with the students. I spent a lot of time with them interacting with them. We developed some close relationships. After the second year, the graduation guest was Dale Evans Rogers. When the awards came, I'd been selected by students as Teacher of the Year and Dale Evans came up and gave me a hug. I was blown away. I had seven years there with a very productive and effective ministry to students. I taught inductive Bible studies, church history, and biblical theology—general education Intro to Religion. I'd have 100 students in general-education courses; it was a stimulating time.

By about September 1970 I was approached by administration to become the Director of Spiritual Life for the University. I accepted and did it for three years; it was a chaplain-type role. It was during the Jesus Movement and in '72 the college revivals broke out across the country. They started at Asbury in the college chapel. Students came forward and confessed and there was a full-blown student revival. Asbury Chapel went on for 2–3 nights and days.

I got in touch with the Asbury chaplain, and I invited someone to come out to share at Azusa. We had chapel Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. I introduced the student body president from Asbury; he began to tell us about the blessings, the work of the Holy Spirit, lives transformed. We had a simple invitation and students lined up. Chapel continued on and we shut down classes for the day. Students were confessing and praying. It went on into the dorms and for the rest of the week and across campus. Many went back to home churches and shared and revivals happened in churches. It spread through 150 colleges in the US.

Shelton finished his doctorate, and he and Vangie adopted their daughter, Anna, all the while teaching and serving in a church.

Emotionally exhausted, I was ready for a change. We received an invitation from a Wesleyan church in High Point, North Carolina. The Senior Pastor, Dr. Adrian Grout, a person of dignity and an outstanding preacher, had been the pastor for 36 years. In the early '70s, they needed someone to build staff. I was invited to develop the staff there at High Point Wesleyan. It was one of the largest Wesleyan churches at the time, with 600–700 attendees (which is

large for holiness standards), and *Christian Life* named it one of the ten fastest-growing churches in America.

I went. I felt it was the right thing to do, and Allison was born at High Point. For three years we had a profound, far-reaching ministry. Vangie got her baptism as a ministry leader. I hired seven people and built the music, educational, and youth ministry until it became the second-largest church in the denomination.

At the same time John Wesley College in Greensboro, a Bible college, hired me as a half-time religion professor. After two or three years, they asked me to be the dean. So I worked at church and I taught. I got the college stabilized. It was located on a very valuable piece of property; I found new campus property at High Point, and I sold their current property and bought the new one and it canceled all their debts. I helped John Wesley Bible College get its accreditation and I got the campus moved to its High Point location, which saved their lives. They are still going strong and they're keeping current. The whole ministry at High Point was many-faceted, but it did wear us out.

Larry Shelton is very visionary, and when he believes in something, he puts time, energy, and talents into taking an organization to the next level. Even as a young college student, he was involved in camping ministries, churches, or Christian schools. At each place, he helped the organization flourish, often with little fanfare for his accomplishments.

Is Influenced by Mentors

Mentors have become a recognized component in the development of successful leaders. Jennifer Dziczkowski reviewed the literature on mentoring and leadership development and noted that "Many of the world's finest and most successful leaders have trusted mentors. Mentoring has emerged as a means to cultivate the leadership skills of current and future leaders."¹³ Mentoring increases self-esteem, self-awareness and insight, improves professional skills, and reduces stress. The most effective leaders have mentors and are mentors. Larry Shelton had several mentors throughout his life who influenced him and whom he trusted and admired. He also became a mentor to others.

At Pfeiffer College, I took speech classes and oral interpretation—Bob Grubbs was the professor in that area. I was going to go into

13. Dziczkowski, "Mentoring and Leadership Development," 351.

ministry so they were good classes. Bob Grubbs had a very strong influence on me. He was a great guy. He tapped into the intellectual side of my faith issues and challenged me to think along the lines of my own self-identity. What is truth? What is reality? How do you evaluate the world around you? He stimulated a dialogue about the meaning of life.

My English professors were also excellent models for me. For the first time, in my literature classes I really faced a truly superior level of intellectual activity. They were superb intellectuals. Though not necessarily faith-oriented, they offered a real challenge to me to understand the level of discourse, the meanings and concepts being discussed and analyzed in lit classes. They gave me a very strong interest in liberal arts and intellectual issues—concerns about the meaning of life and philosophical issues.

It put an exclamation point at the end of my legalistic tendencies when I got to Asbury. There you had people who reflected a depth of spirituality and character that was way more sophisticated than I was accustomed to. A number of world-class leaders in spiritual development came to visit and we were exposed to them. One of those was E. Stanley Jones, a great missionary to India. He had a three-day retreat he called a Christian Ashram, and I had the opportunity to go through the Ashram under his guidance. There was a specific structure; during the open-heart period we would tell our stories and at the end was the period of the overflowing heart. It was my first experience with everyone going around and being brutally honest with unloading their heart. He was tremendously redemptive in how he led it.

I was also exposed to women in Pilgrim Holiness and Wesleyan women in ministry, but at Asbury I was exposed to a whole new level of world-class women in theology and teaching who came through Methodism. I was thoroughly impressed with these women and others. The professors I had were phenomenally mature and it challenged me at a whole deeper level of intellectual curiosity and compassionate ministries all integrated together.

Teaching at Azusa, I was John Wimber's first theology professor after he converted. We formed a bond through his college years. He took several courses from me and the mentoring was both ways. I came out of such an innocent background. He was at Yorba Linda Friends for several years. He had me down to do teaching at his church. Every Sunday he did an introduction of new believers, and he had 10–15 every Sunday brought before congregation. He began a network of small groups that was estimated at 2000 people. We stayed in touch for a long time.

Shelton commented that what kept him going through various hardships over the years were his faith and his friends. He has deep and loyal friends that he has kept throughout his life, and he is a mentor and friend to many both colleagues and students. He believed in the bonds forged in community with mentors and friends.

Is Able to Speak Truth to Power Despite the Risk

Edwin Friedman, in his ground-breaking book *A Failure of Nerve*, wrote about the well-differentiated leader who was able to stay non-reactive in the face of adversity and still do the right thing for the sake of the organization. He writes, "I mean someone who can manage his or her own reactivity to the automatic reactivity of others, and therefore be able to take stands at the risk of displeasing."¹⁴ Very little is as hard in leadership as speaking truth to power when job security, status, or future possibilities are at stake. Shelton's moral courage was life-long.

David McKenna from Seattle Pacific wanted me to be the dean of the School of Religion at Seattle Pacific University in Washington. I had a very good interview and was hired. The challenge and the opportunity were overwhelming. The religion department was getting at cross purposes with the university's goals and objectives. He wanted me to straighten out the situation. If I knew what I know now, I'm not sure I would have jumped at the situation. Biblical scholars and theologians don't like to be straightened out. I started in September of 1978. I was to reorganize the School of Religion.

The Seattle Pacific School of Religion had very great potential to develop as a real player in theological education and scholarship. It was also a real professional opportunity for me. Despite philosophical and personality conflicts, we were able to function together fairly well. We hired four to five new faculty. Ultimately with maturity I was learning how to get along with the diverse faculty and how to deal with the whole issue of turning a traditional theological view into more contextualized theological thinking. It was a real challenge. Some of the things threatening to happen were a significant threat to the school. I was also teaching probably a 60% load. All that stress went a long way towards making my heart transplant necessary. It was so stressful.

14. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve*, 14.

Later Dr. David LeShana asked me to consider coming down as academic dean to Western Evangelical Seminary in Oregon. I served under him at Seattle Pacific, so we knew each other. He also wanted me to teach theology. I came to WES in 1994 and there was way more water under the bridge than was divulged to me. I knew the seminary had to be on firm ground. It was on probation with the Association of Theological Schools, and there were firings and economic instability. My job was to get it off probation. We developed and submitted 3 new degree programs—Certificate in Spiritual Formation, Masters of Arts in Christian Ministries, and a cohort Master of Ministry Leadership. We got a couple of notations off the record. Then LeShana told me that in order to get financially solvent, we would have to merge with George Fox University.

A small committee was put together with a couple of board members and the two presidents of George Fox and the seminary. The meetings went on for a year. Very few people knew what was going on. I fortunately found out that they were not going to issue contracts for the current faculty. The Counseling program was going to have another life, but in the merger they were going to revamp the seminary. The committee decided that they were going to open up the seminary positions and offer first dibs to George Fox religion faculty, and then have a search for what was left. That crossed a line for me. The identity, mission, and faculty of the seminary were going to be dismantled for parts.

In the next larger meeting of the Oversight Committee, I brought it up. When it became known to a wider group, people protested and said this was wrong. So the seminary got a second life, but that was it for me; I crossed the line. During this same time period, I was having heart transplant surgery in Seattle. I was in the hospital room and I got out of the hospital and dressed and went across town to make a video on observations and recommendations on the merger issues to be delivered in time for a George Fox board meeting coming up. I paid out all my chips trying to save the seminary in February 1996.

When I was back at the seminary after my transplant, the president and the academic dean came over to the Portland Center (which housed the seminary), and they were walking around. I ran into them in the lobby downstairs, and they confronted me. They said, "We don't feel you can continue as dean of the seminary after your contract expires this summer." They said I was against the merger. I wasn't against it, but I was against collapsing the seminary into GFU without any identity and dismissing the

faculty. They said in the end, "You can't function effectively and relate to GFU, so we'll end your contract as dean"; they fired me on the spot. It took a while to chew through that one. Eventually you just realize that it's counter-productive. "What's past is past. You need to move on." I cared about the mission of the seminary; it was worth the cost.

Larry Shelton has been willing to speak truth to power, even if it meant losing his job or his status. Both at Seattle Pacific and George Fox University, he tackled some daunting challenges, which threatened his job and his health. His persistence in speaking truth to those in power is illustrated in his life.

At the End of the Day Does the Right Thing to Improve the Lives of Others

Those leaders who live selflessly and who notice and empower others to improve their lives and their condition in the world are ethical leaders. Michael Fullen, a professor and management expert, in his *Leading in a Culture of Change*, calls it moral purpose. When a leader has moral purpose, he or she attends both to making a difference in lives and organizations and also to doing so with kindness and integrity. Effective leaders don't just talk about necessary change; they are able to orchestrate the steps to get there. Fullen writes, "Commitment to the environment and to the broader global community as part and parcel of the long-term success of the organization is moral purpose writ large."¹⁵ James MacGregor Burns noted that, "At the highest stage of moral development persons are guided by near-universal ethical principles of justice such as equality of human rights and respect for individual dignity."¹⁶ Larry has made unique contributions to others because of his ability to hear and understand the voices of those sometimes marginalized.

One of the young women who was a student at Azusa and who was mentored by Vangie was Leslie Brown.¹⁷ She was finishing college and she was pretty mixed up. She had a hard life, came to the Lord and was transformed, and Vangie did a lot of work with her. She graduated and moved back to Utah and got involved in

15. Fullen, *Leading in a Culture of Change*, 25.

16. Burns, *Leadership*, 42.

17. Not her real name.

prostitution and drugs in Salt Lake for several years. We lost touch. One Sunday while we were still in Glendora seven to eight years later, on Easter Sunday morning probably about 1976, we got a call at six am. I answered the phone, "Larry?" "She was so stoned, it took me awhile to figure out who she was. She wanted to meet us. We arranged a place in Pasadena. We met her before service at ten am at a park. She showed up and she was unrecognizable. She was stoned and a hooker. She came over talked and cried. We established a connection with her for later in the afternoon. I made an appointment to pick her up down in a seedy part of Pasadena. I showed up at the address and a big guy answers the door. I rescued her from the place. They thought I was a client. She stayed with us to sober up, and we were able to get her connected with a street ministry in Honolulu. It took six months to get her healthy. She went over and stayed for three years and became a wonderful Christian. She met a guy in Northern California and got married. She's happy with two kids.

When I was waiting for a heart, Leslie sent me a letter. It was a love letter. She wrote, "I told God if you need a heart, if there is any way God could use mine I would gladly give it to you." She meant it. Several years ago in Portland at a convention she called me and we caught up and she's a healthy vibrant Christian. You never know what kind of influence we have on people.

I was on the faculty at WES/GFES from 1994 to today, a total of 19 years. I made peace with not being a primary influencer after I was fired from the Dean position, and I sensed I should become more of a mentor and it worked out that way. I especially wanted to serve those who might be overlooked among evangelicals. I mentored Felix Rosales. He was working at the seminary and we put together a conference at Tilikum (a local camp) in 1998, a three-day Hispanic theological conference, and 65 showed up. He developed all kinds of things out of that and the next year he had 120, and it began a movement for him. He's still working to educate Hispanic leaders.

I've supported and stood with the Native American peoples. I got acquainted with Richard Twiss in the late 90s and we developed a model similar to the one I did with Felix. Richard and I put a conference together in early 2000. We called a meeting on Native American studies at Tilikum and we put it together with Ray Levesque. We had 65-70 people for a three-day conference on Native-studies issues. Richard and I did a paper. We made connections and we kept up over the years.

During the Earth and Native American conference here in 2008–9, I really became closely connected to Randy Woodley and he started planning to come back here. At that conference I worked with Richard (Twiss) and Randy and Terry LeBlanc and Robert Francis. We had about 120 persons. That really formed a significant part of the foundation for Randy's contribution here in the Northwest after coming from Kentucky. He had a property called Eloheh (Harmony Way), which he developed as a Native American L'Abri type school and community. It was near Lexington and Wilmore, Kentucky. He was terrorized off the land—red-necks didn't want Indians setting up camp. Randy had called me and wanted to know if he came out here could he find a place and do some adjunct teaching. He moved out and found a place to rent in Newberg. His whole ministry that supported him fell apart when he left Kentucky. I helped get him started as an adjunct, and then he was hired on at the seminary.

Larry is a scholar who committed himself not only to academic excellence, but to compassionate engagement with the injustices of this world. He did not just write about a relational theology of love; he lived it.

Conclusion

In our postmodern environment extraordinary wizards are not nearly as impressive as ordinary men and women who are ethical and get the job done on behalf of others. People are not looking for a charismatic wonder but for an authentic human being whose walk and talk are one and the same thing. They are searching for persons whose life story communicates truth. Larry Shelton himself wrote, "What is effective is the interpersonal sharing of the transformational experience of our own faith."¹⁸ Today words are not as powerful as lives.

Shelton says about effective leaders,

I think in looking at the people that have been most effective and influential down through the centuries, they are those people who were not seeking to build kingdoms, but who sought to enrich Christ's love in people. The great leaders are not necessarily those leaders who have formed systems and cathedrals, but people who have sought to increase the sum of love in the world. I think it has to do with learning to incarnate in any structures that we have the

18. Shelton, *Cross and Covenant*, 2.

character of Christ—teaching, leading Bible studies, exemplifying in our own behavior a model of Jesus Christ.

Today's successful academic leaders are those who teach and study, lead with integrity, are dedicated to the mission they serve, and have an uncanny ability to transcend adversity. I believe Larry Shelton, the man behind the curtain of his successes, has these qualities and abilities and is an inspiration to scholars, pastors, and Christian leaders.