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Down to Earth Leadership: Influencing Communities Through the Virtues of Jesus Christ

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GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY

DOWN TO EARTH LEADERSHIP: INFLUENCING COMMUNITIES THROUGH
THE VIRTUES OF JESUS CHRIST

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF GEORGE FOX EVANGELICAL SEMINARY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY IN
LEADERSHIP AND GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

BY

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PORTLAND, OREGON

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George Fox Evangelical Seminary
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CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

DMin Dissertation

This is to certify that the DMin Dissertation of

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has been approved by
the Dissertation Committee on February 16, 2016
for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in Leadership and Global Perspectives.

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All Scripture references are taken from The New International Version of the Bible
unless otherwise noted.

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PREFACE

In 2013 my family and I had the privilege of vacationing on the Western most part of our fabulous country. While there we walked among the forests of Sequoia and Redwood trees. It was awe-inspiring to be humbled by their incredible size. My mind began to wander: “What if leadership could be like that? Prominent and stately, captivating.”

About a year later, I returned to Trinidad, the country of my birth. While there I came upon an abandoned church building, nicknamed the Bamboo Cathedral, because it was set back from the road, surrounded by stalks of bamboo arching high over top and enveloping its faded white walls in a sea of deep green. Again my mind began to turn: “Bamboo. What if leadership was like this bamboo forest, where pods of bamboo are planted, and then grow to beautiful heights, creating welcoming oases for colourful wildlife and people alike?”

In the process of this Doctor of Ministry degree those two experiences have continued to challenge me. Though very different, both the Redwood and Bamboo have something to teach us, not so much by what lies above the surface, but by what happens beneath it. It is the unseen transformation that is always active through which we come to marvel at that which is seen and enjoyed by so many.

That is when I remembered another tree, the one upon which Jesus died. Jesus: Saviour, Redeemer, Lord-Leader. There is so much about His earthly life that those in Christian leadership strive to exemplify, and deservedly so. However, just as I paused to give consideration to the beneath-the-surface activity of the Redwood and bamboo, I also

have been challenged to consider the unseen aspects of Jesus' life, which has compelled so many to follow after him.

Down to Earth Leadership: Influencing communities through the virtues of Jesus Christ is a leadership journey that takes us beneath the surface of our own lives to discover what might yet be possible in a world of change.

ABSTRACT

While Canadian culture has changed significantly over the last 40 years, Christian leadership development has failed to keep pace. Today's leaders must learn to apply the Gospel through their lives and ministries into communities that are undergoing constant change as a result of increasing multiculturalism, religious pluralism, and mounting pressures of social diversity. There is a long line of short-tenured Christian leaders that have previously made attempts at leadership without taking time to understand the benefits of focusing on the key virtues from the life of Christ in order to navigate the complexity of the various systems, structures, and competing values through which they are continually measured. Leadership that continually focuses on the life of Jesus Christ will sustain and enable those who serve to apply the Gospel through their lives and ministries in the growing complexities of Canadian communities.

Section 1 provides an overview of the most recent history of the Canadian Church and Christian leadership development. Section 2 examines the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, through two key biblical passages. These will provide a basis for understanding the implications of the Incarnation for those who serve in Christian leadership. In Section 3, the writings and discoveries of St. Bonaventure are examined as a means to identify and developing a clearer understanding of the role of virtue in the life of a person. The importance of Complex Adaptive Systems in connecting virtue to leadership function is the subject of Section 4. The identification of key transitions from existing leadership practices, reflecting the virtues in the life of Jesus Christ, as identified by Bonaventure, is presented in Section 5.

INTRODUCTION

Canada is an incredibly large country. Its land mass makes it the second largest nation in the world. It also has a rich heritage that has integrated many peoples of many cultures over the course of centuries. My parents came to this country from the small Caribbean island of Trinidad in the late 1960s, shortly after my birth. They both shared an East Indian Hindu heritage and a nominal religious practice. They divorced by the time I was eleven years old. In the seventies, to be non-white from a broken family was not considered normal. I remember teachers speaking to the class about the changes my family were going through. I remember years of name-calling and poor treatment, from peers and adults alike, for many years because of the colour of my skin. I remember a sense of being lost in my identity because of the confusing messages the world, as I knew it, was sending me, until coming to the recognition of the grace and truth of Jesus Christ. I am part of the Canadian cultural story because I have lived the reality of its hardships and blessings.

The rate of change in Canadian communities has accelerated over the last few decades. Those who serve in Christian leadership will benefit from re-learning how the Gospel is applied through their lives and ministries, allowing people in their communities to respond to the grace and truth of Jesus Christ. The task may seem daunting as the culture undergoes constant fluctuation as a result of increasing multiculturalism, religious pluralism, and increased pressures of social diversity.

Those who lack this kind of leadership development can feel ill-equipped, overwhelmed, or both. Though they perhaps possess an awareness of cultural change, their capacity to engage may be tethered to the traditional beliefs of congregations and

denominations (who ultimately influence their position and salary). They can feel pulled in many directions (e.g. scheduled meetings and projects that require attention, community collaborations to address the needs of underserved people groups; and meetings with long-term members looking to maintain existing ministry). Then there are presentations about working with other religious groups, decisions on global mission involvement while deciding how much to spend on facility renovations, and there are always the relentless comparisons to that bigger better church. Message preparation is always supposed to be a high priority, and yet somehow the needs of family must never be neglected. Long is the line of short-tenured pastors that have previously made attempts at leadership without taking time to understand the complexity of the various systems, structures and competing values through which they must navigate and by which they are continually measured.

As communities continue to change, the church often struggles to respond. Sometimes the response is motivated by grace; at other times it is motivated by truth. To recapture the essence of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, His grace and His truth, fully applied is always a challenge. For those in Christian leadership who are able to make such an application on an on-going basis, the difference can be positively transformational in developing and sustaining leadership within churches as the Gospel is extended through their lives and ministries into their communities. This paper is intended to identify key transitions from existing Christian leadership practices to those flowing from the virtues in the life of Jesus Christ, as identified by Bonaventure. Christian Leadership that continually focuses on the life of Jesus Christ will sustain and enable

those who serve to apply the Gospel through their lives and ministries toward the growing complexities of Canadian communities.

The first chapter will examine research regarding the changes in Canadian culture as they relate to Christianity and congregational life. While many of the factors discussed in this section relate to congregational life in other parts of the Western world, Canada has its own uniqueness, as a country and within the country. As such, it provides the immediate context through which these observations have been made.

Chapter 2 will provide an overview of key biblical passages (Philippians 2:5–11 and John 1:14) that focus on the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Theological reflection on *kenosis* (self-emptying) and *sarx* (flesh) is key to developing this understanding.

The fulfillment of his leadership was characterized by disciplined commitment to God, Our Father. He came to earth and took on flesh and moved into the neighbourhood of the people of his time. No beauty, no majesty. He prioritized people without concern for self-promotion and chose not to leverage his position for gain. Jesus' appearance was ordinary; his company often less so. Yet, he handled himself in a manner that was both respected by religious leaders and welcoming to the suffering and oppressed. Which are the most compelling of his leadership virtues, as a stranger in a strange land?

St. Bonaventure was a 13th century contemporary of Francis of Assisi (Chapter 3), whose most prolific writings focused on the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and its implications for how those who serve in Christian leadership ought to conduct themselves. His writings draw upon the virtues discovered through the life, suffering, and death of Christ, and are particularly beneficial for those who serve in Christian leadership. The six core virtues are: justice, compassion, forbearance, integrity,

discernment, and devotion. Gleaning from the writings of Francis of Assisi and Thomas Aquinas will bring additional perspectives to the impact of Christ's virtues on the lives of those who influence the lives of others. Bonaventure identified something that is often easily lost in this fast-paced society: through the death of Christ, we are availed of the power of God—death then life. Often we focus on life, abundant life, outcomes, beauty, majesty, and production. However, what if we also took time to remember that real life, resurrection life, comes from a willingness to sacrifice and suffer.

Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS) theory (Chapter 4) is used in many fields, including medicine and forestry. CAS provides a framework through which we can embrace the interaction of individual elements in relationship to the whole. It may be time for Christian leadership to recognize the benefits of understanding CAS in order to better engage the growing complexity of culture. The capacity to provide leadership within a CAS will require particular attention to the unseen spaces where virtue becomes essential and can be applicable in any and every geographical or demographical context.

The final Chapter will recommend key transitions to be made, based on the research of the first four chapters, from existing Christian leadership practice to those influenced by the virtues of Jesus Christ. In identifying these key transitions, it is hoped that their on-going implementation and refinement will be instrumental in sustaining healthy, long-tenures for leaders as they apply the Gospel through their lives and ministries in the communities in which they serve.

CHAPTER ONE

THE CANADIAN STORY

The State of Current Leadership Development

The Western Church, particularly in Canada, has lost its place as a significant influence in the lives of communities.¹ The way in which leadership is groomed for congregations and ministries needs to change in order to effectively engage the people around us. Ministry and/or leadership preparation is important; however, one of the indirect messages that this method conveys is that those with enough money to finance such a preparation, and those who can successfully complete this preparation, are those suited for Christian leadership. The participants come to believe this as well as the organizations (churches, ministries, etc.). Only in recent years do we begin to see the evidence of change in the schools and seminaries from which many leaders emerge.

The Association of Theological Schools (ATS) is the accrediting body for the majority of advanced Christian education, including many schools in Canada. Each year they ask graduating students to complete a questionnaire (GSQ) to help assess the effectiveness of theological training. The scope of this paper does not allow space to delve deeply into the analysis of these results; however, even a small sample contains significant implications as it relates to Christian leadership development.

¹ Michael Adams, *Fire and Ice: United States, Canada and the Myth of Converging Values*. (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2003), 50. “In the mid-1950’s, 60 percent of Canadians told pollsters they went to church each Sunday; the proportion in the U.S. at that time was only 50 per cent. Today, only a fifth of Canadians claim weekly church attendance (22 per cent, according to Ekos), whereas the proportion in the U.S. is 42 per cent. A 2002 Pew Research Center poll found religion to be important to 59 percent of Americans—the highest proportion in all the developed nations surveyed—and to only 30 per cent of Canadians, a rate similar to that found in Great Britain and Italy. Nearly four in ten Canadians do not consider themselves to be members of a religious faith... In less than a generation, Canadians have evolved from being much more religious than Americans to being considerably less so.”

From the records available on their website,² from 1996 until 2013, one table of compiled data is contained under the heading “Level of Satisfaction with Progress in Skills Related to Future Work.” In the excerpts below, the categories used to assess preparedness for Christian leadership remained unchanged. The data from the 1996 GSQ is provided:

	MDiv		Prof MA		All Others	
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.
Ability to preach well	4.0	0.8	3.7	0.8	3.8	0.8
Ability to use and interpret Scripture	4.2	0.7	4.0	0.8	4.1	0.7
Knowledge of church policy/canon law	3.8	0.8	3.6	0.8	3.6	0.8
Ability to give spiritual direction	3.8	0.8	4.1	0.7	3.9	0.8
Ability to teach well	4.0	0.8	4.3	0.6	4.1	0.8
Knowledge of church doctrine and history	4.0	0.7	3.9	0.8	3.9	0.8
Ability to lead others	4.0	0.7	4.3	0.5	4.0	0.7
Ability to conduct worship/liturgy	4.2	0.8	4.0	0.8	3.9	0.8
Knowledge of other religious traditions	3.6	0.9	3.5	1.0	3.7	0.8
Ability to relate social issues to faith	4.1	0.7	4.0	0.7	4.0	0.7
Ability in pastoral counseling	3.8	0.9	3.7	0.8	3.8	0.9
Ability to administer a parish	3.6	0.9	3.7	0.8	3.6	0.8
Knowledge of Christian philosophy and ethics	3.9	0.8	3.9	0.7	3.9	0.7
Ability to think theologically	4.3	0.7	4.0	0.7	4.2	0.7

1 - Very dissatisfied	2 - Somewhat dissatisfied	3 - Neutral	4 - Satisfied	5 - Very Satisfied
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Figure 1.1 Level of Satisfaction with Progress Related to Future Work (1996–1997)

A comparison to the data compiled in 2011 reveals that the categories remained unchanged (Figure 1.2). The results also show little change during the fifteen years, with “ability to administer a parish” and “knowledge of other religious traditions” having the lowest scores beneath the satisfactory level. On the opposite end of the spectrum, there is

² “Total School Profile Reports: GSQ Total School Profiles,” The Association of Theological Schools, accessed November 3, 2015, <http://www.ats.edu/resources/student-data/total-school-profile-reports>.

a high rating for knowledge-based and theologically-based categories. While the scoring differences might seem insignificant to some, it may be a contributing factor to the high turnover rate that many churches and ministries experience.

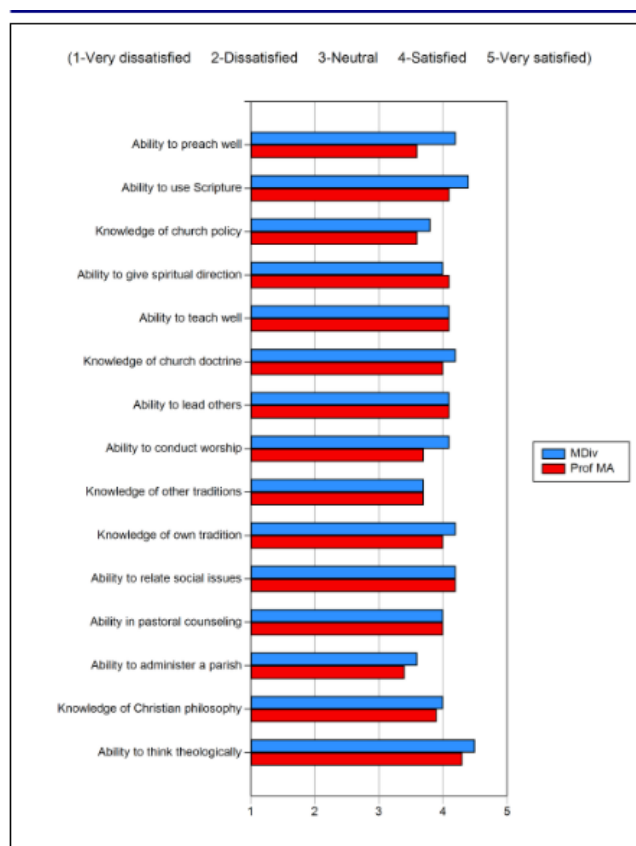


Figure 1.2 Level of Satisfaction with Progress Related to Future Work (2011–2012)

It was not until 2014 (Figure 1.3) that graduating students, preparing to enter into leadership roles in churches and ministries, were presented with a different set of criteria that do cause them to consider more than life from within a Christian context. These criteria also consider the diversity of the world that surrounds ministry contexts. In 2014, the title of the table was changed to “Educational Effectiveness in Facilitating Skill

Areas.” It includes the criteria from previous years, in addition to some new categories for graduates to consider: ability to integrate ecological concerns into theology and ministry; ability to integrate science into theology and ministry; awareness and appreciation of the globalized context in which ministry is practiced; and ability to interact effectively with those of different cultures or racial/ethnic contexts other than my own.

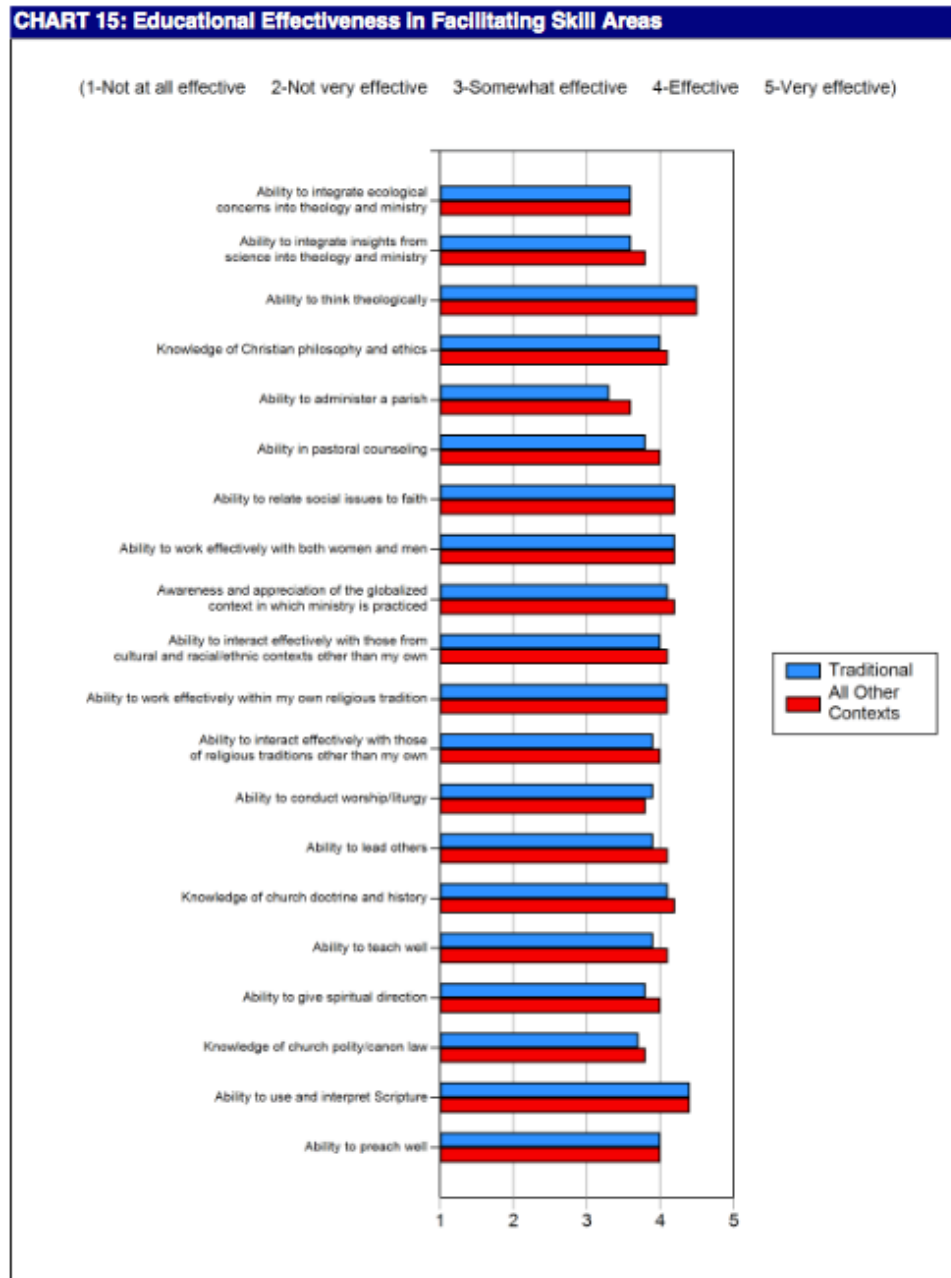


Figure 1.3 Educational Effectiveness in Facilitating Skill Areas (2013–2014)

These new categories demonstrate that training institutions have only recently begun to understand the growing complexity of the world in which we live. To their credit they have taken steps to challenge students to consider these factors prior to

entering their leadership positions. However, this could also mean that there may be a large number of churches and ministries led by people who have not been equipped to undertake the many challenges that exist in a globally informed culture.

Although the data sample is small and subject to interpretation, the conclusions drawn from them are supported by the early findings of an upcoming project by the Barna Group. David Kinnaman wrote an article, published in *Leadership Journal*, which summarizes some key points from this project, including two areas that relate to this study. First, Kinnaman, noting the mental, spiritual, and emotional wellbeing of pastors, reports, “Just two out of five pastors say they are very satisfied with their overall quality of life, their spiritual wellbeing, with their mental and emotional health, and with their friendships. More than two out of five say they are struggling (or have struggled in the past) with depression.”³ Secondly, Kinnaman notes:

Preaching is also a ministry activity for which another person would rate them highest, followed by knowledge of Scripture and their grasp for practical or applied theology. Fewer pastors—only two out of 10—say another person would rate the high on connecting with the community surrounding their church or managing the church’s finances, or leading the organization or on counseling or pastoral care.⁴

These findings from the Barna Group seem to directly reflect the way in which institutions have trained leaders for the last two decades, according to the statistical information available. The training received has understandably impacted their personal ministry experiences. Additionally, it can be reasonably assumed that the dissatisfaction felt by these leaders is likely influencing the congregations and ministries in which they serve.

³ David Kinnaman, “How Are You, Pastor, Really?,” *Leadership Journal* (Fall 2015): 20.

⁴ Ibid.

Enter most church buildings and you will likely find printed material or even a display board for missions. The purpose of that information is to provide a reminder that this church is aware of needs in other places and is supporting the work and individuals in those places. Those are noble intentions; however, it is also possible that the result includes a message that “missions” is someone else’s responsibility and that “missions” only happens in locations that are distant from the home church.

My immediate context provides an excellent place from which to learn. The church I currently serve in is over sixty years old. It was established, as a partnership between two churches, to address the worship needs of a growing community. In the 1950s, most of the families who attended the church lived nearby, and many could walk to the building. Most of the families came from two-parent homes in which the father was employed and the mother stayed home to look after the children. In those days, the city shut down on Sundays: there were no stores to go to, no sports to participate in. If a church service was held, the expectation was that people would come through the doors. This is no longer the case.

Times have changed. The demands on time have changed. The value placed on the use of time has changed. The options available to families have changed. Families have changed. The church in which I serve is still located within a few blocks of its original site, but no longer is there the expectation that holding a church service means that people will attend. As the society changed so too did the perspectives of people in regard to the church. Rick Rusaw’s comments in his book, *The Externally Focused Church*, are a plea to church leaders to rethink the manner in which they view their communities: “In most places the church has lost any voice on the issues and needs

facing the community.”⁵ In current times, it is important to consider that the mission field is first at the doorstep of everyday life and then it extends into the far off places of the earth. The dissatisfaction noted in the aforementioned surveys are good news, insofar as there is recognition on the part of those in Christian leadership that their contextual needs are changing. There appears then to be an internal readiness for a different approach to Christian leadership that will allow for a higher level of satisfaction and a greater sense of readiness to engage the cultural changes. Leadership that is not only willing to recognize the changes taking place around us, but also willing to shape ministry according to those changes will be beneficial to furthering God’s commission for the church.

The Impact of Diversity and Pluralism

From a Canadian perspective, the obstacles currently facing the church that seeks to engage its community can be summed up in two broad categories: diversity and pluralism. Diversity speaks to those changes that can be perceived with the eye. They are sociological and economic, and they present real time issues that the church can no longer ignore. Frances Haesslebein’s diverse leadership experience and perspective provides an important voice. Her past role as the president and CEO of the Drucker Leadership Foundation is just one of the strengths she brings from the social sector to the leadership conversation. She says: “Every leader must anticipate the impact of an aging, richly diverse population on the families, work organizations, services and resources of

⁵ Rick Rusaw and Eric Swanson, *The Externally Focused Church* (Loveland, CO: Group Pub., 2004), 104.

every community. Headlines and television tell us that governance amid diversity is the world's greatest challenge."⁶

The historical foundations of Canada were formed with a coming together of two distinct European cultures, the French and English. Both those cultures tried to establish themselves while also contending with the resident indigenous peoples. The result, from a Canadian perspective, is the development of a culture of tolerance and compromise derived from the multicultural profile with roots that extend deeper than just a few decades.⁷

The church, until recent years, has been relatively effective throughout the history of the nation. Now and for the foreseeable future, the Canadian church should try to come to terms with its displacement in the everyday lives of its people. The societal changes magnified by the research of Michael Adams in *Fire and Ice* should serve as a wake-up call to Christian churches; the findings in the book are being lived out in our neighbourhoods. Therefore, as God's chosen instrument, the church, and those called into Christian leadership are faced with consistently making a positive long-term difference despite the challenging trends. From an evangelical perspective, one of the most glaring revelations of this study is the significant drop in weekly church attendance compared to the rise in spiritual interest.⁸ This rise in spirituality comes in a personal form rather than

⁶ Frances Hesselbein, "Managing in a World That is Round," in *Leader to Leader*, eds. Frances Hesselbein and Paul M. Cohen (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1999), 8.

⁷ Adams, *Fire and Ice*, 5.

⁸ Project Canada Press Release, "Religion and Spirituality in Canada," April 8, 2012, accessed November 12, 2015, http://www.reginaldbibby.com/images/PCS_Release_Religion_Spirituality_Remain_Pervasive_in_Canada_Easter_2012.pdf. Canadian Sociologist Reginald Bibby provides the following statistical look at the drop in attendance at religious services compared to the rise in spiritual interest: "National research findings through 2010 analyzed by prominent sociologist and religious trends analyst Reginald Bibby of the

a corporate form (i.e. the traditional church culture). According to Canadian theologian and author Robert Webber, “The church must come to grips with this reality and find ways to evangelize the secular but spiritually inquisitive seeker in our post-Christian world.”⁹ For Webber the good news lies in the fact that this change in the culture is not completely unknown, but finds some significant parallels to the first centuries of the Christian church. Webber calls for a fresh look at the church as a community of people on their spiritual journey embodying the presence of God. Reginald Bibby, Canada’s foremost researcher on the religious landscape, substantiates Webber’s findings. Based on Bibby’s statistical analysis in 2011, he gave the following three implications:

Bibby says that the situation has at least three major implications for religious groups: (1) there is a need for a mindset change: things are anything but over; (2) the presence of significant numbers of people who are ambivalent but receptive to faith calls for far better ministry; and (3) the time has come for like-minded groups, led by evangelicals and Catholics, to explore ways of working more closely with each other.¹⁰

University of Lethbridge show that, since the 1970s, the proportion of Canadians who never attend services has doubled from about 20% to 40%. However, in the last decade, the proportion of people who worship at least once a month has remained steady at around 30%. The remaining 30% of Canadians are sort of like ‘the politically undecided’: they haven’t dropped out and occasionally drop in. But what is particularly striking about a new snapshot provided by Statistics Canada’s most recent, 2010 General Social Survey of more than 15,000 people is the actual importance that Canadians place on religion and spirituality.

- ☐ ☐ No less than 2 in 3 people across the country say that their religious or spiritual beliefs are important to the way they live their lives.
- ☐ ☐ What’s more, 1 in 2 report that that they engage in personal religious or spiritual practices at least once a month.
- ☐ ☐ The fact that many Canadians do not give up on spirituality even when they do not embrace organized religion is suggested by some stark findings: almost one-half (42%) of those who never attend services say their religious or spiritual beliefs are important to how they live life, and about one-quarter (27%) report that they engage in related practices every month or more.
- ☐ ☐ The importance of religion and spirituality is somewhat higher in the Atlantic and Prairie regions, along with Ontario; it also tends to be higher among women than men. Canadians show a greater inclination to embrace religion and spirituality as they get older. Yet, despite these variations, majorities of people in every demographic and social category acknowledge the important of their religious or spiritual beliefs in the way they live their lives.”

⁹ Robert Webber, *Ancient and Future Evangelism: Making Your Church a Faith Forming Community* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), 55.

¹⁰ Project Canada Surveys Press Release, “The Religious Situation In Canada,” September 27, 2011, accessed November 20, 2013, http://www.reginaldbibby.com/images/PCS_Release_The_Religious_Situation_in_Canada.pdf. Bibby says

Likewise, Darrell Guder calls the church to recognize itself as an extension of God and His missional task rather than looking at mission as a work of the church for God.¹¹ This certainly represents a significant shift for the modern approach to church, but it also provides an opportunity for those willing to reexamine the function and purpose of the church.

The research of Michael Adams provides some of the most in depth look at contrasts between Canadian culture and American culture. Based on the information Adams is presenting, Canadians are: more resistant to patriarchal authority, more supportive of equality rights for women, more skeptical of authority, and less conservative (from the way we dress to the way we define family) than Americans. Canadians also seem to look for a greater sense of “experience.”¹² This sense of individuality and engagement from which experience is derived provides a key toward understanding ministry north of the border.

It may be tempting to place these shifts solely on the newest generations. However, Adams’ research shows that this slide to the postmodern and beyond transcends all generations. “Canadian seniors have more postmodern values than American seniors, and Canadian youth have more postmodern values than American

the research documents a highly polarized religious situation in Canada: 30% of Canadians value faith while about 40% do not. The remaining 30% are an “ambivalent middle”—people that identify with religious groups but practice “à la carte.” Nonetheless, many are open to expressions of faith that touch their lives.

¹¹ Darrell L. Guder and Lois Barrett, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 82.

¹² Adams, *Fire and Ice*, 51–59.

youth.”¹³ Across all age groups, according to Adams, Canadians are pursuing fulfillment through more individualistic means, while still demonstrating an openness towards the ideas of others. Whereas Americans, across all age groups still find their fulfillment in their group identities. The challenge therefore, is much larger than Canadians are passively inclined to think from within the spacious comfort of church walls. In a culture of progressive compromise, there is an opportunity for the counter-cultural yet relevant Truth of God.

The key to mission may lie in the interdependent spiritual desire of Canadians looking to be drawn into “experience.” Whereas our neighbours to the south seem to be growing more individualistic, Canadians seem to be willing to examine and embrace the differences that exist between us: “To be interdependent means to acknowledge the essential equality of the “other”... . In Canada, interdependence, autonomy, and diversity work in concert.”¹⁴ It is a small opening, but one that provides evangelical Christians the opportunity to share the Love of Jesus Christ with those He has placed around them.

In Canada a census is taken every five years, with the most recent census completed in 2011. According to the statistics available from the government of Canada,¹⁵ Canada had the highest rate of population growth among the G8 (Group of 8: the Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russian, the United Kingdom and the United

¹³ Ibid., 90.

¹⁴ Ibid., 125.

¹⁵ “The Canadian Population in 2011: Population Growth and Counts,” Statistics Canada, accessed October 30, 2015, <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2011/as-sa/98-310-x/98-310-x2011001-eng.cfm#a2>.

States).¹⁶ While having 5.5% increase in population from 2006 to 2011 is noteworthy, what is more remarkable is that the increase is due primarily to immigration. According to the report, this factor distinguishes Canada from the rest of the G8: while the other countries that experience growth in population do so internally, Canada achieves its growth through welcoming diversity.

These nuances provide a challenge to those who serve in leadership in churches and ministries. That challenge provides a tremendous opportunity for Canadian churches. Bibby, says “What’s needed so badly today is a commitment on the part of churches—to do what they can by way of moving beyond ministries that are turned inward, and reaching out to Canadians who need ministry.”¹⁷ In a country as diverse as Canada this means different things in different contexts. It is important, therefore, to resist looking for quick solutions or compelling ministry models.

While diversity speaks to the changes that can be seen, pluralism provides a different obstacle, as it is often unseen. Pluralism speaks to the melding together of beliefs or belief systems. John Dickson speaks of two forms of pluralism, popular and sophisticated. Popular pluralism contends that all religions teach the same things.¹⁸ At an intellectual level, there are those who logically distinguish between the differences apparent in various religious approaches, whereas sophisticated pluralism would contend that there is a greater truth, which all religions try to address, thereby making them

¹⁶ “What is the G8?” G8 Information Centre, accessed December 22, 2015, http://www.g8.utoronto.ca/what_is_g8.html.

¹⁷ Reginald Bibby, *Restless Churches: How Canada’s Churches Can Contribute to the Emerging Religious Renaissance* (Kelowna, BC: Wood Lake, 2004), 141.

¹⁸ John Dickson, *The Best Kept Secret of Christian Mission: Promoting the Gospel with More Than Our Lips* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 39.

equal.¹⁹ Dickson's summary of the influence of pluralism describes its prevalence in a growing multi-cultural Canadian culture: "Individual religions do not describe this reality; they merely express a longing to experience it."²⁰ Dickson's research speaks to the reality of the times, which places a challenge to those in Christian leadership to recognize the spiritual hunger among the people in the communities even while many church buildings grow emptier. These results should not be surprising, neither should there be an expectation that everything will suddenly change to a favourable course. For Canadians, this path has been travelled for centuries even if it has only revealed itself in recent decades.

Impact of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms

We live in a world where the concept of biblical freedom has been distorted from the Good News that God has announced from the beginning of time. This distortion of freedom shows itself in two distinct ways of thinking. First, freedom is considered from a negative perspective, as "freedom from." Limitations, guardrails, boundaries, and rules are perceived as taking away freedom. The resistance that is put up can quickly turn into rebellion and lead to a resistance against historical or accepted cultural norms. Secondly, freedom is considered from a selfish perspective, as "freedom to," to insist and even demand changes to address perceived needs.

On a national scale, in 1984 the Canadian government introduced a landmark document entitled the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. It was touted as the necessary update of the century old Constitution. In the thirty years since the introduction of that

¹⁹ Ibid., 41.

²⁰ Ibid., 42.

document, the word “freedom” has been dressed up in its more political clothes, “autonomy.” Autonomy is defined in two ways: 1. “the quality or state of being self-governing;” and 2. “as self-directing freedom and especially moral independence.”²¹ In 2005, then Canadian Prime Minister, Paul Martin spoke these words in a national speech:

We value individual freedom. So we seek to give people the tools to succeed. We believe in our responsibility towards our fellow citizens and for future generations—a responsibility that we express through public undertakings, robust social foundations and an enduring commitment to human dignity... We (Canada) celebrate diversity in pursuit of common purpose and aspire to embrace inclusion and equality of opportunity; those things that define a shared citizenship. These values are codified in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, a document that has for more than 20 years now played a pivotal role. It will continue to do so as we grow as a nation and advance as a society.

Our unique blend of values helps to define who we are, and how we will act to achieve our goals as a nation. These values endure even as time passes and circumstances change. They give shape to the idea that is Canada—a nation determined to leave no one behind; a nation with the ambition to be the standard against which others judge themselves... I believe that the role of government is to set the national objectives of its time, and then to mobilize the national will to achieve them. In summary, I believe it is the responsibility of government to prepare the country for the world ahead. To meet this obligation, we must understand the forces influencing our country and our world, the tectonic plates moving beneath the surface of our national life.²²

The voice of the highest authority in the country acknowledged the difficulties of the issues the nation was facing at the time. Additionally, he went on to speak of two future issues that would add to the complexity of Canadian demographics. The first issue is a domestic factor, as the advancing age of the baby-boomer generation starts retiring. Secondly, he spoke of the growing impact of globalization, not restricted to international

²¹ Miriam-Webster, s.v. “autonomy,” accessed June 25, 2015, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/autonomy>.

²² “Address of Prime Minister Paul Martin,” Liberal Party of Canada: Speeches, accessed June 25, 2015, <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/eppp-archive/100/205/300/liberal-ef/05-12-06/www.qc.liberal.ca/en/presse/discours.aspx@ID=325>.

trade but also the openness to maintaining welcoming immigration policies to meet the growing demands of the aging and shrinking national workforce. The shifting of the “tectonic plates” of the nation has certainly placed challenges upon those who serve in Christian leadership.

Prime Minister Martin’s words have become the reality of this country, which was recently recognized as the most tolerant nation in the world by the London based think-tank, the Legatum Institute:

Canada also stood out this year for being the “freest country in the world” with its tolerance of immigrants, minorities, freedom of expression and beliefs. In fact, an overwhelming percentage of Canadians—92 per cent—agreed that their country is a good place for immigrants, and another 94 per cent said they believe that they have the freedom to choose the course of their own lives.²³

Noted Christian Apologists Os Guinness and Ravi Zacharias recently gave a lecture in Atlanta, Georgia on the topic of freedom.²⁴ In his address, Os Guinness defined the cultural definition of freedom as the capacity of self-determination, which is exactly the autonomy that Canada has known for the last 30 years. He went on to say that freedom is a paradox in current culture; people want to be free, but they want to protect themselves from the freedom of others. They want to be free, but they also want to deny others their freedom.²⁵ The push and pull of the perceived freedoms of different people groups, no matter how much of a minority they are, need to be recognized in a society that defines freedom without limitations, guidelines, guardrails, or rules.

²³ “Canada Named Most Tolerant Country In the World,” CTV News, accessed November 3, 2015, <http://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/canada-named-most-tolerant-country-in-the-world-1.2640276>.

²⁴ “Ravi Zacharias International Ministries: Unlimited? The Challenge of Human Freedom,” YouTube, accessed June 25, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lo8vZU_p2aY.

²⁵ Ibid., 0:16:00–0:17:45.

Gary Nelson, President of Tyndale Seminary in Toronto synthesizes these dual obstacles of diversity and pluralism that currently exist in the Canadian context:

Canadians have long preferred the image of “mosaic” rather than a “melting pot” in discussions about nation building. We acknowledge cultural challenges produced by the coming together of various narratives of meaning and values. This intercultural awareness, this multicultural pluralism affects everything we do. To minister effectively in our new context requires many of us to reorient the way we think and seek to be the church. Like the early church we must take the redemptive mission of God to the world, and find our identity not inside the walls of the church, but outside in the borderlands where faith, unfaith and other faiths intersect.²⁶

The evidence strongly suggests that changes have taken place in Canadian cities, both large and small. The question that remains for the Church and those who serve in Christian leadership is: “How shall we respond?” No longer can the Canadian Church hold onto traditional practices and hope that Canadian culture will desire (or relate to) them and come to us. There is a need to recognize that a re-orientation must come from within the life of the church and therefore, this change in posture should be found in the lives of those who serve in leadership. Through this kind of leadership, and through these kinds of congregations, Grace and Truth can then extend into communities. Again, Frances Hesselbein’s perspective substantiates the priorities of leadership. She says, “It is the leader’s job to identify the critical issues in which his or her organization can make a difference, then to build effective partnerships based on mission, innovation, and diversity to address those issues.”²⁷

²⁶ Evangelical Fellowship of Canada: Gary Nelson, “Finding Our Canadian Mission,” accessed December 15, 2013, <http://digital.faithtoday.ca/faithtoday/20111112/?pg=16&pm=2&u1=friend#pg16>.

²⁷ Hesselbein, “Managing in a World,” 14.

Denominational Perspective

Lou Geense, is the Global Initiatives Director of the EMCC (Evangelical Missionary Church of Canada). Previously, as a long-tenured pastor and in his current role, Geense's perspective provides excellent insight into the inherent difficulties of helping churches engage mutually beneficial relationships with global communities. His valuable experience provides insight toward helping churches foster global partnerships and it should also lay some important groundwork for understanding how churches and denominations could shape their leaders to address the changing multicultural communities.

In the congregation that Lou Geense pastored for sixteen years, there was great enthusiasm for the development of a partnership in a distant global location (Tanzania). There was and continues to be a commitment of financial support by the congregation. There was a willingness to take time to listen to the people of another culture, hearing of their hopes and dreams, taking time to understand their current limitations and difficulties. It was through that process then that a prayerful and intentional Gospel-centred response was implemented through both practical (grace) and instructional (truth) means.

These stories and this kind of approach are not new or uncommon in congregational practices. The Church often desires, supports and celebrates these efforts as global extensions of local ministry. However, attempts to use these same principles (sacrificial giving, intentional listening, patient practical help, and need-specific teaching) in local Canadian-based ministry are often met with resistance. Given the cultural complexities previously discussed, it is time to consider change.

In my current context we have also wrestled through many of these same tensions. There is a surface level understanding that, as a congregation, we are called to be “in the world,” but there is a genuine apprehension of losing what we have come to know over the course of the previous six decades. Putting those tensions together with the changes in a particular community presents a difficult task that some may say call for a new strategy or model.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter’s article, “Leadership in a Globalizing World,” gives an accurate description of the effects of cultures colliding within country borders and across them., Sociologically speaking, leadership that fails to recognize the shifting contexts for decision-making will be deficient.²⁸ Those contexts can be represented in the diversity of target markets, but a greater emphasis ought to be placed within the decision-making circles of the organization.²⁹ In her final section on the Identity Work required for leadership, the author refers to several character attributes that are beneficial for a globalized leader: consideration of other perspectives, holding one’s ego, cross-cultural awareness, listening skills, and adaptability.³⁰ Moss Kanter helps to understand the layers of complexity that are involved in increasingly globalized cultures and points toward the opportunities that are now available.

²⁸ Rosabeth Moss Kanter, “Leadership in a Globalizing World,” in *Handbook of Leadership Theory and Practice*, eds. Nitin Noria and Rakesh Khurana (Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2010), 569.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 577.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 599–601.

Reason for Hope

There is a tremendous opportunity that now exists at the doorsteps of nearly every Canadian church community. That hope, however, is not necessarily found in a new strategic model of doing church. Having now had the privilege of serving in vocational Christian leadership for over fifteen years, I have had the opportunity to listen to and read about many different kinds of strategies or new ways of doing church. All of them come with captivating stories from their authors or presenters and there is no doubt that they impacted their local context. Something that is often forgotten by those who listen and are eager for solutions for their own ministries is that these strategies have taken many years to develop and were birthed within a specific environment. A mistake is made when a strategy is adopted into a context without consideration for the uniqueness of that community. Perhaps because of pressures from a board of directors and a denomination—and even a personal sense of accomplishment—there is a temptation to push hard on the implementation of a strategy that rarely is reflected in eventual outcomes.

Another way in which those in Christian leadership attempt to address communities is by starting new congregations or ministries. A healthy multiplication of churches needs to be part of the mandate, but the idea of starting fresh to avoid the trappings of tradition and traditionally-minded people often leads to frustration rather than fruitfulness. The opportunity that presents itself to those in Christian leadership is found in rethinking the Scriptural implications of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, first in the life of pastoral leaders, and through them to the people gathered in church buildings.

Despite the obstacles that seem to be appearing at an increasing rate, there is optimism about the mission possibilities in local contexts. Over the last several years the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (EFC) has been holding forums and conferences to address the state of the Canadian mission field. Alan Hirsch (Missional Leader) and Cam Roxborough (Canadian Missional Leader) were co-presenters in 2011. Part of their conversation, captured in the EFC's publication *Faith Today*, should encourage pastoral leaders toward a renewed hope. Alan Hirsch, while referring to an article written with Van Ginkel and Roxborough, said, "We find ourselves in a genuinely missional or missionary culture where the church must adopt crosscultural missionary methodology to engage meaningfully with the culture.... It's all too easy to lose the impact of the Incarnation on our theological perspective as well as on our missiology."³¹ Co-presenter Cam Roxborough shares that enthusiastic outlook: "We need to recognize too that the rate of change is phenomenal right now. And it's happening within the church as well, I'm excited and optimistic about the unrest people are experiencing."³²

Authenticity, first modeled by those in leadership, will be fostered by the people as they collectively (at their own pace) find their place within the unfolding of God's redemptive story. A greater vibrancy will be the result, as people help each other discover their sense of worth in God alone while simultaneously recognizing that they are not alone in their searching. Eddie Gibbs captures the essence of the potential that exists for preaching in an emerging culture:

³¹ Aileen Van Ginkel, Alan Hirsch and Cam Roxborough, "Theology Crucial in a Changing World," *Faith Today* (July/August 2011): 16.

³² Ibid.

Nonbelievers will be exposed to the gospel in a highly contextualized form. They will not be confronted with a generic, propositional message, but one in which the big story of salvation history as recorded in Scripture is worked out in the little stories of the lives of each individual and at the micro level of the local group of believers ... they will engage in open and honest dialogue with people they know well and consider credible witnesses. ... In a phrase, the gospel is about the restoring and building of relationships with a holy God and with one another in the body of Christ, as well as with the wider community we serve.³³

These new (or renewed) communities will unite around their common faith in Christ and communicate acceptance of all people acknowledging their individual place along the journey of faith. No longer should coming together be based on age or interest but solely on equal standing with respect to Jesus Christ. Christian leadership in this type of complex context will emphasize the continual growth that takes place in each life and take place in “an environment where becoming, growing is normative.”³⁴ This environment will continually resound with a freshness that reflects the multigenerational diversity of the journeying community. Innovation will not be implemented, just because it is new. Tradition will not be abandoned just because it is old. Rather, these new communities of faith will respect tradition as what allows the past to inform the present.

Over the course of the last several years, I have had the privilege of listening to, learning from, and working with Christian leaders from various places in the world. Many of them have faithfully served for long numbers of years despite enduring difficult and challenging circumstances. Whether it is pastoring a church in rural El Salvador, in the slums of Khayelitsha, South Africa or in the underground church in China, their stories have helped shape my understanding of what Christian leadership looks like when

³³ Eddie Gibbs, *Church Next: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000), 199.

³⁴ Milfred Minatrea, *Shaped By God's Heart: The Passion & Practice of Missional Churches* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 163.

the culture around you is difficult. Their perspectives are valuable to an ever-changing Canadian context where cultures collide, values shift, and political agendas place an increasing pressure upon those who serve in Christian leadership.

As a leadership team, in our local, Canadian context, we have attempted to walk through these questions along the way. In examining the alternatives, there has been an unceasing recognition that any new strategy would alienate some very faithful people who have long served as part of this church family. Instead, as a leadership team we have been challenged to ask new questions. Instead of “What do we want our church to do?” we are learning to ask “Who do we want the people of our church to become?” This shift has allowed us to appreciate the contributions of sincere and genuine followers of Christ no matter their generational or cultural differences.

A new strategy may be in order, but it is not the first step. The starting place needs to be in deepening the character of the leader to navigate through the tensions of helping those currently part of the church to engage the culture (truth) and to be visible in the community (grace). As the Canadian church reflects on past successes and accomplishments, it needs to learn to adapt to its current changing culture. There is a need for the internal changes to take place within the life of those in Christian leadership in order to serve a church and a community.³⁵

Conclusion

Cultural changes have made a dramatic impact on the function of churches in their communities. The challenge to engage and welcome people of different heritages,

³⁵ Reggie McNeal, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 135.

customs and values has left many traditional-minded, Western Church buildings emptier than perhaps ever before. It is also important to be reminded that strategies and models that may work well in a large metropolitan centre may not carry over into a small rural setting. Additionally, within each setting, changes occur at increasing rates that make strategic implementation difficult. Therefore, new production-oriented metrics will be of little use. Based on the observable changes in our communities,³⁶ the perspective of denominational leaders and leading thinkers on cultural engagement requires a change.

It is the position of this study that the most effective place to start is with a change to the way in which pastoral leaders are conditioned or trained to think about their roles. Canadian author, Carson Pue speaks to the need importance of developing the interior life of the person: “We are tempted to seek what God wants us to do rather than what he wants us to be. ... The corporate vision God gives is based on spiritual gifts given by his grace and by his power for the purpose of serving the body of Christ and God’s eternal purposes.”³⁷ Pue’s voice ought to be echoed and amplified for the betterment of both those who serve and the organizations they represent.

In this chapter one can see that it is only in very recent times that Christian leadership development has demonstrated an indication of changing its approach. To revisit the analogy of the tree, based on these findings a determination can be made that those who serve in Christian leadership have often been perceived a lot like a single tree, standing alone across the horizon; one solitary leader, properly groomed, and perfectly

³⁶ Live in Lambton, “Social Planning and Program Support Department,” accessed November 1, 2015, http://www.liveinlambton.ca/images/settlement/lip/LIP_Final_Report_2010.pdf. Recent research from my geographical area shows that projections of a continued aging and declining of our population. As a result, efforts have been made in recent years to recruit international students and to attract immigrants to study, work and live in our community.

³⁷ Carson Pue, *Mentoring Leaders: Wisdom for Developing Character, Calling, and Competency* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2005), 97.

set apart, with the idea of being the answer for all things that happen between heaven and earth for those who came into our church buildings. In fact, systems have been developed systems, schools and agencies to cultivate similarly equipped leaders. The idea was that, with enough training and pruning, leaders could be supplied to those church buildings. It is possible that up until now there has been an overemphasis on the function of Christian leadership or what the tree looks like above the ground. What is being discovered, to a greater degree, is that life outside the walls of the building influences those within. A growing complexity of demands has often left those who serve in leadership feeling unproductive, isolated, and barren.

There are both visible obstacles (diversity) and unseen obstacles (pluralism) that have presented themselves in our communities. These obstacles provide new opportunities for those who serve in Christian leadership to look beneath the ground level. Part of the composite of Down to Earth Leadership is the emphasis to engage their communities in a manner that reflects the Incarnational model of Jesus. They underscore the importance of a renewed emphasis on the character development of the leader for the purpose of engaging the rapidly changing culture in the Canadian context.

A willingness to learn from the world around us provides an opportunity to implement the Incarnational effect of Jesus: bringing grace and truth to the world in which we are called to serve. The second chapter moves the discussion from external measurements to the internal character development of leadership.

CHAPTER 2

GRACE, TRUTH & LEADERSHIP

Introduction

The challenges of being in a Christian leadership position are constant, diverse, and multiple. As a result, an on-going understanding of leadership roles amid these challenges should take on a greater priority. Over the last three decades it has been my privilege to spend time with, learn from, and work among many leaders. Each one has contributed to my growing understanding of what leadership is and why effective long-term leadership is so important. From my Canadian context there has been an increasing emphasis on the professional and educational preparation of individuals in order to qualify for leadership. In the previous chapter this study drew attention to the fact that until recently, the methods of preparing people for Christian leadership have not been keeping pace with the increasing complexities of communities. This chapter seeks to return the leadership focus to the Incarnated life of Jesus Christ, the Son of God who came down to earth. For those who claim to follow him, his down to earth leadership provides invaluable lessons for the diverse challenges of ministry.

Over the last few years it has been my privilege to learn from several diverse groups of people who serve in ministry leadership roles around the world. There are those who serve among the poorest people in El Salvador, those who have sacrificed much to developing previously neglected communities in the post-apartheid world of South Africa, and there are the resolved voices of those who provide leadership to a growing network of churches in China despite the watchful eye of the communist government.

Through these relationships, I have come to appreciate that there are more significant priorities for those leaders compared to many of my Canadian colleagues.

In the professionalism that has become Christian leadership in Canada, many conversations surround working hours, benefits and compensation. This perspective provides the enticement necessary to be drawn into the promise of strategic solutions. It also can lead to high turnover rates in leadership and damaged or dysfunctional congregational life. At a pastors' meeting a few years ago I was in a conversation discussing programs that our representative churches were offering. I was struck by the comment of one pastor who indicated that they were stopping a particular program because it was not moving people into their Sunday service (which is where local board and denominational scrutiny is applied and financial reward is measured). There was no talk about the real pain of the lives of the participants being addressed by the program or their value as people in the eyes of God. By the nodding heads of agreement around the table, I knew that my thoughts were among the minority. Discussions like this one are not isolated and they cast a shadow upon the way Christian leadership is defined or valued.

Most leadership definitions point toward outcomes, performance, and goals achieved or surpassed. Many of them would draw comparisons against the weaknesses or deficiencies of the past and of other organizations. Greatness, in a starry-eyed culture, can also be mistakenly measured in beauty, power or influence, and profit.

Churches are not exempt from any of these trappings. Even the most noble of religious organizations are based on smooth running systems, popular programs and their capacity to generate both attendance and profit (not necessarily in this order). Leaders with charisma are elevated to attract and sustain easily misplaced, consumeristic ideals.

“Regular” leaders flock to attend conferences and buy books dispensed by these “great” leaders. Their greatness is often conveyed in attendance figures and publishing acclaim.

Toward the Incarnational Way

Jim Collins, through his research in *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap and Others Don't*, indicates that sustained greatness in a particular area/product/specialty (he calls the “Hedgehog Concept”) comes from surprising, counter-intuitive places. Among the key aspects of Collins’ discoveries were three cornerstones that address the needs of the growing complexity of Canadian culture:

1. “The good-to-great companies understood a simple truth: The right people will do the right things and deliver the best results they’re capable of, regardless of the incentive system.”¹ and “...widen your definition of “right people” to focus more on the character attributes of the person and less on specialized knowledge.”²
2. “... they never talked in reactionary terms and never defined their strategies principally in response to what others were doing. They talked in terms of what they were trying to create and how they were trying to improve relative to an absolute standard of excellence.”³
3. Enduring great companies preserve their core values and purpose while their business strategies and operating practices endlessly adapt to a changing world.⁴

What Collins considers surprising or counter-intuitive, Jesus affirms when he addresses the tension of greatness and leadership. In the Gospel of Mark Jesus said:

You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.⁵

¹ Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap—and Others Don't* (New York: HarperBusiness, 2001), 50.

² Ibid., 216.

³ Ibid., 160.

⁴ Ibid., 185.

⁵ Mark 10:42–45.

The challenge, through Jesus' words and example, is that He does not denounce the pursuit of greatness. What he does challenge is the way in which the privilege of leadership is viewed and handled. From Jesus' perspective leadership involves the willingness to humbly serve, the capacity to serve for the benefit of others, the ability to embrace simplicity and even scarcity, and the vulnerability to sacrificially suffer for a purpose greater than ourselves.

The leaders that I have met and worked with, despite the difficulties of their global contexts, each love the Lord deeply and they each are passionate about their congregation's purpose in the community. In fact, they possess a deep concern for the welfare of the community, beyond their local congregation or ministry; however, they share one more thing. They have all understood and personally experienced suffering and/or sacrifice, but they have not used it as an excuse or an exemption from serving Our Lord. Instead they have learned to submit their wounds and weaknesses to the power of the Cross and they serve others with grace and truth of God, according to the Kingdom purposes they uphold:

At the outset of any study of spiritual leadership, this master principle must be squarely faced: True greatness, true leadership, is found in giving yourself in serve to others, not in coaxing or inducing others to serve you. True service is never without cost. Often it comes with a painful baptism of suffering. But the true spiritual leader is focused on the service he and she can render to God and other people, not on the residuals or perks of high office or holy title.⁶

We live in a rapidly changing culture. Under the influence of changes in economics, societal norms, and multi-ethnicity, it is almost impossible to formulate plans of action.

⁶ Oswald Chambers, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 15.

Any plan that is developed is based on variables that often change between the formulation and implementation of the plan. Conversely, being in a position that only reacts to the changes around us would make for ineffective leadership, particularly over the long term. Additionally, any listing of leadership challenge is lacking if it neglects the primary challenges of knowing how to make a meaningful eternal impact among the people we are called to serve.

As ministers of the Gospel, our first resource and exemplar ought to be Jesus Christ. Learning from His approach, and understanding both His resources and His limitations, should provide information and inspiration to serve the Lord in ministry. The incarnation of Jesus is central in developing the capacity to shape ministry responses. Leadership practices and ministry functions should be directly influenced by the example of Jesus' earthly ministry.

The biblical text will be instrumental in reorienting leadership development according to the example of Jesus Christ. By studying of the scriptural passages that define the Incarnation and on Jesus' relationship with God the Father will establish a foundation. Additionally, grasping knowledge of the manner in which the Incarnated Jesus related to the culture of his time will aid those in involved in Christian leadership.

Biblical Texts that Help Define the Incarnation

There are a number of texts, which refer to Jesus, the second person of the Trinitarian Godhead, coming to earth in human form. The nature of this analysis is not to provide an extensive exegetical or theological analysis of these passages, as much excellent work has been done by those more qualified. The purpose of this section is to

glean some key points from two key passages as they relate to incarnational leadership, namely, the “self-emptying” of Christ referred to by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Philippians⁷ and the idea that Jesus became “flesh and dwelt among us” as presented by the Gospel writer John.⁸

1. *Kenosis*: “self-emptying”

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,
 who, though he was in the form of God,
 did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,
 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant,
 being born in the likeness of men.
 And being found in human form,
 he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death,
 even death on a cross.
 Therefore God has highly exalted him
 and bestowed on him the name that is above every name,
 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
 in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
 and every tongue confess
 that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.⁹

The transfer of “form” for Jesus, from that of a divine being into that of a human being is not easy to comprehend. Central to Christian faith is the fact that Jesus retains the fullness of his deity, while living the fullness of his humanity. Questions abound as to what extent this truth can be fully understood. For example, some might argue that Jesus, despite his humanity could not possibly fully identify with the rest of humanity because he always had his divine nature to fall back on. The predisposition of this thought stems from the misguided human understanding of power. Once possessed, this thought or belief is not given up. As Bruce Fisk noted in his address on this passage, “It’s

⁷ Phil. 2:6–11.

⁸ John 1:14.

⁹ Phil. 2:5–11 (ESV).

unfathomable to relinquish power, surrender power, let alone to embrace demotion and limitation.”¹⁰ He further states:

The crucial question is not whether or not Jesus enjoyed equality with God. The question is whether or not Jesus chose to exploit that equality for his own advantage. He didn't. Unlike so many oriental despots and pagan gods in Paul's day, Christ refused to strut and swagger in his regal robes. Unlike so many politicians, personalities, and power brokers in our day who parlay social status into personal gain, Jesus did not equate glory with self-promotion.¹¹

Jesus does not wield his power or status to create distance between himself and those he was called to serve. This self-emptying choice of Jesus causes us to think differently about both power and status. Instead of leveraging his power he divests himself of it. He does so in order to fully identify with all people by placing himself in a complete and willing submissive relationship to the power of God the Father. Author and theologian Bruce Ware's study on the incarnation of Jesus, which is rooted in the Philippians 2 passage provides needed clarity. Ware remarks: “Note that Paul is not saying that Christ emptied something from himself or poured something out of himself, as if in so doing he became less fully God than he was before. Rather, he emptied himself; he poured out himself ... He remains fully God.”¹²

This willing action of self-emptying goes beyond the notion of giving for the benefit of others. It speaks to an internal sacrificial generosity that is willing to suffer so that others might gain. Generosity starts within, is marked by self-sacrifice; which makes

¹⁰ Bruce N. Fisk, *The Frog Prince, The Matrix, and the Way of the Cross: A Meditation of Philippians 2:5–11*, (Lecture Notes of September 25, 2000), Retrieved from Westmont College, accessed February 24, 2014, <http://www.westmont.edu/~fisk/Articles/Wayofthecross.html>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Bruce A. Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus: Theological Reflections on the Humanity of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 19.

it a reflection of God's generosity towards humanity.¹³ This level of generosity is part of what makes the incarnation so awe inspiring. Jesus does not give out of abundance; he gives himself abundantly:

In Christ Jesus God has shown his true nature; this is what it means for Christ to be “equal with God”—to pour himself out for the sake of others and to do so by taking the role of a slave. Hereby he not only reveals the character of God but also reveals what it means for us to be created in God's image, to bear his likeness and have his “mindset.”¹⁴

The revelation of God's character, in Christ, to humankind was done (among other reasons) so that we also would learn to develop a similar pattern of thinking so that the character of God might also be revealed through the lives of those who would choose to follow him. In a western culture that trumpets accomplishment and grandeur, Jesus' example of self-emptying stands in sharp contrast, particularly as this kenosis is a necessary part of his capacity to identify with the fullness of humanity. To that end, Jesus Christ also provides the best example of what it means to actively live among the people of his community.

1. *Sarx*: “flesh”

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.
We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only,
who came from the Father
full of grace and truth.¹⁵

The beginning of the Gospel of John makes a direct connection from the eternal aspect of Jesus Christ as the “Word” or *logos* of God (John 1:1) and his earthly life. The

¹³ James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful Community: Following the Spirit, Extending Grace, Demonstrating Love* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010), 153.

¹⁴ Bible Gateway, “As God He Emptied Himself – Philippians 2:6-7”, *The IVP Bible Commentary Series*, accessed October 19, 2015, <https://www.biblegateway.com/resources/ivp-nt/As-God-He-Emptied-Himself>.

¹⁵ John 1:14.

One who was actively involved in the creation of the world makes a startling transition at a certain point in time, by stepping down into the middle of the created order to tangibly live among the very people he created. “In the incarnation the Logos does come into the world which was created by God through him. When the Logos enters the world and takes on flesh, he enters the realm of createdness.”¹⁶ After hundreds of years in which the voices of the prophets of God were silent and there were no new written revelations to add to the law, Jesus entered into human history, becoming the fulfillment of the law and the means of salvation for the human race. This is not just another religious act; rather, his life became a transformational focal point from which everyone needs to give account. The experiences of forgiveness of sin, salvation, and the capacity to daily move through life, take on new definitions because of the incarnation of Jesus. “But because of the emphases that in him alone is life and that he alone makes the Father known and, as such, displaces the revelation of Torah through Moses, the conflict is not so much Christological as it is soteriological.”¹⁷

In his humanity Jesus grew up in a community (Luke 2:40) and learned his religious faith by demonstrating his willingness to learn from teachers and participate in religious observances (Luke 2:41–47). He understood the frailty of the human body (John 4:6) and the human condition (Luke 23:34). He was part of celebrations (John 2:1–2) and times of mourning (John 11:33–36). He understood the tensions of economic (Matthew 22:15–22) and political pressure (Matthew 4:9–10). Yet in all these things he remained

¹⁶ Marianne Meye Thompson, *The Humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 41.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

without sin, becoming the perfect, acceptable sacrifice to God on behalf of humanity

(Hebrews 9:24–28). British theologian and author Dr. Angus Paddison adds:

The act of incarnation is therefore the expansion of the Word outwards in freedom to assume and indwell what it was not before. With attention to both sides of John 1:14 Jesus can be seen as what John persistently claims him to be: the true revelation and presence of God himself (Jn 1:18; 2:21; 4:26; 6:46; 8:26; 12:45; 14:9), the reconciliation to God offered on our behalf (Jn 17:19), the Lamb of God whose ‘food is to do the will of him who sent me and to complete his work’ (Jn 4:34), and he who lives a life that can only be ‘completed’ on the cross (Jn 19:30).¹⁸

In his humanity Jesus demonstrated grace in all matters while being fuelled by the truth of God. Jesus demonstrated an unrelenting commitment to his disciples, despite their lack of understanding, or their desire for power and privilege. Even when they abandoned him, Jesus never gave up on them.¹⁹ It is Jesus’ extension of both grace and truth beyond the limitations of his own needs and toward the needs of others that makes His life a compelling example to emulate.

Limitations of the Incarnation

The concept of the limitations inherent in the incarnated Jesus can be somewhat perplexing. In part this is due to the fact that for many, the human experience of Jesus, which involved suffering and death, is well beyond what many humans will experience in their lifetime. His willingness to embrace this type of ending to his earthly life should not be diminished rather it should be an inspiration (Luke 22:42) because of the limitations he endured. “In his three years of ministry Jesus walked headlong toward death... he

¹⁸ Angus Paddison, “Engaging Scripture: Incarnation and the Gospel of John,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 60, no. 2 (2007): 152.

¹⁹ Madeleine L’Engle, *Bright Evening Star: Mystery of the Incarnation* (Wheaton, IL: H. Shaw, 1997), 159.

could have hesitated, deviated, adjusted the plan to soften the blow to himself.”²⁰

However, the idea of limitation is not to be construed as if external pressures imposed themselves upon Jesus. It was the unseen, internal choices, chronicled in the New Testament, that he chose to make which brings understanding “that this suffering is not a result of external limitation, for nothing can limit the absolute being from outside, but rather is an expression of the reality of sacrificial love.”²¹

Among the defenses for the existence of the shared identities of Jesus is Robin Le Poidevan’s idea of what is possibly possible is possible:

A key move in the argument just considered is this principle: what is possibly possible is possible. But now consider this case. Jeff, until recently a very keen runner, is somewhat out of practice, and right now would be unable to run a mile in four minutes or less. However, he is certainly fit enough to start a demanding training programme which would get him to the point where a four-minute mile was within his capacity. So, physiologically speaking, it is currently possibly possible for him to run a four-minute mile. But it is not currently possible for him to do so. So does that mean the principle is false? The complicating factor in this case is that different ways of assessing possibility are in play. In what sense is it not possible for Jeff to run a four-minute mile? Just that doing this is currently ruled out by his current physical condition: the strength of his muscles, the capacity of his respiratory and circulatory system to cope with hard exercise sustained over an extended period, and so on. But these things can change. In what sense is it possible for him to put himself in a position where he could run a four-minute mile? That a training programme is available to him which his current physical condition, though sub-optimal, would not rule him out from undertaking. Were he to undertake it, his physical condition would improve to the extent that a four-minute mile would be within his reach. So it is possibly possible for him to run a four-minute mile in this sense: that he is free to undertake a programme which would make him physically able to run at the requisite speed. The ‘possibly’ of ‘possibly possible’ alludes to one set of conditions, the ‘possible’ to another set.²²

²⁰ Don Everts, *God in the Flesh: What Speechless Lawyers, Kneeling Soldiers, and Shocked Crowds Teach Us About Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 118.

²¹ Paul L. Gavrilyuk, “The Kenotic Theology of Sergius Bulgakov,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 58, no. 3 (2005), 256.

²² Robin Le Poidevan, “Kenosis, Necessity and Incarnation” *Heythrop Journal: A Bimonthly Review of Philosophy and Theology* 54, no. 2 (2013): 220, accessed January 27, 2014, Philosopher’s Index, EBSCOHost.

This self-emptying, real life intersection of earthly life in earthly time had a qualitative, distinctive feature described by the disciple John with the terms ‘grace’ and ‘truth’. Theologian C. Stephen Evans, in his writings on the kenosis of Jesus, make the following observation:

I believe that God limits himself, not to free humans from a relation, but to make them capable of having genuine relations with himself and others. The power on God’s part to do this does not mean that he is weak; it is the kind of self-limitation only one who is absolutely strong and confident of that strength could undertake.²³

These are not words that Jesus announced for himself, nor are they words that are chronicled in a journal, rather these descriptive words of Jesus by the Gospel writer John represent a reflective summation of Jesus’ life, which took years to formulate after having seen how his earthly days came to a close. John’s observations help the reader to appreciate that the perceived limitations of Jesus’ incarnation are in fact the very means by which Christian leadership responsibilities can be fulfilled. The kenotic account “coheres well with the very human portrait of Jesus that we see in the gospels. An honest reading of the New Testament reveals a Jesus who seems to share the normal limitations all humans experience.”²⁴

Limitation is often considered in a negative sense. However, a closer look at these two key passages regarding the Incarnation of Jesus also reveals a key difference in the perceived limitations of Jesus: the glory of God. Paul’s letter to the Philippians contains a reminder (2:11) that the glory of God is the key motivating factor in the self-emptying

²³ C. Stephen Evans, “Kenotic Christology and the Nature of God,” *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Pub., 2010), 216.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 199.

activity of Jesus. The premise of the Gospel of John (1:14–15), is a reminder that the glory of God is revealed through the humanity of Jesus. It is as though Jesus venerates the very nature or characteristics of God to those around him. Through the manner in which Jesus handles himself, within the limitations of his earthly life, the presence of God is made known to us.

Implications for Christian Leadership

Given that the environments of leadership are subject to tremendous fluctuation, it becomes extremely important for Christian leaders to continually be positioned as instruments of God's grace in order for God's truth to be heard; "If character issues are compromised, it hurts the whole team and eventually undermines the mission."²⁵ The challenge is for the character of Jesus Christ to be nurtured continually in the life of those who serve in Christian leadership, in order for them to be prepared for unforeseen difficulty.

That order can only be attained by intentional development of the leader's inner spirit before God. The key is to deliberately set time aside, daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly to nurture the spiritual life within. There is no fixed technique to this process. Just as God has created all people uniquely in his image, he has enabled a variety of ways through which an understanding of who he is and what he desires, in the life of each person, can be deepened. He has also given Jesus as an example of just how crucial and diverse this practice can be. "Although he (Jesus) was certainly sensitive to the needs of others, the people pressing for his attention never determined his agenda... Instead, he regularly separated himself from the emotional intensity of his public life and aligned

²⁵ Bill Hybels, *Courageous Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 190.

himself with the purpose of the Father.”²⁶ It is these moments where leaders become more aware of their unique gifting and develop the resolve to function according to those gifts while at the same time developing the courage to say “no” to those aspects that do not fit.

Canadian communities are becoming more complex. Christian leadership can be more effective by considering itself to be a continuation of the Incarnational ministry and example of Jesus Christ, looking for ways to be present among the communities rather than isolated behind pulpits or tucked away in offices. It can be tempting to think that it is easier to communicate effectively and creatively if more time is taken isolated in preparation. However, there needs to be a move toward being part of the rhythm of the community, being known even among the challenges of community life. From experience and observation of Christian leadership, here are some observations:

1. Everything cannot be accomplished in one congregational service, or as pastors in one preached message. This calls for taking a long view toward the spiritual formation of people. Instead of trying to have an amazing message every week, the heart of the preacher should be humble enough to allow the word of God to speak consistently over time. “Longevity is a hidden secret for those who truly want incarnational fruit. If Jesus spent thirty years becoming known, building a reputation, becoming a man of the people, maybe we should reconsider the transient nature of our lives.”²⁷ That long view does not necessarily mean a long commitment on behalf of one preacher, but could also mean developing an

²⁶ Jim Herrington, R. Robert Creech and Trisha Taylor, *The Leader’s Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass Books, 2003), 131.

²⁷ Hugh Halter, *Flesh: Bringing the Incarnation Down to Earth* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook Publishing, 2014), 105.

appetite for the revealed Word of God, in the life of the congregation, that will be continued, either in a preacher's absence or by a subsequent tenure. The preaching pastor or church leader should not be central. Rather, Jesus Christ should be central. In that manner, should a change in leadership be necessary, there will be a greater chance that the congregation will not be satisfied with anything less than incarnational leadership.

2. In order to address the questions that are embedded in the minds of people, those who serve in Christian leadership will do well to take the time to understand the culture within which people dwell. If communication, particularly through preaching, fails to bridge their world with the eternal world of God, then leadership has become irrelevant, and those who assemble to learn, likewise grow in irrelevance in their communities, despite increased knowledge. There should be a hermeneutic of the people. This requires a nearness between those who serve in leadership and the people among whom they minister. "To be incarnational means you must take the vertigo seriously. You must learn to respect people's lostness; you must become a deep listener and learn to dignify people's spiritual journeys."²⁸ Trust and authenticity is vital in order to be a vessel through which the Word of God can be heard and the presence of Jesus can be revealed in the lives of people.
3. Effective incarnational leaders will also learn to embody and communicate both grace and truth to those who gather each week, equipping them to be incarnational. Denominational leader, author and pastor William Willimon urges this dual importance for those leaders who are entrusted with communicating to

²⁸ Ibid., 45.

gathered congregations. According to Willimon, bringing incarnational preaching is an essential part of the discipleship task:

A sermon is faithful only as it is performed, embodied, and made incarnate in the lives of Christians, not as it is spoken by me. Jesus didn't just speak truth to us; he performed truth, enfleshed the word. What is more, he commanded us to do the same. The faith of Christ is not a set of spiritual propositions but rather an embodied, enacted relationship with a crucified Jew who is also "the way" that we are commanded to walk, "the truth" that we are meant to embody, and "the life" that we are meant to live.²⁹

The focus should not be on how many people gather in *our* buildings, for *our* services, but how effectively people are being equipped to see themselves as capable of engaging decisions and relationships through the empowerment that comes with the grace and truth of God. In this way Christian leaders enter into an equipping of people, as the Church, the Body of Christ, to be incarnational in the community in which they live and move. "We preach in the awesome awareness that the church is, for better or worse, the physical form that the Risen Christ has chosen to take in the world."³⁰

4. Dr. Mary Kate Morse's book, *Making Room for Leadership*, provides some much needed articulation of how physical presence, in the role of leadership, communicates the leader's understanding of power. Its premises correlate well with the incarnational theme of this research. Those who serve in Christian leadership through their positions, either have or are given a tremendous amount of influence over the lives of people. However, long is the list of those who do not steward that power well.

²⁹ William Willimon, *Incarnation: The Surprising Overlap of Heaven and Earth* (Nashville: Abington Press, 2013), Loc. 764–67, Kindle.

³⁰ Ibid., Loc. 895–96.

Through the Doctor of Ministry process, our cohort met online for a weekly chat. In one online discussion on the topic of church leadership,³¹ the conversation turned to our current experiences regarding the stewardship of power in our respective congregational settings. It was interesting to see the replies as many acknowledged its necessity in the board rooms of our congregations, but few considered their leadership team to be willing to embrace this kind of equipping. While acknowledging the necessity of an incarnational approach for congregations, the sense of many is that the long held approaches based on growth strategies and attractive personalities, among other reasons, make the transitions difficult.

That tension is best seen in Dr. William Willimon's writings and lectures regarding the importance of incarnational presence in the community versus his own verbal communication in his home church. The messages can be construed as contradictory. Here is an excerpt from an interview he gave on July 4, 2013:

Q: What are your goals for your time at Duke Memorial?

A: I hope to stay alive, to have something interesting to preach each Sunday! At the same time I hope to continue the incredible momentum that this congregation has enjoyed under the leadership of two great pastors. Duke Memorial is going through quite a renewal at this time, and it's exciting to be part of the movement of God in downtown Durham for this great church! I want to do all I can to ensure that the momentum continues. I say to my fellow citizens of Durham, "Come join us on Sundays!"³²

³¹ MaryKate Morse, "LGP4 On Line Discussion," March 17, 2014. 10:00am to 11:00am EDT.

³² William Willimon, "Durham Magazine: Welcome Back, Will Willimon," *A Peculiar Prophet: The Blog of Will Willimon*, July 4, 2013, accessed January 27, 2014, <http://willwillimon.wordpress.com/2013/07>.

Yet in a message he gave on December 11, 2013, he spoke about a discussion he had with a young pastor who was reluctant to take a new position at a church in a less desirable community, a place that Dr. Willimon agreed would be difficult; however he gives an incarnational answer: “Jesus died for them, if He loves them that much, then we need to go there.”³³

The contrast that exists between “join us on Sundays” and “we need to go there,” is a constant tension between our “come to us” philosophy and our “we’ll join you” aspirations. Therefore, it is no surprise to find that many in Christian leadership view their contexts’ cultures as difficult environments to fulfill Jesus’ call to be Incarnational.

Three Pictures Of Incarnational Ministry

It is from character that the function of Christian leadership will be determined. What is necessary therefore, is a consistent and dependable starting place in the life of a leader. Stephen Covey likens that place to a compass.³⁴ While Covey speaks in regard to the business world, his premise is worth noting for those in Christian leadership positions. Pastors and church leaders may need this direction-giving source more than any other leader. The exemplary character of pastors or Christian leaders is often taken for granted without actually taking the time to assess or equip them in their character development. Instead, undue expectation is placed upon on them to provide strategies, models, and systems for the organization.

³³ William Willimon, “Messiness of Ministry,” *A Peculiar Prophet: The Blog of Will Willimon*, December 9, 2013, accessed March 17, 2014, <http://willwillimon.wordpress.com/2013/12>.

³⁴ Stephen R. Covey, *Principle-Centered Leadership* (New York: Summit Books, 1991), 97.

Covey would consider these like maps and lists several reasons why maps (strategies, models and systems) should be de-emphasized in priority with the compass replacing those maps as the resource of preference. Among his reasons are:

1. The compass orients people to the coordinates and indicates a course or direction even in forests, deserts, seas and open, unsettled terrain.
2. As the territory changes, the map becomes obsolete; in times of rapid change a map may be dated and inaccurate by the time it is printed.
3. Inaccurate maps are sources of great frustration for people who are trying to find their way or navigate territory.
4. The map provides description, but the compass provides more vision and direction.
5. An accurate map is a good management tool, but a compass is a leadership and an empowerment tool.³⁵

The road to truly understanding and living the Incarnational ministry modeled by Jesus is also a long journey that must not be abandoned despite the increased difficulties. For in the complexities effective leadership is becoming increasingly necessary. Three ways to step into these openings are by understanding Christian leadership through the roles of interpreters, ambassadors, and branches. While all three pictures require some explanation, it is likely that the third seems the most out of place. However, for Down to Earth Leadership to become effective, there are benefits from grasping each of these concepts. Each of them places an emphasis, beneath the surface, on the personal relationship between the leader and God, which is then extended toward others. Each picture provides a means through which to discern character development.

Those who serve in positions of Christian leadership have the unique responsibility to be conversant, as an interpreter, with the truth of God, communicating that truth in a manner that allows the contextual community to gain understanding. As people who live in this world with a faithful longing for God's promise of the world to

³⁵ Ibid., 96.

come, those in leadership have the assigned task of being ambassadors of those promises to the community around them. Lastly, the idea of a branch recognizes through the ongoing development of a leader's relationship with God. The function or production that results in leadership will be that which brings benefit to others.

Interpreters

The premises of contextual theology provide some important clues for equipping believers in Jesus to be interpreters who represent the grace and truth of God while actively being immersed in the world. Stephen Bevans provides a challenge in due consideration of the past, with a focus on the future.³⁶ A challenge to be sure, but all interpreters need to be disciplined in their training and focused on their role. As participants in a community, it is essential to be aware of patterns of behavior and to be actively involved in local activities. It allows us to learn the language of the community.

In view of the importance of contextual theology, the call for intentionally equipped theologians is all the more important. According to Robert Schreiter: "The theologian cannot create a theology in isolation from the community's experience; but the community has need of the theologian's knowledge to ground its own experience within the Christian traditions of faith. In so doing, the theologian helps to create the bonds of mutual accountability between local and world church."³⁷ Schreiter is calling for the theologian to be a skilled and equipped interpreter.

³⁶ Stephen Bevans, "Contextual Theology as Theological Imperative," in *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 2002), 9.

³⁷ Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (New York: Orbis, 1985), 18.

Western thinking is often clouded by the innate desire to be part of a big accomplishment or to see dramatic changes take place. This is where the wide reaching policy-minded approach of both political and public theologies seems to miss the mark in their approaches. They become more like theories to adopt or plans to implement without proper regard for the nuances of the local context or the people groups in those local contexts or the individual people within those people groups. Theology that has application in real time, addressing the real questions of real people, can be most effective in achieving these goals.

In *The Making and Unmaking of Technological Society*, author Murray Jardine seeks to take the reader through the loss of effectiveness in words, while also directing attention toward a hopeful future in which the spoken word can re-shape a world that has diluted itself from meaning despite (and likely because of) the increasing volume of communications mediums. For Jardine there is “an implicit recognition that humans have a creative power, that is, an ability to change the world, in their capacity for speech.”³⁸ In his opinion, that hope is found in a transformational Christianity, the body of Christ, the followers of Jesus. Interpreters have the capacity to communicate in meaningful ways that are filled with both grace and truth.

The contextual theological interpreter is placed in just that position, to do what Stackhouse purports as being most effective: “With the proper cultivation and development, they are refined as they work their way not from the bottom up, nor from

³⁸ Murray Jardine, *The Making and Unmaking of Technological Society: How Christianity Can Save Modernity From Itself* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2004), 24.

the top down, but from the center out.”³⁹ Real change according to Stackhouse is neither a political movement nor a grassroots movement; rather it comes through interpreters capable of facilitating a conversation with Our God as they stand among/within a people and a community.

Ambassadors

An ambassador’s mission is to reside in a distant country and communicate news about their native land to those that live in his resident country. The ambassador’s mission is to connect the native land within the context of the distant country. The ambassador honours the privilege of this representation by a willful submission to the authority of the native land, and through a consistent communication with those in the distant country. For the ambassador, strengthening the bonds of citizenship in this manner is of prime importance.

Followers of Jesus Christ are called to bring change (light, salt, compassion, faith, hope, love, justice, mercy) to their land of residence. There is a distant homeland; one that can be pointed to and communicated about. It is an eternal Kingdom that cannot be ushered in, but one from which strength, perseverance, and joy can be derived. To that end, there is a responsibility to also take on the role of an ambassador, as strangers in the resident land, reminding others of a distant, different world: “We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors as though God were making his appeal through us.”⁴⁰

³⁹ Max Stackhouse, “Civil Religion, Political Theology and Public Theology: What’s the Difference?” *Political Theology* 5, no. 3 (2004), 291.

⁴⁰ 2 Cor. 5:20.

The role of an ambassador could well be described by James Davison Hunter's theory of a "faithful presence within" a society. It is one that resonates well with my own interests in exploring the role of incarnational leadership. He presents four implications of the incarnation of Jesus Christ for engagement with society:⁴¹

1. God's faithful presence implies that he pursues us. Though estranged through indifference or rebellion, God still seeks us out.
2. God's faithful presence is his identification with us.
3. The life he offers.
4. The life he offers is only made possible by his sacrificial love.

In these post-Christian pluralistic times, there exists a great opportunity for followers of Jesus Christ to take on the role of an ambassador. While there will be many who are in agreement with the first three implications of this role, it is the last one that is needed most to be effective as agents of reconciliation between this world, with all its troubles, and the eternal Kingdom that God promises. An Anglican priest who served as president of Queens College, Cambridge University, J.C. Pollkinghorne's provides a refreshing encouragement as he moves the discussion from the academics of theology to the practical out-working of the same:

The choice for the kingdom is the choice for generosity and the forgiving spirit of the kingdom. This does not mean compromising truth; it does mean creating hope of reconciliation, in that all activities can be forgiven so that anybody can be redeemed... It will be much easier if we are able to practice the presence of God, and particularly an awareness of the light of Christ within every person.⁴²

⁴¹ James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, & Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 241–42.

⁴² J.C. Polkinghorne, *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2011), 12.

Branches

Admittedly, understanding the purpose of virtue was never my intention when this research began. Like many others who serve in Christian leadership, I was searching for more efficient ways to function. I was looking for something to do in order to address the complexities that we face in ministry as well as something that could help the many troubling stories that I have heard. The search for function kept causing me to go deeper and deeper, peeling back layers of writings on leadership, discipleship, and missiology.

At this point the realization has been that no matter from where the questions are begin, they all find their source and their solution in the person of Jesus Christ. Perhaps too often, Christian theologians have separated some ideas that are meant to be together? This where the concept of virtue becomes important. Jesus' words to his disciples in John 15:5–11 (ESV), provide a necessary reminder:

I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me he is thrown away like a branch and withers; and the branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples. As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

The word “abide” is often translated as “remain” or “rest,” and it gives the idea of grafted into the main vine, Jesus. Most often in my personal reflection of this passage, I have focused on the outcomes and the fruitfulness that is promised. However, this research journey has redirected my pursuits toward the priority of abiding in Jesus or of staying focused on His life. The promise actually seems to be that those who are connected to Jesus in this abiding are availed of the capacity to be productive. That

capacity runs through the branches from the vine. To take the metaphor a little further, it is not simply a result of the work of the roots, but it is the nutrients that are supplied from the roots to the vine and into the branches that bring about the production of fruit. Those nutrients come from the fertility of the earth in which it is planted. Those nutrients, though they are unseen (see Chapter 4 discussion on liminality), ultimately give life and produce fruit upon the branches. Those nutrients are the virtues of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

It is possible that the incarnation of Jesus has become an assumed part of Christian leadership development. However, it is worth considering the value of an on-going focus on the implications of Jesus' humanity for the function of leadership. Those who serve in Christian leadership, with Jesus Christ as the ultimate example, should likewise be willing to empty ourselves, sacrificing our lifestyles, our ambitions, our goals and our comforts in order to be used of God to direct the attention of others towards the different world of God's eternal Kingdom. "One way or another, the V-shaped pattern (glory, humility, glory) that marked Christ's life will mark the lives of those who follow his example and embrace the path of humility, anonymity and cruciform discipleship."⁴³ The third chapter retraces some of the discoveries of St. Bonaventure in regard to how Christian leadership practices and ministry functions should be directly influenced by the virtues and example of Jesus Christ. All of this should, by God's power, bear the unmistakable characteristics of grace and truth.

⁴³ Fisk, *Frog Prince*.

CHAPTER 3

THE BRIDGE: BONAVENTURE AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF VIRTUE

Chapter One provided a picture of changes in the cultural makeup of Canadian communities over the last several decades. Canadian culture remains distinct from many other western nation, as it continues to be moved by its historical and current status of accommodation and autonomy. However the effectiveness of the church has dwindled significantly leaving challenges for those in Christian leadership who have a desire to be effective in applying the Gospel through their lives and into their communities.

A biblical overview of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ was the focus of Chapter Two. The implications, as followers of Jesus, particularly for those who are entrusted with Christian leadership positions, is to learn to live our earthly lives with a humility that causes us to grow in dependence upon God the Father and deepen our desire to serve others. The sacrifice that Jesus continually demonstrated allowed the power of God to be revealed through his life.

This chapter will look at the writings of Bonaventure, a 13th Century disciple and contemporary of Francis of Assisi. Bonaventure focused on the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. His writing draws upon the virtues discovered through the life, suffering and death of Christ for those who serve in Christian leadership. The six core virtues are: justice, compassion, forbearance, integrity, discernment and devotion. Bonaventure identified something that is often easily lost in this fast-paced society. Through the death of Christ, the power of God is availed; death then life. Often the focus is on life, abundant life, outcomes, beauty, majesty, and production. But what if time was also taken to remember that real life, resurrection life, comes from a willingness to sacrifice and suffer.

Bonaventure, became a well respected and influential teacher and leader. He composed a work entitled, “The Virtues of a Religious Superior.” In it, Bonaventure identifies necessary virtues for leadership using the imagery of the six wings of the seraph. Each wing of these angelic servants of God represents a particular virtue. In today’s rapidly changing and globally-influenced communities, Christian leadership that is grounded in and flows from these historic virtues is necessary.

In current times the nurturing of virtue has been overshadowed by other, more external, easy-to-monitor practices such as can be found in corporate business models. In contrast, Bonaventure, as a contemporary and student of St. Francis of Assisi, had a singular focus on the life and sufferings of Christ, therefore this chapter will attempt to: discover the need to return to Bonaventure’s motivation for developing virtues; identify those virtues and understand why he felt these virtues needed to be continually developed; and lastly, their implications for current Christian leadership development.

There are obstacles that stand in the way of appreciating the benefit of virtue in the life of the leader. Two of the most significant obstacles are the over-prioritizing of values and of characteristics. While each has its place in the life of an individual, it is virtue that can provide needed stability and strength through which the leader will be able to serve the Lord and a community over the course of many years and in the face of many challenges. “Whatever interpretation one may decide to give to ordained ministry today does not alter the fact that the pastor’s job is not an easy one...as one considers the role of clergy in today’s church, it is clear that there is unsettledness about it. It is a job in flux ... It is made increasingly difficult by rapid changes in the pastor’s work environment,

including the broader culture in which pastoral work is done.”¹ What follows is a process of delineation/clarification/definition of terms in order to better comprehend the word “virtues” and not values and characteristics.

Why Not Values?

All individuals have values. Additionally, every organization has values. There is often wise counsel in matching personal values with the written and unwritten values of an organization. However, values can and do change over the course of time. For instance, as a single man, I possessed values that were different to the values I held as a newly married man. These values further changed when children came along. Values can be influenced and shaped by external circumstances. Values can shift according to the demands of the moment and the complexity of culture. Leadership development guru, Aubrey Malphurs advocates strongly for an alignment between personal values and organizational values, however he also acknowledges that this works only as those values are not subject to change.² Malphurs’ use of values also suggests something deeper, more interior to the life of those in leadership. “A good core value touches the heart and elicits strong emotions ... it is passionate; it affects what you feel as much as what you think. It involves not only what you believe but how deeply you believe it.”³ Without using the actual words, Malphurs seems to acknowledge the unseen but necessary impact of virtue which shapes character and forms belief. “The presence of virtues acts as a powerful and

¹ Jackson W. Carroll and Becky R. McMillan, *God’s Potters: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2006), 13–14.

² Aubrey Malphurs, *Values-driven Leadership: Discovering and Developing Your Core Values for Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 36.

³ Ibid., 37.

dynamic force in the life of a leader, so much more than merely identifying with or agreeing with intrinsic values that can be easily ignored or put aside when one perceives there is an unwanted cost.”⁴ Leadership that is primarily centered on values can result in frustration, conflict and possible short tenure for those who serve.

Why Not Characteristics?

Another way in which leadership has been developed is through characteristics. The idea is that if potential leaders can understand the various characteristics, external identifiers which can be perceived by others, then they can be better equipped for leadership roles. John Maxwell, a renowned author and speaker on the subject of leadership says: “We don’t get to pick our talents or IQ. But we do choose our character. In fact we create it every time we make choices...As you live your life and make choices today, you are continuing to create your character.”⁵ Maxwell relates several accounts of what character looks like without ever giving it a definition. However, character forged, even through practiced repetition, will eventually be found to be lacking in times of weariness, uncertainty, opposition and loneliness. In those times of greatest challenge, people are likely to revert to their innate inclinations rather than any learned or preferentially deemed behavioural characteristics.

Pastor and author, Bill Hybels, writes much about leadership styles in his book, *Courageous Leadership*. It’s a book that has influenced many pastors and Christian leaders. The majority of the book details various “styles” of leadership, noting the vital

⁴ Glenn A. Williams, “Does the Presence or Absence of Virtues Define the Character of a Leader and Impact Performance?” (George Fox University, 2013), 58.

⁵ John Maxwell, *The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader: Becoming the Person Others Will Want to Follow* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), 4.

importance of uniting a leader's style with ministry needs.⁶ Near the conclusion Hybels acknowledges the importance, through the confession of other leaders to have “a close, consistent, vital walk with Jesus Christ.”⁷ He does not elaborate on what that could look like, but does provide an overview of various spiritual pathways designed to work on the interior life of those in leadership.

Gayle D. Beebe, explores the influential work on leadership understanding of Peter Drucker who recognizes that character does not stand alone, that it is “built on our understanding of ethics.”⁸ Beebe is saying that character is the result of another process, which is where identifying, working from and developing virtue come into play.⁹ A focus on character development through external means will be found lacking. It seems as though people of character are desired even though there is not a clear capacity to articulate what that exactly looks like. By contrast, it is worth digging one layer deeper to consider that character or the characteristics of a person are the result of the regular habitual work of virtue in the life of a person. Virtue is the means through which character is forged. For those who serve in Christian leadership, identifying virtue and nurturing the inner working of virtue is a vital principle of first import in forging the outer-working of character.

⁶ Bill Hybels, *Courageous Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 141.

⁷ Ibid., 217.

⁸ Gayle D. Beebe, *The Shaping of an Effective Leader: Eight Formative Principles of Leadership* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2011), 27.

⁹ Ibid., 35.

Understanding Virtue

Understanding virtue is not an easy task. While appreciated for its role in character formation, there is a great range of thought when it comes to identification of virtue and the means through which virtue is cultivated in the life of a person. Aristotle said that “none of the virtues of character arises in us naturally. For if something is by nature in one condition, habituation cannot bring it into another condition...the virtues arise in neither by nature nor against nature. Rather, we are by nature able to acquire them, and we are completed through habit.”¹⁰

Aristotle continues on to say that through habit or practice a person becomes what they inherently have the capacity to become. In essence, a person becomes defined by the consistent habituations. While the nuances are small the distinction is important. If a person lives in a world influenced by sin and selfishness, how can they ever get to a place where these habits are recognized for what they are? What is needed is an unchanging source through which human nature can be changed.

Michael Jenkins in his examination of leadership, reaches back to medieval philosophers to distinguish between character and virtue. In particular Jenkins looks to 15th Century philosopher Machiavelli’s work on character and virtue, noting “even those most deeply ingrained aspects of our identity and sense of self, can be shaped and restrained from destroying us, and at times rechanneled for good.”¹¹ To Jenkins, through his study on Machiavelli, character is a result of putting virtue into repeated practice.

¹⁰ Aristotle, “Nicomachean Ethics” in *Leading Lives that Matter: What We Should Do and Who We Should Be*, eds. Mark R. Schwehn and Dorothy C. Bass (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2006), 68.

¹¹ Michael Jenkins, *The Character of Leadership: Political Realism and Public Virtue in Nonprofit Organizations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Books, 1998), 103.

However, Jinkins application of these practices places the emphasis on the needs of the organization as the source for virtuous development.¹² As with values or styles this emphasis acknowledges the need to shape leadership in an objective manner. By placing the source for the development within the context of the community, it provides a shifting foundation upon which to develop leadership, given that community needs can change rapidly.

Alexandre Havard begins to redirect thinking in regard to the vital role of virtue in character formation for the purpose of dealing with the influences of culture when he says: “The more deeply we live the virtues, furthermore, the more likely it is that we will change the culture, rather than being content with merely shielding ourselves from its more pernicious effects. We must choose virtue—freely, consistently, joyously.”¹³

Richard Kilburg, by noting the frenetic rate of change in the world from 1810 to 1910 and then to 2010, recognizes that the approach to leadership development ought to reflect change.¹⁴ Bill Hybels despite his exemplary work on connecting values, character and the necessity of a close relationship with our Saviour, leaves this comment on leadership: “And imagine the difference it would make if all our leadership teams and volunteers were led by people who were in vital union with Jesus Christ.”¹⁵

¹² Ibid, 113.

¹³ Alexandre Havard, *Virtuous Leadership: An Agenda for Personal Excellence* (New York: Sceptre Publishers Inc., 2007), Loc. 1844–45.

¹⁴ Richard R. Kilburg, “The Timeless Need for Leaders,” *Virtuous Leaders: Strategy, Character and Influence in the 21st Century* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2012): 3–6, accessed November 24, 2014, EBSCOHost.

¹⁵ Hybels, *Courageous Leadership*, 229.

Similarly, Canadian authors and ministry leaders, Richard and Henry Blackaby recognize the evidence of spirituality in the life of those who serve in Christian leadership, “More than anything else, people are looking for spiritual leaders who are clearly experiencing God’s presence. There is no greater source of influence for spiritual leaders than the manifest presence of God in their lives.”¹⁶ They also go on to relate the need to go beyond the acquisition of position and influence, to the need for on-going cultivation in the life of those in Christian leadership.¹⁷ As a graduate of the Leadership and Global Perspectives program at George Fox University, Glenn Williams also recognizes the need for the development of virtue: “It is not how a leader is born but what he or she has learned in relation to these virtues and been able to habitually put into practice so that his or her identity has been deeply marked and branded by them.”¹⁸

Virtue is indeed a vast topic to examine. As noted above, Jinkins points toward the necessity of virtue for the leader and Killburg goes so further by identifying particular virtue and their implications for leaders and organizations. Both Hybels and Blackaby, on the other hand, both recognize the need for leaders to have a closely connected relationship with Jesus Christ. “Spiritual leadership is based on the work of the Holy Spirit and on spiritual character. Without the guiding, empowering presence of the Spirit, leaders may hold positions but they will not be spiritual leaders.”¹⁹ Williams provides necessary insight as to the manner in which virtue imbeds itself in the life of the leader.

¹⁶ Richard and Henry Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership* (Nashville: B & H Pub. Group, 2011), 96.

¹⁷ Ibid., 107.

¹⁸ Williams, “Does the Presence,” 55.

¹⁹ Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*, 88.

What is now required is a means to clarify and if possible, connect all of these ideas together.

Who is Bonaventure?

Enter Bonaventure, born in the year 1217, in the small town of Bagnorea, Italy. It is reputed that he became very ill while still child. So grave was his illness, that his mother made a pledge to give him into the Lord's service under the care of Saint Francis of Assisi should her son become well.²⁰ In response to his gift of life, out of respect for his mother's vow and his own gratitude toward Saint Francis, Bonaventure dedicated his earthly days to learning from the faith of his mentor,²¹ whose death would come just nine years later.

Bonaventure's writings regarding the life and ethics of St. Francis are extensive and beyond the scope of this paper. However, it is important to note that measuring the significance of St. Francis' influence upon Bonaventure would certainly be beneficial. Whether it was the humility of knowing his young life was extended through a Franciscan prayer, the time spent in his company as a youth or the years spent pouring over his mentor's life and writings; there is a benefit from taking a look backward into time to consider virtue from the depth of the imprint upon Bonaventure's own life and

²⁰ Jacques Guy Bougerol, *Introduction to the Works of Bonaventure* (Paterson, NJ: St. Anthony Guild Press, 1964), 3.

²¹ Laurence Costelloe, *Saint Bonaventure The Seraphic Doctor Minister-General of the Franciscan Order* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1911), 5.

writings.²² In his biographical work, Jacques Bougerol captures the essence of Bonaventure's motivations for life and ministry:

Not alone in his spirituality, but all of his thought, is centered on Christ. Christ is indeed the center of everything: the Middle One of the divine Persons; the exemplary cause of the whole creation; and by His redeeming incarnation, the Mediator of salvation and life, the Light who bring to every man understanding and the certainty of truth. He is also the Goal toward whom tend all the efforts of asceticism and all the desires of the soul in its quest for God through contemplation.²³

The inspiration he received from St. Francis, together with his own life long focus upon Jesus Christ, would form Bonaventure's own understanding of life and Christian leadership. Distilling the elements that contributed to this focus, and the implications of each essential part forms the nucleus of this research.

Why Did Bonaventure Focus on the Virtues of Jesus Christ?

One commonality between the 21st century leader and his peer from the 13th century is that neither had personal bodily access to the life of Jesus Christ. Both need to rely upon the Scriptures, given by God the Father and made known through the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Those scriptures became the main source of Bonaventure's contemplation. "If man is to understand the course of creation, his eye must embrace the whole of it. And since the shortness of his life precludes his doing this, the Scriptures are

²² Ibid., 63. "When these researches were completed, Bonaventure returned to Paris to work up into an authentic record of St. Francis' life all the materials—oral and written—he had come by during his sojourn in Italy. Every incident of any moment in St. Francis' life is faithfully recorded. The graces bestowed upon him, the labours he undertook, the sufferings he bore, the virtues he practised, the miracles he worked: all are graphically and sympathetically described. The following episode gives us an insight into the fervour of soul with which this task was undertaken. On one occasion, as our Saint was engaged on his work, his intimate friend St. Thomas Aquinas came to visit him. Gently opening the door of his cell, the saintly Dominican saw Bonaventure seated at his table, pen in hand, and so engrossed in contemplation that he was lost to exterior things. Deeply moved, St. Thomas withdrew whispering to his companion 'Come! let us leave a Saint to write the life of a Saint'."

²³ Bougerol, *Introduction*, 9.

given him so that he may see through them the order of the whole.”²⁴ By keeping focus on the Scriptures, Bonaventure learned to listen to the words of Jesus as He firstly responded toward his Father, and then as he ministered to those around him.²⁵ The ideas of devotion toward God and devotion to those around him were never separate ideas to him.

Bonaventure was not alone in his interest in virtue. Thomas Aquinas, who has a more enduring legacy in the arena of philosophical thought, was also influenced by the writings and teaching of both Aristotle and St. Francis. Aquinas acknowledged the importance of virtue as a recognition that every person ultimately has a desire to achieve goodness.²⁶ He posited that through an application of reason and will virtue could be developed. Aquinas placed more emphasis on the act of the will (habits) in the development of virtue, which he viewed as a result of, or the evidence of grace.²⁷ In contrast, Bonaventure looked first within, in recognition that a yielded spirit toward God allows the Spirit of God to effectuate grace from which the virtues of Christ are derived. Biographer Christopher Cullen identifies Bonaventure’s focus:

Since grace is a rectification of the soul, when the gratuitous virtues are infused by God into a soul made virtuous by acquired habits, the rectitude that they bring “supervenes” on the rectitude of nature, enlarging and confirming it. This supervenient grace concurs with the acquired virtues and leads them to perfection.²⁸

²⁴ Ibid., 92.

²⁵ Dominic Faccin, *Spiritual Exercises According to Saint Bonaventure*, trans. by Fr. Owen Anthony Colligan (New York: The Franciscan Institute: Saint Bonaventure, 1955), 126.

²⁶ Pater S. Eardley and Carl N. Still, *Aquinas: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2010), 74, accessed October 19, 2015, EBook Collection, EBSCOhost.

²⁷ Christopher Cullen, *Bonaventure* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 159, accessed November 17, 2014, EBook Collection, EBSCOhost.

²⁸ Ibid.

Through this dual work of contemplation and habit, according to Bonaventure, an internal change occurs in the life of the learner. “The transformation of the human being involved in being “deformed” (or God-formed) includes living according to the standard found in human nature insofar as this human nature is an expression of the exemplar in the divine mind ... living according to the standard found in Christ as the new man, or the perfect expression of our humanity.”²⁹ In another of his works, a repeated refrain through his examination of the life of Christ is that disciples of Jesus Christ, would “give heed to understand everything that was said and done, as though you (Jesus Christ) had been present.”³⁰ Most influential on the writings and teachings of Bonaventure was the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.³¹ It is through this penultimate event in Our Saviour’s earthly life that the articulation of the importance of virtue has been shaped:

He who wishes to glory in the Cross and the Passion must dwell with continued meditation on the mysteries and events that occurred. If they were considered with complete regard of mind, they would, I think, lead the meditator to a (new) state. To him who searches for it from the bottom of the heart and with the marrow of his being, many hoped-for steps would take place by which he would receive new compassion, new love, new solace, and then a new condition that would seem to him a promise of glory ... Therefore I exhort you that, if you have studiously considered the things said (on his life), you much more diligently concentrate the whole spirit and all the virtues, for here is shown more especially this charity of his that should kindle all of our hearts.³²

Paul Anderson, an author of Quaker heritage rightly recognizes the significance of a Christ-centered focus: “When God wanted to communicate his saving love to the world

²⁹ Ibid, 156.

³⁰ Bonaventure, *Meditations*, trans. Isa Ragusa (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), 16.

³¹ Bonaventure, *The Mind’s Road*, trans. George Boas (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1953), Loc. 797–98.

³² Bonaventure, *Meditations*, 317–18.

with finality, he didn't send us a ritual, a book, a song, or even a good sermon. He sent his only begotten Son: God's Word made flesh (John 1:14). The ultimate sacrament—the greatest physical conveyance of spiritual reality *ever*—is therefore the incarnation!”³³

For Bonaventure, virtue discovered in the life of Christ provides a dual function for the leader. Firstly, virtue provides the means to be equipped to engage life in community and secondly, it is able to strengthen and purify the life of the individual.³⁴ *The Virtues of a Religious Superior* were written by Bonaventure as an attempt to equip those called to the high privilege of ministry with essential elements necessary for their capacity to serve the Lord and their people.

Bonaventure identifies virtues, imputed by God toward man, which when examined, developed and habitually adhered to allow the minister to reflect the nature of Jesus Christ to his people. These virtues, found first in the Perfect life of Jesus Christ, become resident in the life of a person only because of the grace of God. As the grace of God, through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, transforms natural human nature to reflect the divine nature of Jesus, these virtues should be resident.

A Biblical Perspective of Virtue

Alexandre Havard, in his excellent work *Virtuous Leadership*, devotes a well written chapter on the science of virtues, called ‘aretology’. In Havard’s words aretology “was founded by the classical Greek philosophers and enriched by its encounter with

³³ Paul Anderson, *Following Jesus: The Heart of Faith and Practice* (Newberg: Barclay Press, 2013), 127.

³⁴ Cullen, *Bonaventure*, 160.

Judeo-Christian thought and spirituality.”³⁵ Glenn Williams in his doctoral work also provides an excellent survey on various philosophical, ethical, intellectual approaches to virtue and classifications of virtue through the ages. In keeping with the focus previously made on the Incarnation of Jesus Christ (Chapter 2) and the life-long focus of Bonaventure this paper will consider the way in which virtue is described from a biblical perspective.

The Greek word for virtue is ἀρετή (pronounced ‘areti’), which in its simplest terms signifies moral excellence,³⁶ was a prominent part of philosophical thought in advance of New Testament times and in the centuries that have since unfolded. Aristotle is largely credited with opening the door to the understanding of virtue.³⁷ “Because the self is more like a journey than a formula, we must acquire certain skills of character (virtues) in order to stay on course. This temporal view of the self proves to be congenial to the Christian story. Since Aristotle did not establish a specific hierarchy of virtues, medieval theologians could adopt his theory to their purposes.”³⁸ Lists of virtues can be found with various labels. Among them: the theological or supernatural virtues (the faith, hope and love written about by the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 13) or the Cardinal virtues espoused by Aquinas (justice, prudence, courage, and temperance). There are intellectual virtues and moral virtues. Some lists will contain as little as three or as many

³⁵ Havard, *Virtual Leadership*, Loc. 1768–70.

³⁶ Word Reference English Greek Dictionary, accessed October 15, 2015, <http://www.wordreference.com/gren/ἀρετή>.

³⁷ Aristotle, “Nicomachean Ethics.” Aristotle is considered the pioneer of understanding virtue. He developed a list of 12 virtues (courage, temperance, liberality, magnificence, magnanimity, pride, patience, truthfulness, wittiness, friendliness, modesty and righteous indignation), which have provided a launching point for Aquinas, Bonaventure and many others.

³⁸ William C. Spohn, “The Return of Virtue Ethics,” *Theological Studies* 53, no. 1 (1992): 63, accessed October 19, 2015, *ATLASerials, Religion Collection, EBSCOhost*.

as twelve different virtues. More important than the number of virtues on those lists are the means by which they are identified in the life of a person. There are those who are inclined to look at the development of virtue as exclusively a learned habit that is shaped through external guidelines and moral coaching. And there are those who want to sidestep those discussions through a belief that all virtue comes from within; that virtue is the result of an internal or spiritual working in a person's life. That discussion, which involves moral, philosophical, psychological and theological dialogue, goes beyond the scope of this research.³⁹ However, the lack of consensus through thousands of years does provide the freedom of looking at virtue through the life of Jesus Christ and returns us back to Bonaventure's approach:

To say that Bonaventure's spiritual theory centers on imitating Christ, however, is not to say that Bonaventure adopts a merely moral view of salvation. In other words, one way of conceiving this restoration would be to see Christ as providing a good example of the way human beings ought to live life ... Bonaventure does not adopt this view; he believes that Christ brings about the restoration through the instrument of divine grace, which is itself a real cause in the natural order of things, and that grace effects the human intellect and will.⁴⁰

Despite the fact that identifying a list of virtues can be challenging, Kilburg's definition of virtuous leaders is, "those who discern, decide and enact the right things to do, and do them in the right way, in the right time frames, for the right reasons."⁴¹ He also identifies a list of six virtues, inspired through the philosopher Plato. Those six core virtues (wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, temperance and transcendence)⁴² share some

³⁹ Ibid., 66.

⁴⁰ Cullen, *Bonaventure*, 148.

⁴¹ Ibid., 85.

⁴² Kilburg, "Timeless Need," 83.

similarity with the list that Bonaventure identifies in the life of Christ.⁴³ This work moves us in the right direction, as it begins to centre the discussion of Christian leadership on internal factors which shape character and influence performance:

Within these concepts, a virtue-centered approach to understanding leadership can be best characterized not by the competency-based questions of “what do you do?” and “how do those actions make your performance effective usually as judged by others?” Instead, leadership centers on questions of who you are, who you want to be, and how that affects your performance in the area of discernment, decision making, and action. The latter question moves the discussion of leadership effectiveness beyond the realms of specific behavior and leadership competencies and requires consideration of other factors contributing to performance.⁴⁴

Kilburg also contributes a sophisticated method of understanding virtue and suggests a fourfold lifelong process of leadership that flows from virtue.⁴⁵ Killburg’s approach mirrors most other approaches to leadership development. They center the success of their approach upon the repeated external work of human understanding and habitual practice. While the intentionality of a willing spirit is one important criterion, more is required for virtue to make a lasting difference. For those who serve in Christian leadership the necessary reminder that Bonaventure brings is that through a declaration of faith in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God’s grace is made available. It is through a continual dependence upon the work of God’s grace that a leader learns to function.

⁴³ Spohn, “Return,” 74.

⁴⁴ Kilburg, “Timeless Need,” 85.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 94–96. Kilburg calls this *wisdom mapping* and it involves reflection upon family, organizational, executive team history and tendency together with situational awareness. For Kilburg, leaders “must have a more refined understanding of human wisdom, courage, temperance, justice and reverence and how these aspects of a virtuous character can appear or disappear under the stresses and strains of their own and others’ executives lives. Furthermore, they must be committed to continuously developing the virtuous aspects of their character with the full and certain knowledge that such characteristics cannot be consistently deployed or counted on if they are not practiced and honed just like any other aspect of human capacity.”

It is possible that in the cultural quest to professionalize Christian ministry the call to godly excellence has been neglected. It is possible that the consumeristic values of culture have been allowed to distort the biblical framework of leadership. Thus,

[the] leader's primary aim is to satisfy the expressed needs of customers, clients, or members in exchange for their approbation, cooperation and support. Market values and transactional leadership may be important for excellent business leadership but they have serious limitations when applied to the church.⁴⁶

It is possible that those who enter into Christian leadership come with organizational strength that neglects the role of the body of Christ to be “producers of beliefs, feelings, and practices in congregational life that aim at being faithful to the gospel in the congregation's time and place.”⁴⁷

The significance of virtue can be gleaned from the way in which it is used within the biblical text. In particular there are three passages which capture the five instances encompassing the three different Greek forms of the word ‘virtue’ which have been included in the original text. Though brief they provide insight into the manner through which the transforming ministry of the Holy Spirit of God within us shapes external action or character:

1. Philippians 4:8–9 – “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is **any excellence (*αρετή*)** and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things. The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.” The Apostle Paul gives a strong encouragement in a letter written while

⁴⁶ Carroll and McMillan, *God's Potters*, 194.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

under house arrest, to not allow external circumstances to keep you from understanding or experiencing the peace of God. “Each day try to find a few minutes of that blessed solitude you need so much to keep your interior life going.”⁴⁸ Time taken, habitually, to focus on virtue is never time wasted and becomes part of what God uses to put us in a position to receive His peace.

2. 1 Peter 2:9 – “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the **praises** (*ᾠμὰς*) of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” The privilege of being part of God’s family is to give voice to the virtue found in him. Through this relationship insight is given into the diverse vastness and complete holiness of virtue. This then ought to inspire followers of Jesus, and in particular those who serve in leadership, to describe virtue to others.
3. 2 Peter 1:3–9 – “His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and **goodness** (*ἀρετή*). Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires. For this very reason make every effort to add to your faith **goodness** (*ἀρετήν*) and to **goodness** (*ἀρετή*) knowledge, self-control, perseverance and to perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness and to brotherly kindness love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten

⁴⁸ Jose Maria Escriva, *The Way* (New York: Scepter Publishers Inc., 2010), Loc. 790, Kindle.

that he has been cleansed from his past sin.” It is from God’s own virtue that people are called into relationship with him. Subsequently it is his virtue at work within each person that allows his character to take shape. As a result of the theological virtues of faith, hope and love, the core virtues of Jesus Christ shape character. Together with the other instances of how virtue is described in the New Testament; understanding is gained that virtue is not restricted to exterior habit. It is also a work of faith as the Spirit of God works within each person.

For those who serve in Christian leadership and struggle with feelings of ineffectiveness and the trappings of a production-oriented culture these verses provide a sobering reminder of where purpose and motivation originate. Nurturing the work of the Spirit and learning to lead from virtue therefore seems to be worth stronger consideration in Christian leadership development.

Bonaventure’s Six Core Virtues

Followers of Jesus, who serve in leadership roles can be better equipped to handle the complexities of ministry as they become adept at gracefully helping themselves and others in the unlearning and relearning according to the Word of God. Bonaventure would strongly encourage those who aspire to Christian leadership to be deeply saturated with a depth of understanding of God’s Word: “For Bonaventure the theologian must seek wisdom: theology must be within the theologian...before becoming the same pious knowledge in those who receive his teaching.”⁴⁹ This can only be done in as much as

⁴⁹ Bougerol, *Introduction*, 90.

those in leadership are likewise being shaped by God's Word. As those in Christian leadership take time to engage their roles, being informed through personal time (not as part of the job) consistently spent listening, learning, thinking, understanding and putting into practice; their capacity for leadership can be deepened and increased. As those in Christian leadership take that responsibility more seriously then they will become more equipped and captivated by the immeasurable joy of seeing Truth come alive in the lives of others, and then come together in giving shape, direction and unity of purpose to a church family. Nullens and Michener recognize the importance of developing an ethical framework as a community: "In community we must develop space for internal plurality and dialogue. It is precisely this openness to internal dialogue that makes the church a genuine moral community."⁵⁰

Leaders cannot be satisfied with merely thinking. Thinking is just the beginning. It's only an indication that a process is just getting started. Those who serve in leadership reflect the life of Christ by giving ourselves: engaging with others to listen, learn, think, understand and act, so that together they can all experience the fullness of God's intended joy and purposefulness of the life. The capacity to intentionally engage the thought process of others is articulated well by the work of Patrick Nullens and Ronald Michener:

It is risky to articulate this faith experience in precise dogmatic formulations where we may be more inclined to put our trust in clever definitions than in Scripture itself. We must avoid getting bogged down in the splitting of hairs, locking up the life-infused character of the Bible in our human categories of rationality ... God's Word is useful for a virtuous life ... It is about ethical

⁵⁰ Patrick Nullens and Ronald T. Michener, *The Christian Matrix of Ethics: Integrating Philosophy and Moral Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Colorado Springs, CO: Paternoster Publishing, 2010), 44.

actions, good works, not simply theological dogmatism. Good works, however, begin by listening to the voice of God.⁵¹

Bonaventure's list of core virtues does not specifically include humility. Rather, he presumes humility as a necessary essential as individuals recognize their spiritual poverty and submit themselves to God's promise of grace through faith in Jesus Christ.⁵² The continuing interaction of humility and grace is the means through which virtue is developed in the life of a Christian leader. "A humble heart is virtue's point of departure. The humble person craves virtue."⁵³ Again, this speaks to the acknowledgment of a person to yield their will to the will of God, allowing him to work within their interior life. "Virtuous living stabilizes behavior. One is less susceptible to external stimuli, less reactive, more in control of one's life... Virtue is not a kind of talent, used as needed; it is ever-present in all circumstances. It becomes who you are; it is you."⁵⁴

Humility will move from within the lives of those in leadership and be demonstrated in incarnational ministry (see Chapter 2). In an age where fewer people are venturing into churches to search out the truth, there is a growing need for incarnational ministry. Christian leadership will need to increasingly be purposeful to bring the virtuous vitality of Jesus to the communities in where leaders live and serve. It will need to be relevant to those influenced by the leader and be prepared to bring the graceful application of God's Word to the circumstances that arise. Humility will also allow leadership to celebrate what God is doing in the lives of others. Leaders who are

⁵¹ Ibid., 191.

⁵² Cullen, *Bonaventure*, 96.

⁵³ Havard, *Virtuous Leadership*, Loc. 1974.

⁵⁴ Ibid., Loc. 1806.

continually learning and growing in their relationship with the Lord will discover that God will provide opportunities to encourage, instruct and equip others.

Bonaventure, in no way, limits the virtues of Jesus to these six, however, he does recognize those detailed here as core virtues in this particular work. In particular these six virtues are those that have emerged from his contemplation of the suffering of Jesus as it is recorded in the Scriptures.

That concept of suffering is the story of the bamboo forest. Bamboo does not just happen. In fact, many bamboo plants can take up to five years before the shoots even start to push through the ground. Only after those initial years of invisibility, do they begin to experience growth. It's also the story of the sequoia, which, even if it experiences death, can see new life develop. As Bonaventure has discovered, the virtues necessary for Christian leadership to flourish take time to develop.

What follows is a summary of Bonaventure's definition of each virtue and then a brief personal application for the implication of this virtue on current leadership. The six virtues are: justice, compassion, forbearance, integrity, discernment and devotion.⁵⁵

Bonaventure differentiates these six core virtues from the theological virtues (faith, hope and love), as he ascribes them solely to the work of God's grace in a person's life. In so doing he also notes a distinction while the theological virtues are meant to "invigorate and rectify the powers of the soul with respect to God," the core virtues "principally rule and rectify the powers of the soul with respect to neighbor and self."⁵⁶ For Bonaventure

⁵⁵ Bonaventure, *The Virtues of a Religious Leader* (St. Louis, MO: B. Herder Book Company, Aeterna Press, 2014), Loc. 96–787, Kindle.

⁵⁶ Cullen, *Bonaventure*, 98.

there is both a personal and a communal (or political) aspect to the development of these six core virtues:

1. **Justice** – Bonaventure did not recognize merely the idea of justice but recognizes a necessary zeal for justice. He implores those in leadership to be concerned about the holiness of God and the divinely created value of each person as the impetus for this first virtue. Bonaventure also extends the virtue of justice further by recognizing the purity of gathered worship as well as the manner in which the Lord is honoured with in a community. He says, “... first of all take care not to teach anything wrong; secondly not allow or permit himself to be moved by importunity or deception...whereas it is his duty to admonish and teach how bad certain things are, and to deter others from presuming to attempt them in the future ...”⁵⁷

A zeal for justice requires that the purity and passion of God for his people become resident in the heart of the leader, giving direction to all responsibilities of his office. Understanding the zeal for justice can transform Christian leadership from a position or a job to the distinguished privilege of contending for God’s standard of holiness in a particular community. Following the example of Jesus (see The Gospel of John 8:1–11), who resisted the urging of others to make quick judgments, he understood that God would ultimately judge. Jesus’ commitment to justice though disciplined always allowed room for others to make changes to their lives.

⁵⁷ Bonaventure, *Virtues*, Loc. 169.

2. **Compassion** – Charity is the ancient word that Bonaventure uses to describe this deeply imbedded love that a minister needs to have for those he serves among. This love comes from an understanding of Christ's love for God the Father, and then His resultant love for all people. That understanding of love should lead the minister to endure suffering, not run from it, knowing that through suffering God is preparing the minister to better demonstrate the virtue of compassion towards those who will face suffering in their own lives. Hebrews 4:15 brings the reminder that in Jesus "we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin." The compassion that Jesus displayed in his humanity can be attributed, in part, to his familiarity with human suffering. In his suffering, Jesus stayed committed to fulfilling God's purpose.

It is possible that in the western world, there are those who enter into and serve in Christian leadership who are unwilling to absorb the costs of suffering. The professionalization of the clergy role in many evangelical frameworks, combined with the ease with which congregants can move from one church body to another, has complicated the ability to experience and engage in compassionate love. Individualization as well as the separation that comes as a result of increasing dependency on social media also places significant obstacles for the expression of compassion. Christian leadership that is willing to re-engage people in the rhythm of their lives will go a long way to demonstrating the virtue of compassion.

3. **Forbearance** – We would tend toward translating this word as “patience” in modern language. However, the translation of “forbearance” points to its historical roots and stays true to Bonaventure’s intentions as it speaks to a greater depth of virtue than one would normally consider: Those who are inexperienced in the religious life, and have no taste for spiritual things, are apt to imagine that the whole strength of the spiritual life consists in this external respectability, and therefore defend the latter with great zeal, having no regard for true virtue.⁵⁸

Forbearance requires a gentleness toward others, knowing how to handle differing temperaments and inevitable disappointments when dealing with the lives of others. The virtue of forbearance really implies the necessity to avoid impulse reaction to people or circumstances. Instead, learning to respond with the grace which God abundantly supplies will be necessary, particularly in a culture where needs and preferences change so rapidly. In contrast to those rapid changes, the virtue of forbearance also brings the characteristic of perseverance into play, as the leader adjusts the pace of ministry or the advancement of programs in order to focus on the needs of people in a way that honours God:

Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down on the right hand of the throne of God.⁵⁹

For Bonaventure and for those who serve in Christina leadership, the virtue of forbearance is developed through a continual focus on the earthly life of

⁵⁸ Ibid., Loc. 329.

⁵⁹ Heb. 12:1-2.

Jesus, as he resisted the effects of sin in the world but also as he submitted himself to suffering in the fulfillment of God's purposes.

4. **Integrity** – Bonaventure describes this virtue using the term “edification”. The implication from him is the need for consistent, self-discipline in the development of his own relationship with God, in the face of many and diverse challenges and temptations. Those who serve in Christian leadership are to be examples to their congregations and through their own integrity they can then disciple others to follow Christ as they themselves have learned.

In the country of Canada, to be registered with the government entitles a church to non-profit status, which at the current time provides favourable operational tax relief. One of the requirements for clergy who work in churches is to submit job descriptions, which break down, by percentage, their various roles and responsibilities. Churches also have policies requiring annual reviews, by local churches as well as denominational agencies. There is a temptation to place more emphasis on these external measurements than on the virtue of integrity before God, in order to serve his Kingdom purposes. The virtue of integrity requires a greater emphasis on the authentic reflection of Christ's example humility and service over any extraneous standard (John 13:15 “I (Jesus) have set you an example, that you should do as I have done for you.”). Integrity allows those who serve in Christian leadership to demonstrate equal concern and care for those in their charge.

5. **Discernment** – For Bonaventure the virtue of discernment is necessary for the discipleship of congregants, correction and direction in the lives of people and the corporate body, as well its role in guiding and directing the leader’s own life. This discernment is rooted in the Word of God and contends for the glory of God and not of self.

This virtue of discernment speaks to the humility required to recognize that leaders do not possess all information or answers, however they can help people to listen also to God and together learn to apply His truth to their lives. Jesus provides that example in his interaction with a teacher of the law, which becomes a preamble into the story of the Good Samaritan. In asking “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” (Luke 10:26) Jesus allows those in his hearing to enter into their own discernment, interacting with God’s truth in a conceivable occurrence in their own community. A Spirit dependent discernment requires a humble approach to the circumstances that arise within the complexities of a particular community. According to Bonaventure, those in Christian leadership need to protect against the hardness of being authoritarian, rather they “should seek to accomplish by prayer, in order that God may soon convert the erring subject or bring to light his hidden malice for the purpose of applying a suitable remedy.”⁶⁰

6. **Devotion** – This last virtue for Bonaventure is what informs the other virtues. No one virtue is more or less important than the others. Each wing of the seraph is equally important to the angelic being’s function. The virtue of devotion speaks of

⁶⁰ Ibid., Loc. 557.

a committed faithfulness to God together with a commitment to prayer, on behalf of the community being served. It also includes a dedication of purity before the Lord, as his instrument.

The implications of the virtue of devotion is that as those who serve in Christian leadership would be aware of those activities which compete for the precious commodity of time and take away from the capacity to invest in prayer on behalf of the ministry and the people in their communities. This virtue speaks to the discipline of resisting the many good things that distract from the best use of time and energy. Bonaventure's words are a commendation that those who "guide souls ought to make every effort to possess (*devotion*), for by means of it, he is always informed of what should be done, assisted in doing it, and safeguarded against neglect."⁶¹ Above all, this virtue of devotion is a determined effort to remain authentically engaged in God's purpose in the calling of Christian leadership, reflecting Jesus' own prayer (Matthew 26:38) in the garden of Gethsemane before he would be arrested, tortured and killed upon the cross: "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will but as you will."

Conclusion

Providing Christian leadership in Canada is no easy task, due to the impact of pluralism and diversity. Those who are entrusted with positions of leadership can benefit from continual development in order to meet the complexities of the communities in which they serve. Providing one size fits all strategies and training ignores the complex

⁶¹ Ibid., Loc. 724.

diversity of people's lives and the influences that impose themselves upon a community. Though the list of functions for Christian leadership has many common elements, care of congregants, ministry effectiveness and community engagement add their own layers of complexity. Each leader adds an element of diversity. Each ministry adds an element of diversity. Each congregation adds its own diversity, depending on size and context.

In the midst of these complexities leadership needs to find an unchanging focal point through which to draw motivation and encouragement. The life of Christ offers both those elements and so much more. Bonaventure's writings reflect an in depth look at the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Through his reflections, Bonaventure identifies six core virtues that are made available to all who place their faith in Christ, and are entrusted with the role of Christian leadership. Through a continual focus on these virtues of justice, compassion, forbearance, integrity, discernment and devotion, leadership character is shaped. As they were evident in the life of Jesus when he came down to earth, they also can increase Christian leadership effectiveness.

The body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12), moves, adjusts and functions according to the impulse received from Jesus Christ. Therefore His virtue should be evident in us. Amid the complexity of current culture, having a framework through which to understand that function will be essential. By understanding the nature of Complex Adaptive Systems, the next chapter provides such a framework, through which virtue can influence leadership function. As those who serve in Christian leadership, particularly to those who serve among Canadian congregations, may this admonition from the stylus of Bonaventure provide motivation to cultivate the virtues of Christ, for the glory of God and for the sake of his Kingdom.

*Open your eyes therefore, prick up your spiritual ears, open your lips, and apply your heart, that you may see your God in all creatures, may hear him, praise him, love and adore him, magnify and honor him, lest the whole world rise against you.*⁶²

⁶² Bonaventure, *Mind's Road*, Loc. 359–62.

CHAPTER 4

COMPLEX ADAPTIVE SYSTEMS

Introduction

The survey of the current Canadian landscape (Chapter 1) recognized that, as the decades have advanced into the 21st century, Christian leadership development has not always kept pace with the changes that are a bi-product of culturally diverse communities. Some churches and ministries have continued to operate as though their communities will readily come to them for answers, comfort and renewed perspective. However, the example of the incarnated Jesus Christ (Chapter 2) reminds us that our Lord was intentional about identifying with a community of people, extending himself in loving self-sacrificing service (grace) toward them and yet was able to hold onto the fullness of God's transcendent message (truth). In so doing there was a recognition that there is a validity in identifying with the difficulties about emulating Jesus' approach to ministry. The virtues were uncovered, through the writings of Bonaventure in Chapter 3. These virtues moved allowed further consideration, beyond the function of Jesus' ministry, into the motives that informed the actions of Jesus.

How do the virtues of Jesus Christ fit into the rhythm of leadership and ministry? Are the virtues of Jesus Christ personal or corporate? To what extent do they affect ministry within the church? To what extent do they affect ministry beyond the church? In a world that is used to having quick-fix models, examples and programs, these are all normal and beneficial questions. However, it should be understood that there is no "one-size-fits-all" approach. This chapter will present a brief overview of how an understanding of complex adaptive systems can be beneficial for Christian leadership in a

society that is undergoing a constant (some would say accelerating) rate of change. In her writings, Carol Pearson warns against the natural tendency to resist change. “There is a cost to holding on to old thought patterns and behaviors. We tend to narrow our thinking and collect only data that reinforce our point of view, which constricts our life and the meaning we make of it.”¹ These natural tendencies identified by Pearson provides a stimulus for seeking alternative means of embracing and integrating the unavoidable changes.

“In our day the church building was used a lot as well.” That’s part of a conversation that I had on one cold’s winter’s evening. An elderly couple was visiting an event being held in the church building, in partnership with another local organization to help promote literacy among children in our community. This very kind lady said she used to attend services in the original building in the sixties and seventies. She said, “We lived right across the street, so of course we were here every Sunday.” She went on to tell me of the many different functions that they held, which took place on several different nights of the week. She then drifted into more quiet tones when she realized that at some point all those activities eventually stopped, the people dwindled and the building was sold.

That’s the way it was in this community and many others in this nation. People went to church, because that’s just what you did. It was a predominantly Christian-influenced society. The story of the original congregation is all too familiar, and has repeated itself over the course of many years in many communities. As inward focused

¹ Carol Pearson, *The Transforming Leader: New Approaches to Leadership for the Twenty-first Century* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2012), 64, accessed October 26, 2015, EBook Collection EBSCOhost.

activity lost its appeal, so did its effect on the lives of the people. The result was more elbow room in the pews, and more echoes in the hallways.

Meanwhile, outside those walls, society was changing and the people were not prepared to engage it. Two-parent, European immigrant/descendant, single-income homes are no longer the norm. We work more, play more, we rest less and we are restless. Sundays really hold no different options than any other day of the week. There are an increasing number of homes where neither English nor French (the two official languages) are spoken in the home. Some might say that life today is more complicated than it was just a few short decades ago. However, that may imply that it is simply busier or there are additional responsibilities than those previously held. Complications imply that the systems and methods are remaining unchanged but the variables that impose themselves are becoming too numerous.

In discussions of church function and roles of Christian leadership there is often a need to distinguish between internal and external function. A traditional mindset seeks to protect the internal function of the church leader and to remove complication from external influence. In so doing, it is possible to develop a lack of appreciation and possibly a fear of the changes as a result of the representative cultural diversity. If current culture is complicated, then the solutions may be to simplify or eliminate some of the increased busyness from daily life.

Alternatively, complexity implies that understanding social connections has changed, or is changing. Society is no longer influencing people to make God-honouring choices; rather the time has come where God-honouring choices need to be made in spite of the culture. Christian Leadership in this culture faces new challenges. In today's

rapidly changing and globally influenced communities, leadership that flows from the divine virtues of Jesus Christ, as identified by Bonaventure, can be effective for development. Amid the many challenges a leader faces, an awareness of social theory, in particular complex adaptive systems, will be beneficial to understanding the role virtues play in relationship to the continual changes within a ministry context.

Complex Adaptive Systems (CAS)

Complexity science has its origins in the field of physics and mathematics and was developed to help bring understanding to the chaotic nature of atoms and cells.² The science has expanded its use into many other fields, all of which adhere to the original intent. Cary Brown's definition, though applied to the medical field, provides a concise summary of complexity theory:

Complexity theory places events within a matrix recognising that while simple relationships between two elements can occur, more complex interrelationships between multiple dynamic influences occur as well. Within this matrix, very chaotic events, often with undetected and deeply embedded influences, can also emerge.³

To best understand the nature of complex adaptive systems (CAS) it is helpful to get an overview of some of the ways in which they are being used or being proposed for use. Two areas where CAS has taken on an increasing profile are in the fields of medicine and forestry. Some of the discoveries made in both these field are instructive for this study.

² Curt Lindberg and Marguerite Schneider, *Leadership in a Complex Adaptive System: Insights from Positive Deviance*, Leadership May 2013, vol. 9, Sage Publications, Accessed March 10, 2015, doi: 10.1177/1742715012468784, 2.

³ Cary Brown, "The application of Complex Adaptive Systems Theory to Clinical Practice in Rehabilitation," *Disability & Rehabilitation* 28, no. 9 (May 15, 2006), 588, accessed October 26, 2015, EBSCOhost.

Medical Field

There is optimism regarding the long-term plausibility for CAS to help address the function of various areas of the world. Curt Lindberg study of CAS in the medical health field yielded the following conclusion: “The examination of complexity science in the organizational domain has led to new understandings about leadership. Accordingly, leadership is an indirect, catalytic process that facilitates productive self-organization, a movement in which activities are reformulated around a common cause.”⁴ Lindberg’s research recognizes that new forms of organizational thought require a new approach to leadership that is consistently looking to empower and release new solutions and opportunities that reflect the purposes of the organization.

What the medical field and many who are engaging CAS are discovering is that embracing the theories espoused is not necessarily marking a departure from previous methods, or models of understanding. Rather, according to Brown, the implication for those in leadership is to hold multiple models in tension with the understanding that there is value in all of them waiting to be discovered.

The multidimensionality of many health and illness phenomena dictates that it is essential to have a way to organise and guide examination of these complex adaptive systems ... complex adaptive systems theory should be seen as a meta-theory that provides a way of organising and relating a range of other theories. In this way, complexity theory reconciles potentially conflicting analytical models by demonstrating how each theory is of value in certain contexts at certain times and for certain people.⁵

In addition to keeping multiple methods of discovery in tension the medical profession is recognizing the importance of considering the role of the patient in their

⁴ Lindberg and Schneider, *Leadership*, 7.

⁵ Brown, “Application,” 590.

care. Rather CAS introduces alternatives to a traditional approach that places a medical expert equipped with text-book generic solutions, and whose role is to dispense those solutions to many patients. The doctors place themselves within the framework with the patient in order to discover more information which leads to appropriate solutions.⁶ The implications for this extend beyond the doctor-patient relationship, but also take into consideration the role of other staff as well as acknowledging that with the high level of access to information (i.e. internet, other conversations, family history) patients often will present themselves with a bias toward a particular method of treatment.

The field of medicine is complex on its own, from my perspective, and yet there is a recognition that there is more that can be done for the whole person care of individuals beyond the technical or specialized aspects of the field.⁷ While retaining those historic and essential characteristics of the medical profession, those who demonstrate leadership will also need to expand their view of what constitutes effective patient care. If the medical field can see the importance of CAS as benefitting this process, then how

⁶ Daniel Eubank, "Teaching adaptive leadership to family medicine residents: What? Why? How?," *Families, Systems, & Health* 30, no. 3 (September 2012): 244, accessed October 26, 2015, <http://dx.doi.org.georgefox.idm.oclc.org/10.1037/a0029689>.

⁷ Marcus Thygeson, Lawrence Morrissey and Val Ulstad, "Adaptive Leadership and the Practice of Medicine: A Complexity-based Approach to Reframing the Doctor-patient Relationship," *Journal of Evaluation In Clinical Practice* 16, no. 5 (October 2010): 1014, accessed October 26, 2015, *Academic Search Premier*, EBSCOhost.

"We propose that adopting an adaptive leadership approach promises to improve the practice of medicine. This requires that we see our patients as complex adaptive systems facing both technical and adaptive health challenges. We must correctly distinguish between the technical and adaptive components of every patient problem, and offer appropriate solutions. Failure to do so leads to inefficient and ineffective health care that injures patients and waste resources. Substitution of technical interventions for adaptive work is a prevalent problem in modern medicine and represents a failure of adaptive leadership. To address this issue we need to do the adaptive work to change how we practise medicine. This requires that we be mindful of the problem, develop and apply evidence-based adaptive leadership skills on behalf of our patients, expand our repertoire of technological interventions to include technologies that facilitate adaptive work, and work together as a profession to address the financial, social, cultural and human characteristics from which this problem emerges. In brief, the adaptive leadership framework is a complexity-based approach to practise that promises to make our services more effective, efficient, patient-centred and sustainable."

much more could those in Christian leadership benefit from an understanding of CAS? For too many years, has been a direct and an indirect elevation of those who lead churches and organizations to be considered experts dispensing “biblical remedies” in a one-size-fits-all approach in the sanitized examination rooms that have become meeting places and sanctuaries.

Forestry

A CAS approach is also being used to examine natural life within the context of forests. The science of Silviculture is the management and study of forests to produce desired attributes and products.⁸ “The components of the system are supposed to react to impacts from outside and individually interact with other components. This causes a better adaptation capacity to changing conditions. The complexity approach focuses more on interactions than the individual components.”⁹ It’s not the forest or the trees that are being examined in this study; rather it is the relationship of the parts. The forest forms one component; the trees are their own component. Together they form the forest; individual species of trees are also components of that same forest. Understanding the interaction of these components is essential to the long-term sustainability of forests:

Between micro-level interactions and macro-level adaptivity, sustainability arises, if each sub-system fits successfully in the network, and if the network successfully fits into the wider environment. In contrast, adaptations of particular agents or sub-systems initiate cascadic change across the particular hierarchies and could cause qualitative change of the behaviour or structures of the overall CAS which may prove unsustainable and fail to cope with its external

⁸ Klaus J. Puettmann, K. David Messier and Christian C. Coates, *Critique of Silviculture: Managing for Complexity* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2008), 41.

⁹ Yusuf Serengil and Pinar Pamukcu, “Managing Forests as Complex Adaptive Systems: Building Resilience to the Challenge of Global Change,” *International Journal of Environmental Studies*, 71, no. 1 (January 6, 2014): 118.

environment. In short, any adaptation which enhances a specific optimisation process of an individual sub-system could fail to enhance the resilience of the whole system.¹⁰

In a natural self-organizing system such as a forest, how do the various components respond to changes from another component? How many other components are affected by a change in one component, or even a combination of components? What is the resultant effect on those components? What new possibilities emerge, naturally, from those changes? These are all questions that are being examined in the area of forestry through the scope of CAS. But even these questions fail to account for the changes that occur in the environment around and within the forest as a result of population movement within a country and by increased global travel:

The value of managing forests as complex adaptive systems will increase in light of expected future changes in social and environmental conditions. The potential benefits include a higher likelihood that forests are able to respond to a variety of changes. For example, the probability of exotic, invading plants, insects, and diseases is increasing with regional and global travel and trade... These issues will influence forests regardless of the landowner's management objectives, including intensive forest management with the goal of maximizing wood production at the lowest cost.

Maintaining the ability of forests to adapt to diverse and unexpected future disturbances without losing their ecological integrity should become a higher priority. Silviculturists cannot afford to wait until all aspects of complexity are agreed upon before considering the many potential benefits that such a new approach to managing forests could bring. We propose that the value of complexity science and thus of managing forests as complex adaptive systems is sufficiently well established that silviculture, as a discipline, will benefit greatly from adopting and adapting it.¹¹

From this brief look at some of the science involved with forestry, it is noteworthy that there is a movement to acknowledge the cultural changes that bear influence as a result of increased globalization. If forests need to be prepared to adapt to

¹⁰ Christian Rammel, Sigrid Stagl and Harald Wilfing, "Managing Complex Adaptive Systems—A Co-evolutionary Perspective on Natural Resource Management," *Ecological Economics* 63, no. 1 (2007): 11.

¹¹ Puettman, Messier, and Coates, *Critique of Silviculture*, 119–20.

future disturbances as a result of never-before-seen influences, there should be leadership lessons to be learned for those in other fields. No longer should communities (or forests) be considered in isolation. A better understanding will be derived about a community by intentionally considering the impact of outside influences, some of which come, positively and negatively, from increased globalization. The forestry industry seems to understand the need for a change in leadership development:

The forests of tomorrow will be profoundly different from those of today. Guidelines for management must acknowledge that variability and uncertainty are the norm in ecosystem conditions and dynamics. Viewing forests as complex systems highlights the fact that principles based on maintaining stable forest composition and structure cannot continue to guide management strategies. If nothing else, an appreciation of non-linearities and system openness should instill a sense of humility among forest managers, a recognition that we cannot precisely control the future of any tract of forest.¹²

The call for forest managers to demonstrate humility makes a direct link to the subject matter of this study. It can also be said of that some Christian leadership practices have focused on maintaining the stability based on past experiences within a congregations or ministry. However, like our peers in the forest industry, there might also be benefit from understanding that there are new non-linear factors that require attention. These factors though are often unseen, yet they bear influence upon culture, environment or community. Therefore it is worthwhile to gain understanding of those concepts that are not necessarily visible.

Common Factors of CAS

Three factors that are consistent across CAS theory in many fields are the recognition of agents, the openness to new mediums of information, and the emergence

¹² Elise Filotas et al., "Viewing Forests Through the Lens of Complex Systems Science," *Ecosphere* 5, no. 1 (2014): 16, accessed October 26, 2015, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1890/ES13-00182.1>.

of new forms. These factors therefore all have implications for the future of Christian leadership as it considers the function of ministry in the context of CAS theory.

Whether in medical study, ecological study or social study, one of the common practices has been to isolate the parts of a system. The thought has been that by understanding the individual parts (sometimes referred to in CAS as agents¹³) there will be a benefit from their contribution to the system: the assumption being that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. While there is obvious benefit to the examination and understanding of individual elements, the findings generated are insufficient to develop a coherent theory or a thorough understanding of the whole.¹⁴ Systems theory pushes back against these norms by recognizing that every part within a system has an interdependent relationship with the some or all of the other parts of the system. Therefore, understanding of one part cannot be fully known without the context of the whole environment.

In a forest, the agents range from the obvious (various species of trees, plants, animals and insects) to the not so obvious (seasonal impact, composting and changes in the surrounding environment). These, among many other agents, form an ecological system. They share an interdependent relationship that should not be neglected and which contributes to their communal life. Pearson considers the role of sunlight regarding the capacity of nature to reproduce itself, and rightly asks the question of current organizational systems: “Do we have an equivalent to the constant-renewable energy

¹³ John H. Holland, *Signals and Boundaries: Building Blocks for Complex Adaptive Systems* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012), 178, accessed October 27, 2015, ebook Collection: EBSCOhost. “All complex adaptive systems exhibit obvious internal boundaries that divide the CAS into a diverse array of semi-autonomous subsystems called *agents*. Each agent has a “program” that guides its interactions with other agents and other parts of its environment.”

¹⁴ Ibid., 51.

source in our organizations?”¹⁵ In the same way that sunlight is a necessary agent whose role is often neglected, what of soil conditions, wind conditions and rain measurements, to name some others. These are all elements that are vital to the development of a forest but are easily taken for granted by generalization and individualization. These elements or agents are a necessary part of the process that enables the forest to develop and are often the means through which it matures.

A recent study looked at CAS as a lens through which to better understand mentoring relationships. The authors contend, “The changing nature of these systems means they cannot be fully explained by the study of the individual components alone. Furthermore, the changing, adaptive nature of CAS ensures that interactions between their components are likely to be unpredictable and unplanned.”¹⁶ However, according to the authors, the key to long-term viability is to resist the temptation to place the CAS lens within a rigid structure.¹⁷ It is the dynamics of the relationships that lead to the unpredictable results. It would seem then that a greater understanding of the nature of those relationships would be important to discerning how Christian leadership could function amid the complexity.

As the conversation is moved from the forest into the context of the church or Christian ministry, it is important to identify some of the agents within this “system.” Darrell Guder, in examining the Canadian context with its sharp and continual decline in institutional religion, recognizes that although attendance within the church as an

¹⁵ Pearson, *Transforming Leader*, 65.

¹⁶ Rachel Jones and James Corner, “Seeing the Forest and the Trees: A Complex Adaptive Systems Lens for Mentoring,” *Hum. Relat.* 65, no. 3 (2012), 393.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 406.

institution has declined, there is still a high percentage of people who consider themselves spiritual. Guder's research seems to call for a transition from viewing the church as an institution to viewing the church as a living organism or system.¹⁸ Some of the agents within the organism of the church are, like the trees of the forest, more obvious: pastors and staff, leadership teams, ministry volunteers, attendees. Other agents are present even if they are not necessarily obvious: programs, liturgy, denominational framework, building or meeting space, the norms of dress and even gender or ethnic diversity. Then there are agents that are unseen but influence the environment: past practices and traditions, the health of relationships among the people that gather, the reputation of the church in the community, the impact of local, national and global events, plus the soul condition of all those gathered. There are likely others that can be added to this list. However to limit leadership to only those agents that can be seen fails to account for the influence of the myriad of other agents and also ignores the influences that bear upon each of those agents. As the medical community and the forestry community are finding out, the church community would do well to consider: complexity grows as the number of agents increases.

With a greater awareness of the increased number of agents, the second factor that CAS theory considers is *openness*. Openness suggests that there is influence that exists between the agents that cannot be solely measured by isolating the agents from each other. The task of leadership is to be able to be alert and willing to observe the interaction of the agents, noting in particular how a change in one agent (i.e. the decision to end a long running program, or change the style of music) influences change in other agents. In

¹⁸ Darrell Guder and Lois Barrett, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 1998), 60.

social contexts the reactions of agents are non-linear and often unpredictable. The implication for leadership is that it takes a nearness and familiarity with both agents and the system (congregation or community) in order to effectively discover changes. Openness also heightens the importance of listening as a first priority of communication between agents, often facilitated by leadership, so as to lead to adaptive changes that may take place as a result of inevitable changes. This will be explored among the suggested transitions of Chapter 5.

The third common factor in CAS theory is that of *emergence*. Emergence is the recognition of the historical and present condition of the system and takes into account the conflict induced by internal and external influences. Rather than resisting the changes, emergence (sometimes called adaptation or innovation) anticipates and facilitates new possibilities, which retain the essence of its environment.

Discovering the tools necessary to be aware of these factors and the transitions that they necessitate should enable those who serve in leadership to address the needs of a growing number of agents in a rapidly shifting culture. Emergence can only be possible because something that has previously existed begins to interact, either with a new agent or in a new way with an existing agent, to bring a new expression.

The Role of Chaos

Chaos, some would say, is acceptable in a forest but it is generally thought to be avoided as a term to describe people. Chaos is often used in a negative manner. “Usually, in our daily conversations we condemn chaos as some sort of confusion or disorganization. Scientifically, we look at it quite differently. Chaos implies the existence

of unpredictable or random aspects in dynamic matters, but it is not necessarily bad or undesirable – sometimes quite the contrary.”¹⁹ Though the thought of chaos may seem to insinuate complications; the benefit of systems theory is the capacity to embrace chaos. “People communicate and interact with one another, which creates a complex system. Any action that one person takes can impact others in multiple ways; they can be seen or unseen, have unanticipated consequences, and the effects may not be known immediately.”²⁰ The task of leadership, in an increasingly complex culture, will be to understand the necessity of monitoring the community to discern, stimulate and an engage with a healthy amount of chaos:

Systems poised at the edge of chaos had the capacity for emergent computation. The intuition behind this claim has tremendous appeal: systems that are too simple are static and those that are too active are chaotic, and thus it is only on the edge between these two behaviors where a system can undertake productive activity. In its most grand incarnation, the edge of chaos captures the essence of all interesting adaptive systems as they evolve to this boundary between stable order and unstable chaos.²¹

For most existing organizations the idea of beginning with chaos may not be realistic. To that end chaordic systems may be a means to work through the transitions. In his book, *The Chaordic Organization*, author Dee Hock defines chaordic as follows: “the behavior of any self-governing organism, organization or system, which harmoniously blends characteristics of order and chaos.”²² This concept of a systems approach is important to keep in mind given that most movement towards a CAS will undoubtedly

¹⁹ A.B. Cambel, *Applied Chaos Theory* (San Diego: Academic Press, Inc., 1993), 15.

²⁰ Beverly G. McCarter, *Leadership in Chaordic Organizations*, ed. Brian E. White (Boca Raton: Taylor & Francis, 2013), 186.

²¹ John H. Miller and Scott E. Page, *Complex Adaptive Systems: An Introduction to Computational Models of Social Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 79.

²² Dee Hock, *The Chaordic Organization* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1999), 1.

have to account for previous linear organizational models, authority structures and methods of practice. In the case of Christian leadership this includes long held traditions, practices and approaches to ministry that are meeting the cultural challenges discussed in Chapter 1.

Alan Roxburgh advances this discussion into the realm of Christian leadership and away from linear systems thinking by using the term *liminality*²³ to describe the chaordic function of the church, particularly in Canada, in the confusing movement between where past practices of tradition and organizational practice and the opportunities that have now presented themselves. The word *liminal* comes from the Latin word *limen* or ‘threshold’, and means “Of or relating to a transitional or initial stage of a transition, an initiation of a process, coming to the threshold of something, and is crucial to the life of a growing being.” George Fox Graduate, Thomas Rundel’s excellent work on the liminal spaces found in the biblical text describes liminality as “developing threshold of some capacity of your life, a trimming of vice and/or cultivation of virtue.”²⁴ Rundel’s observations regarding liminality are significant for the scope of this research as they validate the internal process that is present within a person even as there are external changes or pressures:

Yet, these times in liminal space, walked in liminal posture, prove to be catalytic for those who walk through them. They prove to be times where faith in God deepens and matures, seen and unseen vice is purged, and virtue is cultivated, resulting in an authentic incarnational presence. The Biblical narratives of liminal

²³ Alan Roxburgh, *The Missionary Congregation, Leadership and Liminality* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 1997), 23. “Therefore liminality is the conscious awareness that as a group (or individual) one’s status, role, and sequence-sets in a society have been radically changed to the point where the group has now become largely invisible to the larger society in terms of these previously held sets.”

²⁴ Thomas J. Rundel, “Liminal Spaces: A Narrative Spirituality of the Bible” DMin diss., George Fox Evangelical Seminary (2015).

space, posture, and mission provide us with a paradigm for walking through needed and expected parts of our journey with God, provides the posture in which we walk, and gives purpose and meaning to a time often felt as meaningless...Also known as liminal space. It is this path through liminal space that supports ongoing Christian formation.²⁵

The concepts of liminality may be difficult for some to grasp and yet are crucial as they underscore one of the key discoveries of this research. The difference between where I started in my understanding of Christian leadership and what I am currently learning can be summed up well by this picture (Figure 4.1):

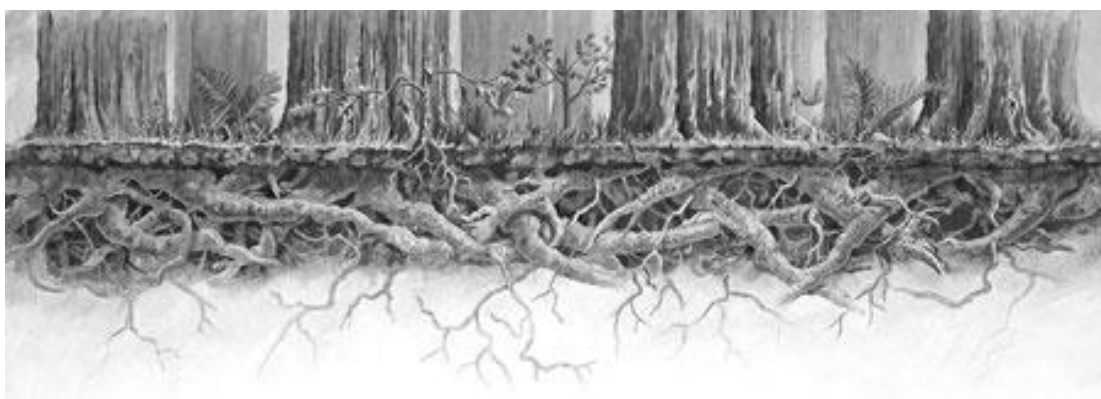


Figure 4.1 The Forest Floor

Some will see the strong base of the trees. Some will see the natural composting from the exchange of life and death. Some will see the root system. For a long time, all I could see was the root system; but as I continued to look and think about this, I began to wonder what holds it all together? What makes it grow? It is the unseen space between. That's where the virtues of Christ (Chapter 4) feed the roots of leadership development: in the liminal spaces of theories and practices, character and values. The virtues of Christ hold all of it together, giving life, embracing decay, and renewing growth. In the liminal spaces of a forest system nutrients are shared, root systems are knit together, and in the event of death, all of it comes together to help restore life and rise tall again. Leadership

²⁵ Ibid., 10–11.

virtues take time to develop; they are often forged through struggle and even failure.

Though often unseen, the role of virtue in the liminal space of leadership will be integral to establishing both the form and function of leadership, as it develops within a local contextual environment.

Function flows from character and character as Christian leaders is shaped by the virtues of Jesus Christ. In relation to the context of the church, Roxburgh acknowledges the changes that are occurring and encourages a fresh opportunity for those who serve in Christian leadership:

A shift in place has occurred, and marginality is the language used to describe the church's changed position in relation to modern culture. The churches have lost their social language at the center of the culture. Rather than being viewed as a loss, this changed social location may hold the seeds for a renewed witness to the presence of God's kingdom in the world ²⁶ ... The present liminality is one that offers the potential for a fresh missionary engagement in a radically changing social context.²⁷

Hock states: "the organization of the future will be the embodiment of community based on shared purpose calling to the higher aspirations of people."²⁸ While Hock leaves room for religious organizations to be one of those who could benefit from understanding systems, God has already declared the necessity of His Church as a complex adaptive system through which He can be at work in reconciling the people to himself.

Regarding the church, author Jim Herrington in his book, *Leading Congregational Change*, affirms the complex nature of the church:

Groups of people are vastly more complex than individuals, and Christian congregations are the most complicated human organizations that exist. Their mix

²⁶ Roxburgh, *Missionary Congregation*, 2.

²⁷ Ibid., 27.

²⁸ Hock, *Chaordic Age*, 2.

of the human and the divine, a heritage measured in centuries, and variations in size, context, beliefs, values, and practices make them extraordinarily intricate. We are tempted to treat them like social machines by indiscriminately interchanging people, programs, and purposes, but their status as living systems requires a far more nuanced understanding and approach.²⁹

Noted social theorist, Margaret Wheatley would find a connection with the idea that people, together, have a greater capacity to accomplish much more than tightly reined organizations have traditionally permitted.³⁰ John Holland uses the description of a niche to describe the mutual dependency that is necessary and vital for development within a CAS.³¹ Whether viewed as an organization, organism or a family or even a niche, the gathering of followers of Jesus have a complexity that is understood by and purposefully shaped by God.

A Biblical Perspective of CAS

There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them.
There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord.
There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone
it is the same God at work.
Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good...
All these are the work of one and the same Spirit,
and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.³²

The Apostle Paul may not have had the use of CAS terminology, but he seems to have had a great understanding of the complexity of the interpersonal relationships that unite as the Church because he calls it a body. In so doing Paul is reminding us that as

²⁹ Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem and James H. Furr, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 2000), 145.

³⁰ Margaret Wheatley, *Finding Our Way: Leadership for an Uncertain Time* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc., 2007), 21.

³¹ Holland, *Signals and Boundaries*, 181. Niche: "A niche is a diverse array of agents that regularly exchange resources and depend on that exchange for continued existence."

³² 1 Cor. 12:4-11.

participants within that body, we are part of something that possesses life. In consideration of a human body there are those elements of life that we are able to recognize because they are external. However, there is so much more activity that is internal and unseen. As a living organism the Church, as a united group of believers in Jesus Christ, is indeed complex in its own nature:

Just as a body, though one, has many parts,
but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ.
For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body
—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—
and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.
Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many...
Now you (as the Church) are the body of Christ,
and each one of you is a part of it.³³

Functioning as a body requires a willingness to be synchronized in action.

Movement of a physical body requires many parts of a body working in harmony among each other while taking into account the external elements that influence those actions. To be effective mutual submission, of the many parts, is shaped by a common purpose. The interdependent function that results from an understanding of that common purpose is what makes the Church distinct. Most importantly the effectiveness of the function of the body of Christ is not fuelled by effort or measured by success. Rather, effectiveness is the result of the Spirit of God working through all parts of the body, together. Spiritual gifts are given by God for this purpose. The manifestation of these gifts may vary based on internal and external factors. One of the key tasks of the leader then is to help nurture the capacity of the body to display the evidence of God's Spirit in their function, together.

³³ 1 Cor. 12:12–27.

Complex adaptive theory speaks of this type of transition in leadership as one that seeks to “influence or leverage others, not control them. Those who try to impose control may achieve some limited success temporarily but fail in the longer term because people resent being treated like machines.”³⁴ The Church is not an institutional machine built upon probability and predictability. It is infused with the continual life giving power and influence of the Holy Spirit. According to Alan Roxburgh, the role of those who serve in Christian leadership ought to reflect this nature: “Discipleship emerges out of prayer, study, dialogue and worship by a community learning to ask the questions of obedience *as they are engaged directly in mission*. But in this kind of congregation, the pastor will be able to lead only as she or he models the encounter with the culture.”³⁵

The implication, given the discussion above of the incarnation, is that God’s people are to display the grace and truth characteristics of Jesus’ presence to their world. “(The) Church as the unity whose informing life is the very life of the divine-human Lord, is as much a part of the gospel of the Incarnation as that Lord himself. It follows that the work of the Church is to continue the reconciling and incarnating activity of God in Christ, so making it available to men and women today.”³⁶ This point is crucial and is noted by several theologians, including Steven Evans:

The Incarnation truly does give us a window into God’s powers that transforms our understanding of what God is capable of doing. If God the Son can, out of love, will to enter fully into the human condition, we should have no trouble understanding how the Godhead is capable of consistently willing the creation to ‘do its thing’ and exhibit a consistent character that is its own, and of consistently

³⁴ McCarter, *Leadership*, 2.

³⁵ Roxburgh, *Missionary Congregation*, 66.

³⁶ W. Norman Pittenger, *Christ and Christian Faith; Some Presuppositions and Implications of the Incarnation* (New York: Round Table Press, 1941), 155.

willing that humans have the freedom to perform actions that will truly be their own.³⁷

and George Hendry:

If God's decisive deed for the salvation of the world was accomplished in the historical life of the incarnate Christ, that deed must somehow be extended in history ... clearly it is the community which was formed around the incarnate Christ, and which has continued in existence to this day, that must be regarded as, in some sense, the bearer of the extension.³⁸

The church should embody the life of the Spirit in a world that seems ready for meaningful connection. Those who find their identity in the 'grace and truth' of Jesus Christ can extend the ministry of God through intentional interactions in real time with real people. If, instead, the Church exists only in order to maintain a historical presence it is to effectively lose the vitality of its existence.³⁹ Present cultural conditions provide a renewed opportunity for redemptive engagement.

We all desire a sense of belonging. This idea of searching for a sense of belonging is what Charles Taylor is addressing in his book, *Modern Social Imaginaries*. He says, "I am thinking, rather, of the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations."⁴⁰ Taylor correctly asserts we have tried hard in the pages of our mind to create ways to make social belonging happen. In the futility of effort or in the frustration that comes from suffering, our imaginations have not given up hope. The reminder from

³⁷ Stephen C. Evans, *Exploring Kenotic Christology: The Self-Emptying of God* (Vancouver, BC: Regent College Pub, 2010), 214.

³⁸ George S. Hendry, *The Gospel of the Incarnation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958), 155.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 158–59.

⁴⁰ Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 23.

our God is that through the life and ultimately the death of Jesus Christ, the power of God gives “us” a whole new definition, one that satisfies the deepest yearning of the soul. In order to help others identify with this truth, followers of Jesus should be active participants in the life of their communities. “Because the word became flesh, the way is opened to beholding and testifying to his glory.”⁴¹

Leadership Implications

In his humanity Jesus demonstrated grace in all matters while being fuelled by the truth of God. It is Jesus’ extension of both grace and truth (Chapter 2) beyond the limitations of his own needs and toward the needs of others that makes His life a compelling example to emulate. “Christians today... live in a world where objectification and excarnation reign, where death undermines meaning, and so on. We have to struggle to recover a sense of what the Incarnation can mean.”⁴²

Christian leadership that reflects the virtuous life of Jesus can bring vibrant, new growth from the listless, predictable, lifeless and religious orders of current practice and serve to stimulate, awaken, encourage and spur on the many people who are seeking to find sacred vitality despite the acknowledge complexity of the world around them. Hans Rudolf Heinemann’s observations from the field of ecology provides excellent framework for Christian leadership development:

Adaptation and emergence are linked to the question about the range within which the system can change its behavior without losing its essential properties.
Resilience is the capacity of a system to renew and sustain specified conditions of

⁴¹ Marianne Meye Thompson, *The Humanity of Jesus in the Fourth Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1998), 42.

⁴² Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), Loc. 11999–12001, Kindle.

processes in spite of exogenous disturbances or changes in driving forces ... The resilience concept replaced the earlier world-view of nature and society as near-equilibrium systems. It also suggests that the concept of stability is an illusion that has to disappear ...⁴³

Over the course of the last two years I have had the privilege of learning from some inspiring ministry leaders in their global contexts as well as some highly reputed global leaders. Many of these Christian leaders have faithfully served for long numbers of years despite enduring difficult and challenging circumstances. Whether it's pastoring a church in rural El Salvador, in the slums of Kayelisha, South Africa or in the underground church in China, their stories have helped to shape my understanding of what leadership looks like when the culture around you is difficult and does not reflect biblical principles. Their perspective is valuable to an ever-changing Canadian context where cultures collide, values shift and political agendas place an increasing pressure upon those who serve in Christian leadership.

From the higher profile global leaders, I have likewise been inspired. Despite the diversity of their backgrounds and their fields of expertise, there was a convergence of thought between the three diverse leaders. One leader (Vishal Magdalwadi) is from India and studied Western culture; another leader is Canadian (Barry Slauenwhite) and develops leaders in global fields and the third is a Canadian leader (Bruce Clemenger) who works extensively within Canadian culture. There was agreement on the necessity of developing leadership that possessed the humility to trust in God's truth as it has been revealed in Jesus Christ, and ought to be displayed through His chosen instrument, the Church. These three Christian leaders validates the need for the real-time application of

⁴³ Hans Rudolf Heinemann, "A Concept in Adaptive Ecosystem Management—An Engineering Perspective," *Forest Ecology and Management* 259, no. 4 (2010), 850.

adaptive leadership, as described by Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky:

These are extraordinary times. The turn of the millennium brought the pressing realization that every human being, as a member of a globalizing set of nations, cultures, and economies, must find better ways to compete and collaborate. To build a sustainable world in an era of profound economic and environmental interdependence, each person, each country, each organization is challenged to sift through the wisdom and know-how of their heritage, to take the best from their histories, leave behind lessons that no longer serve them, and innovate, not for change's sake but for the sake of conserving and preserving the values and competence they find most essential and precious.⁴⁴

A second area of agreement between all three leaders was the capacity of Christian leadership to understand the spiritual complexity of the current times. They all independently quoted the biblical passage of Ephesians 6, which not only reminds us that opposition (and the source of much of the complexity in society) is unseen in the spiritual world; but the reminder is also on the need to “declare the mystery of gospel” into the open spaces of our communities. Engagement with the truth of God is not only the means to navigate the growing complexity of the world but it is also the key to seeing new solutions or innovations or emerging ideas begin to develop.

“Some leaders borrow their visions...Mimicking the successful strategies of others is enticing to some leaders because it eliminates the need to think reflectively...it eliminates the need for Christian leaders to cultivate an intimate relationship with God.”⁴⁵ This speaks to the internal need of a leader to be nurturing their relationship with God for the purpose of the potential of being used of God to influence their leadership

⁴⁴ Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2009), 2.

⁴⁵ Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership* (Nashville: B & H Pub. Group, 2011), 58–59.

environment. Additionally, Henry and Richard Blackaby also emphasize the need for vision to be informed by the community around them: "...those churches most in touch with their community's expressed needs will be viewed as a more relevant, viable option by those whose needs they address."⁴⁶ These views correspond directly to the findings of complex adaptive social system research that states "...organizations must make decisions based on information they receive from the environment."⁴⁷ The interplay between the needs of a community and the life of a congregation will indeed yield a continual shifting of mission and ministry.

From both sets of leaders, those serving in their global context and those giving direction to global movements, I am learning that Christian leadership that is sensitive to the nature of the complex emerging opportunities will be essential to seeing life continue to grow in the body that is the church. Stephen Bevans writes extensively regarding the praxis model of theology, the capacity to develop an understanding of God and to strive to act in partnership with him.⁴⁸

Bevans' work correlates well with Stephen Garner's hermeneutic spiral:

What is at the heart of public theology is a community of faith, informed by Scripture and Tradition, which is committed to reading the 'signs of the times' and acting for the common good for society. Therefore, if we're thinking about compassion in the context of public theology, we are thinking about how our understanding of compassion might be offered in distinctive and constructive ways so as to enrich wider society, help restrain evil and violence, and promote the building of communities of reconciliation.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Ibid., 61.

⁴⁷ John H. Miller and Scott Page, *Complex Adaptive Systems*, 173.

⁴⁸ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 75–76.

⁴⁹ Stephen Garner, "Public Theology Through Popular Culture," in *The Bible, Justice and Public Theology*, ed. David J. Neville, Bible in the Modern World (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014), 176.

If we allow our perspective to be shaped by God's truth, as it is being lived out globally, it can only enhance the function of a local community on mission with God. The resultant depth of understanding is one of the benefits of expanding the view of the Christian leadership. Stephen Lansing writings on CAS correlates directly with this premise:

But if we shift our attention from the causal forces at work on individual elements to the behavior of the system as a whole, global patterns of behavior may become apparent. However, the understanding of global patterns is purchased at a cost: The observer must usually give up the hope of understanding the workings of causation at the level of individual elements.⁵⁰

In an increasingly globally connected world, it is possible that identity, meaning and perhaps even truth are getting harder to define. Anthony Elliott, in his book *Contemporary Social Theory: An Introduction* states that “the global challenges we face demand global solutions, and ones that are both future-regarding and geared to the actual needs and desires of others.”⁵¹ The intricacy of global relationships has in many ways granted the average person opportunities and experiences previously reserved for a select few. Rapid access to information and the capacity to transmit messages across multiple media platforms can leave us wondering what is truly significant and what is merely a product of publicity.

“The postmodern mind does not expect any more to find the all-embracing, total and ultimate formula of life without ambiguity, risk, danger and error, and is deeply

⁵⁰ Stephen J. Lansing, “Complex Adaptive Systems,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 32, no. 1 (October 2003): 185, accessed March 25, 2015, EBSCOhost.

⁵¹ Anthony Elliott, *Contemporary Social Theory: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 350.

suspicious of any voice that promises otherwise.”⁵² Elliott’s words provide no comfort despite the many ways in which the arrival of the newest, fastest and most compact means of transmitting information are communicated. It is possible that there is so much information that a person no longer is able to allow themselves the capacity to truly consider the implications of all the messages they are processing in any given day. The question that comes to mind is simply this: if the pursuit of knowledge and the increased access to information is leaving social relationships wanting perhaps there exists a deeper, unseen yearning: to be known?

The questioning that exists within a person, from Elliott’s social theory perspective, provides a definite connection to the inner-soul work active in those around us. Christian leadership, therefore, ought to have a greater awareness of the unseen inner workings of the people they engage, recognizing their desire not simply for answers but for identity. Often Christian leadership development has focused on providing answers and certainty. However, in a culture of autonomy a different approach, not a new approach, may be required. With a confidence that comes from the Truth of God, leaders are given the opportunity to gracefully share that truth as they enter into the diverse needs of real lives. “Wisdom in dealing with other wisdoms and their perversions is one of the great tests of any wisdom.”⁵³ That’s the reminder and the example that Jesus Christ gives, which is why there is a need to look to him to reorient leadership practices.

In their co-authored book, *Roads 2 Bridges*, South African pastors, Xola Skosana and Luis Oosthuizen, make several important statements to address the complexity of

⁵² Ibid., 261.

⁵³ David F. Ford, *Theology: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 174.

needs within the changing social and political landscape of their post-apartheid country. Their past and present experiences provide important learning for current Canadian condition:

We need empowering faith perspectives and enabling theologies that respond to our current situation. The need is for a view and ideal that can mobilize faith communities to live the values of the kingdom of God as taught by Jesus in the Beatitudes. This will help present the Kingdom of Jesus in visible and tangible forms, seeing that it is a force of social transformation. It will take Kingdom-minded Christians and an incarnated church to welcome such a Kingdom in South Africa society.⁵⁴

Conclusion

In an increasingly complex globalized world, there is a growing need for the church to reflect the incarnation of Jesus, learning from His virtues, to become an active agent in the community. Our past models and experience should not be looked upon as failures but rather learning experiences that have prepared us for the current opportunities that now exist. Authors Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone encourage a wider, longer view at negative experiences as essential pieces that contribute toward a preferred future.

Rather than seeing frustration and failure as evidence that we're pursuing a hopeless cause, we can reframe them as natural, even necessary, features in the journey of social change. Why might failure and frustration be necessary parts of the journey? Because if we stick only with what we know how to do, what we're comfortable with and confident about, we limit ourselves to the old, familiar ways rather than developing new capacities.⁵⁵

Canadian culture has not become more complicated. It has clearly become more complex. However, Christian leadership practices and organizational models, from a Christian perspective, have fallen behind the rate of change. The solutions that are

⁵⁴ Xola Skosana and Luis Oosthuizen, *Roads 2 Bridges Uninterrupted Conversations: Stories of Friendship and Partnering Across the Racial Divide* (Paarl, South Africa: Emmaus Media, 2013), 72.

⁵⁵ Joanna Macy and Chris Johnstone, *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We're in Without Going Crazy* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2012), 188.

possible through complex adaptive systems are important to examine, as they will be beneficial to understanding the key relationships that exist between the main components (agents) of the church: people. People who are at the same time part of the congregational environment and participants in an ever-changing community. It is the position of this paper that Christian leadership that humbly conducts itself and shapes ministry through a demonstration of understanding the complexity of these variables will be better positioned to apply the Gospel through their lives and into their communities. In the liminal space, within the life of a leader, virtue resides and can make a critical difference. From the interior world of the leader, new possibilities exist, influenced by the virtues of Jesus. Benefiting from the best of previous experience and striving toward new possibilities, there is much to anticipate knowing that God is always at work in a particular community. New possibilities may be both surprising and difficult, but necessary to experience the growth that has eroded away over recent decades. The next chapter will suggest six transitions that can be addressed as a way through the liminality of these times.

CHAPTER 5

TRANSITIONS

Chapter One provided a picture of changes in the cultural makeup of Canadian communities over the last several decades noting that Canadian culture continues to be moved by its historical and current status of accommodation and autonomy. However, the effectiveness of the church has dwindled significantly leaving large challenges for those in Christian leadership who have a desire to be effective in the Great Commandment and Great Commission of our Lord, applying the Gospel through their lives and ministries into communities. Chapter Two provided a means to understand the Incarnation of Jesus Christ and the potential implications for leadership that reflects his example. With attention given to the life and writings of St. Bonaventure in Chapter Three, the focus was sharpened further to look beyond the function of Jesus' ministry to the significance of the virtues which informed his ministry. Understanding that current leadership functions in the midst of a number of traditional expectations and new strategic models, Chapter Four provided an overview of how complex adaptive systems theory can allow Christian leadership to bring all the many pieces of the ministry puzzle together, with virtue providing the unseen stabilizing presence and the means through which new forms of ministry may be discovered.

How Was the Life of Jesus Rooted?

Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?
Jesus replied: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart
and with all your soul and with all your mind.'
This is the first and greatest commandment.

And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’¹

This chapter will suggest some transitions that could be made to current Christian leadership practice from current practices. At this point, it is worth noting two ways in which Jesus’ life was rooted. It is from these roots that the transitions are being proposed. Both of these roots are reflective of the Great Commandment, quoted above. The first root reflects the priority that Jesus places on his relationship with God the Father. The second root reflects the counter-cultural means through which Jesus accomplishes his redemptive purpose. Both roots are important to understand as in consideration of the role of virtue in the life of those who serve in leadership.

Jesus Relates to the Father

When I consider biblical leaders of great repute (Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Rahab, David, Nehemiah, Ruth, Peter, Paul), it can be no coincidence that they all experienced significant time of preparation where they learned to listen for, trust and follow the voice of Our God as he led them, even into periods of testing and trial. Yet they all had failings and shortcomings despite their leadership accomplishments. That is what makes the example of Jesus so important for us. “Rather than drawing upon the infinite resource of his divine nature, he prayed for help and trusted both his Father and the Spirit to bring to him what he needed. He accepted our life as his own, and in this he showed amazing humility.”² These Old Testament leaders pointed toward Jesus, as the paramount fulfillment of leadership:

¹ Mat. 22:37–38.

² Bruce A. Ware, *The Man Christ Jesus: Theological Reflections on the Humanity of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 45.

1. And he went a little farther, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt. (Matthew 26:39)
2. In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to the one who was able to save him from death . . . (Hebrews 5:7)

MaryKate Morse also addresses this well: “When you step into sacred space with Christ, then no matter where you are, what is going on or who you are with, the mission of God’s Kingdom is at the forefront.”³ Too many of those involved in Christian leadership view their roles as jobs rather than places to which God has led them. In forgetting that God, The Father, is the one who leads they are tempted to lay out the boundaries of sacred and secular space. Jesus’ complete dependence upon the Father, by virtue of his limitations, provides the best example and motivation from which to consider transitions from iconic history to present reality in the unpredictable rhythms of leadership life. Morse encourages those who serve in Christian leadership to be intentional in seeking these divine interactions.

A quiet and reflective space is necessary to minimize distractions and allow the inner emotional psyche and spirit to surface. The Holy Spirit moves in us at those deeper levels. When we fill up inner space with our own words and thoughts, we are trying to stay in control. When we allow ourselves to be still and wait, we relinquish control to God. Open space with God is not simply leisure or selfishness; it is our spiritual food and drink.⁴

Jesus modeled this for us with his intentional interactions alone with God, His Father. In prayer, and with reliance upon the Word, Jesus intensely fought against the emotions and thoughts that could derail his mission and was continually renewed and

³ MaryKate Morse, *Making Room for Leadership: Power, Space and Influence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), Loc. 1772–74, Kindle.

⁴ Ibid., Loc. 1580–84.

affirmed in his commitment and conduct in fulfilling his purpose. “We may surely suppose that Jesus spent more time than the rest of us in prayerful communion with God. Yet this did not make him solitary; from every period of communion with God he returned to the world of men to enter more deeply into solidarity with them.”⁵

Despite the personal demands on his time and the political and religious pressures of his day, Jesus was intentional about creating space to spend in reflection and conversation with God the Father. It should follow then that those who serve in Christian leadership would also benefit from creating space in their schedules for this same purpose. Unfortunately, for many, the pace at which daily life is ordered allows little time for reflective communion with God. As a result the demands of people can be viewed as an inconvenience or distraction to leadership purposes.

Those who serve in Christian leadership need to be consistently challenged to consider the importance of theological reflection for the purpose of bringing meaning to everyday circumstances. “How do we construct a contextual theology? Our answer is: By bringing our understanding of Scripture, our cognizance of our heritage and our reading of our cultural context into a creative dialogue.”⁶ Theological reflection cannot be done in isolation from the past or the present realities. The truth of God will flourish with significance as it is meted out in everyday life. However, this process must be deliberate. It requires the intentionality of creating space to think, unthink, and rethink prior to engaging in the activity of ministry. That kind of space will not be added to a day or a

⁵ George S. Hendry, *The Gospel of the Incarnation* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1958), 102.

⁶ Stanley J. Grenz and Roger E. Olson, *Who Needs Theology? An Invitation to the Study of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), Loc. 1135–36, Kindle.

week. As the example of Jesus reveals, this kind of space should be carved out from somewhere else.

Jesus Relates to People

As a result of the dependence upon God's power and purpose for his life, Jesus also modeled for us a way to relate to others. He gave examples of using words wisely, the importance of a timely touch and open arms, the need for intentional rest and true sacrificial compassionate love. "Throughout the Gospels we are shown Jesus' hands as he touches the hurting, as he calms the fearful, as he holds someone's hands gently. This God, this Creator of all, this incarnate Word who could have spoken everything out of existence with one commanding word, this immense, looming Jesus softly held the hand of a blind man. Touched the ear of the deaf. Touched the wasting skin of the lepers. Felt the sick eyes of the blind with his fingers."⁷ The capacity of the incarnated Son of God to enter into real time interactions with people, respecting their relational and cultural framework, and despite the intensity of his own personal situation should provide for us an example worth imitating:⁸

1. Matthew 20:34 – Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes.
2. Mark 1:41 – Moved with pity, Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him.
3. Matthew 8:3 – He stretched out his hand and touched him
4. Matthew 8:15 – He touched her hand.
5. Matthew 9:29 – He touched their eyes.

⁷ Don Everts, *God in the Flesh: What Speechless Lawyers, Kneeling Soliders and Shocked Crowds Teach Us About Jesus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 102.

⁸ Ibid., 102–103. This list was built in part from the list included in the book; however, I have added additional items.

6. Matthew 9:36 – When He saw the crowds, He was moved with compassion.
7. Mark 8:23 – He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the village.
8. Mark 8:25 – Jesus laid his hands on his eyes again.
9. Luke 7:14 – He came forward and touched the coffin, and the bearers stood still.
10. Luke 18:16 – He welcomed little children.
11. Luke 19:41 – He approached Jerusalem, saw the city and wept over it.
12. Luke 22:51 – He touched his ear and healed him.

“A gospel of abundance is found only in the Kingdom of God, where somehow we have what we need when we need it. The Kingdom of God is not like an ATM where we can get an endless supply of resources to spend however we like. It is a dispenser of resources offered to those who understand the ways of the Kingdom. Where there is a need and a person who can meet that need, the supply will never run out.”⁹ James Bryan Smith elaborates well on the complete personal commitment of a follower of Jesus, in describing five areas of generosity: soul, body, talents, time and treasure.¹⁰

According to author and mega church pioneer Bill Hybels, in his book *Courageous Leadership*, those who serve in leadership (particularly pastors) need to be continually renewed in the unchanging truth that the “local church is the hope of the world because it stewards the only message that can impact a person’s eternal destiny.”¹¹ That realization should provide a sober preliminary perspective on one’s own abilities

⁹ James Bryan Smith, *The Good and Beautiful Community: Following the Spirit, Extending Grace, Demonstrating Love* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2010), 154.

¹⁰ Ibid., 156–57.

¹¹ Bill Hybels, *Courageous Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 167.

and accomplishments. In a similar manner, Adam Hamilton also recognizes the importance of God's purpose and persevering in it with a Christ-like attitude. Hamilton challenges leaders to take their purpose right from the heart of God and the incarnational example of Jesus, by going "into the community, getting to know and building relationships with unchurched people and caring for those who are hurting."¹² God desires us to approach Christian leadership with purpose and to not shrink back when difficulties arise, because inevitably they will.

Six Transitions

The activity of virtue should bring demonstrable change in the life or character of those who serve in Christian leadership. Each virtue has immeasurable independent value; however, it is together that they make a most significant difference under the controlling guidance of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, this chapter will suggest, as a beginning point, six transitions for those who serve in Christian leadership, based on the virtues of Jesus Christ as identified by Bonaventure. In so doing, it is my prayer that those who serve in Christian leadership will be discover a renewed capacity for their ministries. As they continually focus on the life of Jesus Christ, discovering his virtues, sustaining and enabling them, as they apply the Gospel through their lives and ministries into the growing complexities of Canadian communities.

Reggie McNeal is a noted author and speaker on the area of Christian leadership. In recent years McNeal has advocated for changes to the approach of those who serve in Christian leadership: "Externally focused ministry leaders take their cues from the

¹² Adam Hamilton, *Leading Beyond Church Walls: Developing Congregations with a Heart for the Unchurched* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 17.

environment around them in terms of needs and opportunities. They look for ways to bless and to serve the communities where they are located.”¹³ By giving greater consideration to the needs and opportunities of the surrounding community, Christian leaders may be faced with making changes to their function of ministry.

The following lists those transitions that emerge from the virtues of Jesus Christ as identified by Bonaventure (justice, compassion, forbearance, integrity, discernment and devotion) and detailed in Chapter Three. This list of transitions is a living document and by no means exhaustive. In keeping with the permeability of Complex Adaptive Systems theory, additions to the list and further consideration within the examples given are welcome.

Justice: From Clean to Messy

The virtue of justice, as identified by Bonaventure, speaks to the zeal for God’s holiness to be mediated by those who serve in Christian leadership. The implication for this virtue is that it should influence the manner in which those in leadership facilitate the worship space when a body of believers gathers. It should also provide the motivation to extend the holiness of God toward those who have yet to enter into a faith relationship with God. This dual purpose will undoubtedly produce tension and conflict. However, conflict within a complex adaptive system need not be feared, rather embraced in as much as the clear purposes, and in the case of the church, the virtues are not sacrificed or compromised. Here are a few observations about the transition from the clean, streamlined institutional view of the church to one that embraces the complexity of messiness:

¹³ Reggie McNeal, *Missional Renaissance: Changing the Scorecard for the Church* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 7.

1. A traditional model seeks to have very clean organized systematic way of doing things. Our Sunday services are a great example of that.
2. A clear understanding of grace should deepen the capacity to help those caught in the messiness of life.
3. A clear understanding of truth should hasten the motivation to direct people away from sinful characteristics, knowing that sin will need to be accounted for.

However, it is important to note that we need to allow time and space for people to respond to God's prompting for change.
4. God can take the broken pieces of our lives and make something beautiful out of them.
5. It allows for failure and commends the courage to take steps in a God-honouring direction, knowing that it is often through the liminal space of failure that success or improvement take place.

Liminality, as discussed in Chapter 4, is defined as a place in between. To some it's a place of uncertainty and incompleteness. For others it's a place of discovery and possibilities. Liminal space is a place of the no longer, the not yet, and the might be. It's a fascinating place especially as it relates to the church. Liminal space is where development of virtue resides in the life of a leader. It is also the place where new forms and functions are discovered as a result of allowing virtue to develop. Canadian Author and Pastor, Len Hjalmanson, put it this way: "Churches are entering a nowhere land that has come into being in the turbulent waters of societal shift. We have become like travelers with maps that are outdated and that no longer describe the landscape. The sense that the old maps no longer function increases a sense of lostness, as well as an anxiety

about the future.”¹⁴ We love maps, GPS systems and tracking devices of all kinds. It’s comforting to know where we are in relationship to where we’ve been and more importantly to where we’re going. It also helps us to know where everyone else is as well.

The challenge for Christian leadership during these messy or chaotic times of uncertainty will require a different set of tools. Helping people to navigate their cultural context can seem like an imposing task, unless there is a recognition of the importance of using the resources that God has given to us as opposed to the way things have always been done. Hjalmarson refers to these resources as frameworks, therefore the role of Christian leadership is to help people find meaning and purpose within them: “The meaning-making view assumes that people are naturally in motion, always doing something, and that they need, rather than motivation to act, frameworks within which their action makes sense.”¹⁵

Canadian culture has not become more complicated. It has undoubtedly become more complex. The solutions that are possible in the liminal spaces of complex adaptive systems are important to examine, as they will be beneficial to understanding the key relationships that exist between the main components of the church: people, people who are part of a congregation and people in the ever changing community. Understanding those relationships requires a preparedness to embrace new possibilities that may be both surprising and difficult. Yet they are necessary to experience the growth that has eroded

¹⁴ Len Hjalmarson, “Broken Futures: Adaptive Challenge and the Church in Transition,” accessed October 5, 2015, https://www.academia.edu/16879163/Broken_Futures_Adaptive_Challenge_and_the_Church_in_transition, 2.

¹⁵ Len Hjalmarson, “Leadership in a Chaordic Age,” accessed October 5, 2015, http://nextreformation.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Leadership_in_Chaordic_Age.pdf , 5.

over recent decades. Leadership, fuelled by the virtue of justice, in the spaces between, of past practice and future possibility, will be necessary to allow people to enter into the transformative excitement of new discovery.

Compassion: From Giving to Generosity

The virtue of compassion is one that challenges the personal connection that needs to be made with others. Compassion is reflective in the life of Jesus toward those whom many considered unworthy. Yet, through the deliberate attention demonstrated by Jesus, lives were redeemed for the Kingdom of God. In a consumer culture it is possible that there has been a dilution of the virtue of compassion to a transactional distance of giving rather than the sacrificial commitment of generosity.

Both authors, Miller and Cavanaugh, point back to religious traditions and to current consumer patterns to sound an alarm about the dangers that already seem to be diluting the influence of religious frameworks; sending their leaders to spend their time and energy clinging to a symbolic presence in society to which they seem relegated...unless something changes.

In Matthew 25:31–46, Jesus shares the details of the distant eternal horizon. In so doing He also challenges current perspectives on the suffering around us and causes internal questioning regarding our capacity to respond. It's a Kingdom picture, a global picture that is shaped by everyday individual choices.

“This integration of suffering into the broader flow of the media diffuses its challenge to the dominant sense of evolutionary time. But there is more to the relation between suffering and spectacle. Human suffering is neither ignored nor comprehended as a necessary part of some larger ideational totality; rather, it is packaged and sold as

media spectacle.”¹⁶ That the global world includes those who suffer needs no elaboration. Interestingly, there is a need for conviction in understanding that the local world of our daily movements also includes suffering.

Many would say, “but of course, I donate food and drink, I give my old clothes for resale or even to someone in need and certainly I support care agencies that reach the sick and imprisoned.” In fact, some would say, “isn’t that what we’re supposed to do, give?” My concern is that we’ve reduced Jesus’ call to a transactional relationship rather than a transformative relationship. Here are some of my reflections of Matthew 25:31–46 as it relates to this transition from giving to generosity:

1. We have turned the food, drink, and clothes into commodities and we have co-opted the hospitality to a stranger or the caring for the sick or the prisoner to others.
2. We have focused primarily on the supply, the response, the action of giving and the feeling we derive from being kind.
3. We have turned Jesus into a consumer of the products we allow him to possess by relative benevolence.
4. How often is giving done so that we can replace what we have with something newer or better?
5. Those who were rewarded seemed to give in such a way that they did not even notice it; there was a generosity of character that reveals a transformative depth that does not wait for a news headline, a Facebook event or a bulletin announcement.
6. I say we, because these comments are not accusatory but are from my own reflection and from conversations I’ve had with others; they often condemn my conscience and challenge my thinking and my actions, while shaping the way I lead with others.

To read these words again, listen, not for the product being exchanged, but the relationship being enhanced through action inspired by compassion. Notice the nearness of the hands coming together around a dinner table, a glass, clothes. Notice the hand being held at a bedside or a comforting, assuring smile of a true friend. But then ask

¹⁶ Vincent J. Miller, *Consuming Religion Christian Faith and Practice in a Consumer Culture* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009), 133.

yourself this, if engaging in these actions is like ministering to Jesus, who among us would hurry past him or quickly replace what we've given with newer, brighter, faster, better? Wouldn't we want to talk to him, learn from him, understand him? Has the consumption culture deafened and blinded us to see the needs and relationships in which Jesus is waiting for us to engage?

"The problem calls for something akin to the immersive methods of ethnography, whereby the anthropologist spends extended time with members of a culture, attending to the implicit logics of their practices and the texture of their daily lives."¹⁷ It's interesting that even in this message, Jesus understands the consumer tendency and invites us to delay gratification for a reward that he has been preparing for us from the dawn of creation.

Forbearance: From Telling to Listening

In the professionalized role as pastoral leaders, a sense of worth is often made by educational and academic accomplishments. The ability to know, understand and communicate biblical truth is emphasized strongly. These are necessary qualifications. However the current complexities of local communities call for a greater emphasis on the capacity of leaders to be continually developing their personal relationship with God. "God speaks to leaders and his message is confirmed. An emerging leader may not always recognize God's voice. A leader who repeatedly demonstrates that God speaks to him gains spiritual authority. One who listens and follows will see God's confirmation

¹⁷ Ibid., 227.

and expansion of his ministry.”¹⁸ The capacity to deal effectively with people is crucial to the function of ministry. However, the unpredictable nature of people makes that task an everyday challenge. The virtue of forbearance is essential in the shaping of the character of those in leadership.

Making personal preparation means becoming increasingly open to hearing God’s voice and to making the personal and congregational changes that may be required. It also means being open to dealing with personal issues and motivations that might get in the way of personal and community transformation. “If leaders cannot or will not make the time to prepare adequately for transformation, they should not continue any further with the process. . . .”¹⁹ Integrity is sustained and credibility in leadership grows as the capacity to listen is deepened. Canadian pastors and authors Henry and Richard Blackaby have noted that: “Spiritual leaders are not discouraged by their circumstances – they are informed by them...defensive leaders learn nothing. Listening leaders are constantly learning and growing...Effective leaders make a concerted effort to invite discussion and constructive feedback from associates.”²⁰

David F. Ford contends that questions, the asking of them, and the welcoming of them and the thoughtful consideration of the responses they bring, are an integral part of developing theological views. “Can you really claim to know anything without there being experience, understanding, and judging, with questioning being present

¹⁸ J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1988), 68.

¹⁹ Jim Herrington, Mike Bonem, and James H. Furr, *Leading Congregational Change: A Practical Guide for the Transformational Journey* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., 2000), 30.

²⁰ Richard Blackaby and Henry Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership* (Nashville: B & H Pub. Group, 2011), 185.

throughout?”²¹ What I am learning, sometimes through difficult circumstances, is that Ford’s question is rhetorical. I do not really need to answer it, because there is only one answer. Whether verbalized or not, questions are being asked all the time through personal experiences, and by observing the lives of others. Questions demonstrate interest in the other person. They communicate a willingness to be taught and can serve to empower another as it places the one asking into the position of a listener.

If we believe that God is at work in our communities, then shouldn’t leaders be the first to demonstrate Christ-like humility through listening? Only by entering into the complexity of listening, both to our God (through his Word and in prayer), to our congregation, and to our community, can the discovery be made of places and people with whom he desires us to work, live and play among. Instead, those who are called to shine the Light of Christ, are too often found in close knit huddles within the walls and beneath the roofs of the buildings that have become like bowls, hiding the Light from a world that is waiting to be shown the way to the Father. Kathryn Tanner, in her book, *The Spirit in the Cities* puts it this way: “I want to concentrate on the human person who understands herself in relation to her community and to those beyond her community, a person who needs and is creating a different world.”²² For those who serve in Christian leadership within the growing complexity of a local community, it is becoming increasingly necessary to learn to listen to the many stories that are waiting to be shared.

²¹ David F. Ford, *Theology: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 148.

²² Kathryn Tanner, *Spirit in the Cities: Searching for Soul in the Urban Landscape* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004), Loc. 1323.

Integrity: From Planning to Preparing

Complexity theorists agree that linear thinking and extensive advanced planning can be detrimental to the long-term capacity of the organization. “What this means to us as individuals is that, in the dynamics of our daily lives, uncertainty is quite normal. This does not mean that it’s futile to plan. On the contrary, once we accept that some element of chance is unavoidable we must develop improved ways of forecasting.”²³ From a Christian leadership perspective, the transition from planning to preparing is a necessary adjustment to be made.²⁴ Preparing is derived from the virtue of integrity: the unflinching commitment to honour God’s purposes in all that we are and all that we do by taking time to understand his truth and be obedient in response. Here are some of the reasons to consider this transition, based on my own ministry experience:

1. Planning usually is done with an end in mind (i.e. “if I do this and this, then this will be the result”)
2. Preparation will incorporate many of the same actions of planning, but with the added need to be consistently submitting ourselves to the Lord’s direction.
3. Planning can get us into predictable routines
4. Preparing allows us to stay open to the possibility of change as the Lord directs us according to his purposes.
5. The differences between planning and preparing are often unseen.
6. Planning focuses on action items and outcomes.

²³ A.B. Cambel, *Applied Chaos Theory: A Paradigm for Complexity* (Washington, DC: Academic Press Inc., 1993), 2.

²⁴ Blackaby and Blackaby, *New Day*, 67.

7. Preparing grows from virtues which are revealed in character and shape values.

Preparing is a humble recognition that the Lord is directing my life, therefore I am open to where he takes me, what he wants me to do, who he wants me connect with, and when he wants me to do it. In *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement*, David Brooks relates the many paths through which a person can journey through life in the hopes of fulfillment. “The reality is that intelligence is a piece of mental ability, but it is not the most important piece. People who score well on IQ tests are good at logical, linear, and computational tasks. But to excel in the real world, intelligence has to be nestled in certain character traits and dispositions.”²⁵ Brooks goes on to recognize that what are missing in the lives of people are unchangeable virtues from which to base their actions.²⁶

Caroline Ramsey, a George Fox University Doctor of Ministry Advisor, brings additional insight to Brooks’ conclusions, when she writes that “a scholarship of practice recognizes the constitutive importance of ongoing relations within management practice.”²⁷ This is true not only from an ancient biblical perspective but also from a contemporary ministry perspective. “The improvisational and mindful skills” which Ramsey also mentions are necessary terms that speak to the discernment and sense of timing. In her work on Provocative Theory, her stories accentuate the importance of

²⁵ David Brooks, *The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement* (London: Short Books, 2011), Loc. 2808–11.

²⁶ Ibid., Loc. 4760–4763.

²⁷ Caroline Ramsey, “Management Learning: A Scholarship of Practice Centred on Attention?,” *Management Learning* 45, no.1 (2011): 17.

inquiry in the decision-making role of a leader, “For it is in the cycle of inquiry, as reflection follows action before projecting into further action that evaluation of the quality of previous evidence can be made.”²⁸ Therefore, leadership that is being continually shaped by the virtues of Jesus can be used of God to nurture a fresh experience in the life of a body of believers.

Christian Leadership in the complexity of current Canadian environment can flourish through the development of new stories so that individuals and whole communities are able to function to their best God-given potential. Social theorist Margaret Wheatley would underscore the intentionality of resisting the urge to achieve organizational cleanliness: “When we model our organizations on standards of machine efficiency, we are told to minimize the numbers, eliminate the waste, get down to one. But an emergent world needs the messiness of many. It rewards our collaborations with systems that make more possible.”²⁹ In different ways over the last few weeks, months and years there are reminders that the cultural landscape in which ministries function is undergoing rapid and continuous change and/or fragmentation. Therefore the importance of letting go of isolated preconceived plans to allow for a relational process through which wisdom and timing can be continually discerned will be all the more vital to making a Gospel centered difference.

Discernment: From Reacting to Responding

²⁸ Caroline Ramsey, “Provocative Theory and a Scholarship of Practice,” *Management Learning*, 42, no. 5 (2011): 477.

²⁹ Margaret Wheatley, *A Simpler Way*, ed. Myron Kellner-Rogers (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1998), 73.

There is very little about Christian leadership that is predictable. Over the course of these last few years, I am learning the importance of prayer as a means toward effectiveness in the leadership roles entrusted to me. While I did not have the understanding or language of virtues and complex adaptive systems, I have come to readily identify with the importance of these concepts for the life of the church. The virtue of discernment is crucial as a means to make the transitions from reacting to situations and people, to allowing the grace and truth of God to enable us to respond in a way that reflects the example found in Jesus.

There was the day we had a visitor during a study group that I was facilitating. She shared her testimony. In the context of her story, she shared a passage of Scripture. It was Romans 13:8. Later that evening, I received an email from a congregant. The message was an emotional complaint to me about an on-going conflict with another person. There was a desperation for a solution and there was also a hint at the desire for wisdom in how to control his emotions. I certainly sensed that this latest email could be the last straw unless the Lord provided another solution. My human instinct in these situations is to immediately send a reply. However, I am learning that it is important to take some time to move past the wave of adrenaline that drives the reactions within.

Some of what I am learning can be summarized as follows:

1. Reacting often involves a natural human instinct when faced with conflict or opposition.
2. Reacting usually is a temporary solution based on a subjective (and often defensive) personal perspective.
3. Reacting will often sever or stop a conversation or relationship.

4. Responding is an intentional effort to step back from the situation, take a time-out, pray for grace to be applied and supplied.
5. Responding allows time for personal evaluation.
6. Responding reinforces the value of the relationship and points people toward the grace and truth of God, leaving the choice up to them.

After some prayer, God reminded me of the story I heard earlier in the day. He had delivered an answer through an unscheduled visit. My response, as a result, contained the following:

Lastly, let me share with you a Word from the Lord that came to my attention today. It's from Romans 13:8: "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law."

This verse came in the context of demonstrating love to those who do not seem to return it. The question we often ask each other and ourselves is: "why should I continue to show love to those who mistreat me or (in the case of this person's life) those who seek to harm me?" The answer is that we owe a debt of love, not to that oppositional person, but to our Lord Jesus Christ. His love for us knows no limitation or boundary. He continues to pour out his love toward us, despite our waywardness (those seen and those unseen). Therefore we ought to demonstrate love, not because someone is deserving of it, but because of our desire to honour our Lord and reflect his kind of love.

...Let me commend you again, for seeking to honour the Lord and for taking time to solicit input and insight. May the Lord continue to multiply his grace and peace in your life and may he grant you the wisdom you seek.

As always, feel free to email me, even while I am out of country. If there are specific ways that I can be praying for you then, certainly, I will...God's grace to you.³⁰

In the middle of an otherwise smooth day, these kinds of situations tend to rise up at unexpected times and in unexpected ways. It's the reality of the complex world in which we live. The Lord is challenging me to take stock of how I respond to others, because the way they are treated will affect the way in which they treat others. As I

³⁰ Deve Persad email response written in the Spring of 2015.

reflect on this incident I am thankful that I am learning the capacity to listen to God's Word, listen to others and to have the courage to enter into the messy fray of other people's situations with the grace that flows from Jesus Christ. The virtues that were evident in his life, need to be grafted into our own and I am thankful for the small ways in which He demonstrates that progress is being made.

Devotion: From Rest to Relationship

The virtue of devotion, according to Bonaventure, is one that draws us deeper into our relationship with God the Father. Devotion allows us to learn to continually yield our own will to his. In the continual challenges of Christian leadership, nurturing the virtue of devotion is vital. At the beginning of my tenure as Lead Pastor, I had a simple conversation that has left a profound impact. I had driven two hours from my home to visit with one of my mentors. He's Nigerian by birth and has extensive ministry and theological teaching experience in his home country as well as in Canada. Our conversation that day had little to do with theology training. Rather, my interest on that day was to glean some of his insights regarding long term health for the church where the Lord had called me to serve and for myself, amid all the demands (those that are clear and those implied or assumed).

In eager expectation I waited for a long list or two; perhaps a "to do" and a "not to do" list. I expected, based on my conversations with others, a list of techniques, strategies, even models for pastoral success. What I received that day was not what I expected, but something I have never forgotten and will forever treasure: "Your greatest investment will be time spent in prayer. Take time, do not wait for time, to pray for your congregation, everyday."

My thoughts, no doubt my expression and I'm sure a few words communicated: "How can my greatest investment be largely unseen? That does not measure up to our training to succeed and accomplish; to build and to conquer." His reply "Your greatest investment, for the long term benefit of the church and for yourself, will be intentional time spent in prayer with God, everyday." Those words spoke through my academic, practical and theological understanding of rest and spoke into the vitality of that rest, which is found in a deepening relationship with God.

Author MaryKate Morse, an advisor in the George Fox University Leadership and Global Perspectives program, in her book, *A Guidebook to Prayer: 24 Ways to Walk with God*, says: "Prayer is more than a practice. It is a living adventure with a relational and risen Lord³¹...For most of us the issue is not the abundant presence of God but our limited attention to it."³² Jesus gave a similar invitation regarding prayer, when he talked about a room or closet. I often thought of this room like a closet, small, cluttered or dark. But I have come to deeply appreciate the way *The Message* communicates this invitation to find out what lies behind the door:

Here's what I want you to do:
Find a quiet, secluded place
so you won't be tempted to role-play before God.
Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage.
The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his
grace.³³

³¹ MaryKate Morse, *A Guidebook to Prayer: Twenty-four Ways to Walk with God* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2013), Loc. 145.

³² Ibid., Loc. 215.

³³ Matt. 6:6.

When the focus is on the presence of our Holy God, we should allow ourselves to linger. In so doing there may be a realization that it is not a small closet, but it is a large room where, despite the fact that his Light penetrates even the darkest most remote corners of thought, the best of God's blessings reside, and that He desperately wants to share some of them with us and talk to us about the others, so that all can be encouraged, strengthened and comforted as we learn to serve his purposes for his glory. He wants us to discover that it is a place worth coming to everyday, several times a day.

Amid the many parts of that room is a place where God continues to shape us through the Lord's Prayer. While I did not grow up in a Christian home, I did grow up in a public school that read the Lord's Prayer every morning over the public address system. I was familiar with the words, but they never really caused me to consider their meaning, nor did they bring any change in my life, particularly as Morse describes it: "The Lord's Prayer, then, contains in it all the important fundamentals of Jesus' proclamation. When we pray the Lord's Prayer we affirm the priorities of Jesus Christ and we join with the catholic (meaning all-embracing or universal) church throughout time and place, proclaiming our united calling."³⁴ However, over the course of the last number of years in particular I have come to be shaped by the example and the very words themselves. Three things that I am willing to share about what I am learning behind the door are:

1. The prayer for "daily bread" is a prayer for provision. There have been times in our lives where this prayer fulfilled that meaning; however these words are now teaching us about contentment for ourselves and provision for others – being satisfied in the daily provision and being generous with any increase.

³⁴ Ibid., Loc. 1602–4.

2. The importance of praying for “deliverance from evil.” The unseen forces that battle around us cannot be taken for granted. To pray for protection from evil is vital for the life of a community, a church, a family and an individual. But it is not easy to sustain that prayer.
3. The acknowledgement of the “hallowed name” of our God and our declarative allegiance to submit ourselves to his Power and for his Glory, takes a lot of inward wrestling against the relentless push of our own ego and goals – a quick stop into the room can never be enough.

Devotion to God the Father, was a choice that Jesus, in humanity, regularly made. It was a virtue that shaped his life and ministry. By focusing on the example of the life of Jesus that same virtue can be nurtured in the lives of those called into Christian leadership.

Conclusion

This chapter has proposed six transitions, as a beginning point, through which those who serve in Christian leadership could further develop their capacity to strengthen and sustain their life and ministry, particularly amid the complexities of Canadian culture. Each of these transitions are reflective of the incarnational ministry of Jesus Christ and each of them is derived from the six virtues identified by Bonaventure in his examination of the life of Jesus Christ.

The concept of transition is one that speaks to gradual change and recognizes that there is a continual process involved. This continual process is a means to articulate the character shaping work of virtue as it influences the root system of a leader’s character, which in turn will shape the outworking of growth and effectiveness (fruitfulness). While

each virtue in Down to Earth Leadership may be not be immediately perceptible, their collective effect will develop through the life of those who serve in leadership and will be specifically beneficial in the context in which the leaders serves. This unseen activity of virtue with its resultant outworking is in keeping with the nature of complex adaptive systems and, more importantly, the continual work of God's Holy Spirit, in the life of those who serve in Christian leadership.

CONCLUSION

When I began in fulltime ministry, almost fifteen years ago, I did so with the challenge from a mentor to discern the difference between a job and a calling. If it was the former, then I would be vulnerable to succumbing to the pressures of inevitable seasons of discouragement or disappointment and would rarely find the satisfaction that I might otherwise be looking for. However, if it was the latter as a response to what God was doing in my life then learning to serve in response to that calling would be at once the most challenging and most rewarding of lifetime pursuits. That conversation propelled me into discovering many of the ideas presented in this study.

As the years have unfolded, I have met with, listened to and spent time with many people in Christian leadership. Some have served in small settings, some in larger settings. Some in the Canadian context and others in global contexts. I have come to love what God is doing through gathered groups of people across the country and around the world. For a country like Canada, which has been continually influenced by its welcoming stance to other cultures, there is great wisdom in learning from Christians in other global regions. We live in a solution ready society that is always looking for strategies and models to follow, and therefore run the risk of having the underpinnings of this material being ignored. The media and marketing that is generated from the United States of America, makes the adoption of strategies and models difficult to ignore. However, as the look at Canadian culture demonstrated, there is a significant difference to the way in which are countries are developing their population bases and therefore there are significant contextual differences that exist. The capacity to learn from the

experience and perspective what of God is doing in other global contexts, would be beneficial to the increasing cultural mix of Canada.

As noted throughout this study, when it comes to virtue, there are a myriad of lists for those in leadership to consider. There will always be an on-going tension to sanitize or professionalize these lists according to desired outcomes. Edwin H. Friedman calls for leaders to be “self-differentiated,” in his book, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of the Quick Fix*. He continues to take the leadership qualities, as he sees it, of various historical explorers and distill them down to five qualities that would be vital for those in current leadership roles, particularly for those who are looking to change the way others view the world¹:

1. A capacity to get outside the emotional climate of the day.
2. A willingness to be exposed and vulnerable.
3. Persistence in the face of resistance and downright rejection.
4. Stamina in the face of sabotage along the way.
5. Being “headstrong” and “ruthless”—at least in the eyes of others.

These qualities certainly caught my attention and have captured my thoughts as I have considered my recent experiences in South Africa, in China, my role as a pastor, my role with our work in El Salvador and most importantly, my role as a husband and father. Given the discussion about virtue above, it is important to note an observation about this list, which may be helpful in consideration of other such lists. I have great agreement with the first four. In fact they very much reflect the core virtues of Jesus Christ, which Bonaventure describes. Bonaventure may label those first four in this manner: forbearance, devotion, integrity and compassion. However, Friedman’s fifth principle seems out of place for those who serve in Christian leadership.

¹ Edwin H. Friedman, *A Failure of Nerve: Leadership in the Age of Quick Fix* (New York: Seabury Books, 2007), Loc. 3443–59, Kindle.

And that is where I believe a Christ-centered leader can re-write that fifth principle as one that reveals the virtue of discernment, demonstrating a humble resolve to follow the example of Jesus Christ.

Following a short-term trip to El Salvador in 2014, this difference between Friedman and Bonaventure became increasingly clear. At the start of the week, I felt led to have the team read through John 4 (the interaction with the woman at the well) on a daily basis. Listening to the words of Jesus, and placing ourselves within this story is normally a challenge. However, the objective on this trip was to climb a mountain pass in the hot sun in order to build new homes for people in extreme poverty, who live in remote villages where no westerner had been before. We were also tasked with listening to their stories and through local partnerships point them toward the Hope of Salvation found in Jesus Christ.

As we went through the week, the team understood very well what it meant to be hot and tired. We also found out what it meant to try and relate to a people group that was very different than our own, group that had lost hope because of their personal situation. And lastly, the team learned the importance of putting aside our own needs for the greater eternal needs of others. All of this learning came through a focus on the life of Jesus, revealed in the Scriptures.

Friedman hints at what Bonaventure states clearly: inward refinement can only happen through a developed understanding of our identity as uniquely created, purposefully gifted and deeply cherished children of God. It also reflects the significance

of learning and developing virtuous leadership in community. Jesus says it this way:

“You are the salt of the earth... You are the light of the world.”²

These words of Jesus speak of a collective and purposeful presence and a God ordained function for those who would follow him. They also speak words that place no limit or restriction on their use. We live in a world that needs healing and the preservation of good. We live in a world that is often shrouded by darkness, doubt and fear. The complexities of current culture place demands upon those in Christian leadership that are not easily addressed by traditional and conventional methods of training. What may be required are people who, in discovering virtue as a result of a relationship with God, are undaunted to make the voyage across the street, across the city and across the world. For those who serve in Christian leadership and for the people with whom they serve, learning to lead and to live from the virtues of Jesus Christ will help us in fulfilling God’s purpose for us as His people sent into the world.

Bonaventure, like the Apostle Paul understood that his greatest identity was that of being adopted into God’s family through a relationship with Jesus Christ. Like Paul, Bonaventure came to that realization through a continual focus on the life, death and resurrection of our Saviour. Daniel Harrington and James Keenen capture the intimacy of the Apostle’s Paul’s relationship with Jesus and rightly hold this example up as a worthy aspiration.

From his experience of the risen Christ, Paul was convinced that he finally knew better than he had ever before who he really was: a child of God through Christ. He also knew his goal or “end” in life: perfect participation in Christ’s death and resurrection, and eternal life with Christ in God’s Kingdom. And he recognized that between perceiving his present identity in Christ and attaining his goal there

² Matt. 5:13-14.

was the challenge and even the struggle of living an authentic Christian life by acting in ways that fit with his identity and his goal.³

I have also been grieved at the number of ministries, congregations and people that have been hurt, and even been soured toward faith in God because of instability of leadership. As I have witnessed some of these tragic events or listened to the stories, their scars remain vivid in memory. Admittedly, one of the limitations of this study is discerning the reason for failure at the leadership level. That is indeed a broad and deep topic. However, when it comes to Christian leadership, we will never have a clear picture of the reasons why if we only dig down to the roots. No matter what the reasons may be, this much is becoming more apparent: leadership failure is never less than a reflection of an individual's own relationship with God. In listening to the stories through these years, it's interesting to note the evidence of a fractured relationship with God which often leads to temptations to over-work, look for quick fixes and become overwhelmed. In a personality-driven culture, character matters, especially when it comes to Christian leadership.

For the purposes of this study, there is a necessity to limit the discussion on the great diversity of Canadian culture to some general statements. My practical experience from a medium sized, Southwestern Ontario city will not necessarily be reflective of ministry life across Canada, nor is it intended to. Every province, every municipality within a province, and every community within a municipality possess its own cultural identity. Some of those nuances are historical, while some are more recent. Some are based on language, and some are geographical. However, despite the vast array of

³ Daniel J. Harrington and James F. Keenan, *Paul and Virtue Ethics: Building Bridges Between New Testament Studies and Moral Theology* (Blue Ridge Summit: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2010), 17.

differences that exist, the scope of this paper is to resist presenting context dependent strategy. Rather the goal has been to go beneath the surface of the function of Christian leadership.

The development of character is understood as important in all parts of society, yet it is usually put aside when compared to performance or production metrics. Character is valuable, but only if it feeds the bottom line. When there is conflict, character is allowed to slide. Our look at the Incarnated life and ministry of Jesus helps to bring change to that stance. The capacity of Jesus to willingly let go of his power and authority (in greek “kenosis” or self-emptying) stands in contrast to a status driven society. Additionally, the capacity of Jesus to fully identify with those he came to serve (in greek, “sarx” or flesh) by becoming human also defies the hierarchal distance that typically separates leaders from followers.

Character, however, does not just happen. It is developed. In particular, the character required for Christian leadership is developed by God in the life of the individual. This is where virtue comes in. The constraints of this paper have also limited the examinations of the virtues of Jesus Christ to the six identified by Bonaventure through his writings. As discussed previously, the list of virtues identified in the life of Christ and made available through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, is much more numerous. There would certainly be value in identifying other virtues and noting their effectual change on the character of Jesus and the implications they also would have for leadership function.

The introduction of complex adaptive systems brings a significant challenge to many who are looking for the “one way” to function in their roles in Christian leadership.

Embracing the implications of CAS provides a “framework” within which to affirm a diverse number of models and strategies, which may be particularly necessary given the complexity of traditional, historical, current and future dynamics of Christian ministry.

From a practical perspective, allowing the virtues of Jesus Christ to have an impact, in the liminal spaces of a leader, developing character and the function of leadership is an on-going, life-long commitment. It cannot be approached as an item to check off of the leadership list. The paradox that exists in understanding the role of virtue is that we can never move on from the nurturing of virtue, but only in the nurturing of virtue can we move on: feeding the roots of Christian leadership function from which ministry grows and develops.



Figure 6.1 Virtue Develops the Root System of Leadership

Make no mistake, I'm not opposed to beauty or majesty or prominent leadership. But my desire is to understand, promote and develop the root system (Figure 6.1), feeding it through the virtues of Jesus Christ so that Christian leadership will make an enduring and eternal difference, because it responds to, develops in and contributes to the local complexities. Down to Earth Leadership: Influencing communities through the virtues of Jesus Christ.

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