

*The Leader's Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation.* By Jim Herrington, R. Robert Creech, and Trisha Taylor. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003, xvi-188 pp., \$23.95.

A sabbatical for the study of family systems by Robert Creech, and the practical use of systems thinking in the work of Jim Herrington and Trisha Taylor precipitated the occasion for the authors to write on the subject of how transformational leadership is related to systems thinking. They contended that sharing information about leadership is not sufficient for true leadership development to occur. Therefore, they “go in another direction” by helping leaders understand that they are part of a living system of engagement and relationship (xiv). As a result, their aim was to focus on the leader's being and the management of oneself, rather than on techniques and the managing of others.

The authors called for the personal transformation of the leader that centers on the concept of differentiation of self. Drawing on Murray Bowen's work (e.g. Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy and Clinical Practice* Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1994), they noted that differentiation of self is “the effort to define oneself, to control oneself, to become a more responsible person, and to permit others to be themselves as well” (51). Interpreting this from a Christian perspective, they emphasized “the ability to allow the life and teaching of Jesus to serve as one's compass rather than reading everyone else's emotional chart” (51). The authors stated that gaining the above capacity is the point of the book.

Through several means, the authors pursued the goal of encouraging differentiation of self with the desired outcome of individuals becoming more like Jesus. Initially, in part one there is a challenge for personal transformation and an application of the life of Jesus as a model. Jesus was perfect in the differentiation of self in that his purpose and actions were always to do the will of the Father. Jesus resisted the pull of the Devil, his enemies, and even his family and friends who wished to set his agenda. The authors acknowledged that unlike Jesus, we are sinners. However, they emphasized that even what may seem like a slight change can make an enormous difference. The illustration of baseball was employed to note that the only difference between the all-star hitter of .350 and the mediocre hitter of .250 is one extra hit every ten times at bat. Being cognizant of the common trap of many self-help leadership improvement books, they avoided proposing unrealistic expectations. For instance, in regard to becoming a calm leader the goal is not to become non-anxious (which they admitted is impossible for humans) but to become less anxious. This is part of the transformational journey of the leader.

In part two, readers are urged to think systemically in their relationship, which can prevent destructive triangling (i.e. the avoidance of direct communication in resolving conflict and instead bringing in other parties for support). Further, it was proposed that systemic thinking can alleviate the anxiety that keeps people mired in unhealthy roles like projection, or overfunctioning and that the ability to manage emotions can be developed.

In part three, family patterns were employed to explain how a person's background is a strong determinative in behavior. Great detail was given in regard to how to construct a family diagram. Practical advice was offered on how to have a healthy family system and healthy relationships with others which includes the setting of boundaries. Part four of the book contains an emphasis on spiritual disciplines quoting from a number of well-known authors in the field such as

Richard Foster and Bill Hybels. In the last chapter of this section, the authors concluded the book by challenging leaders to practice transformational behavior until conscious competency becomes unconscious competency.

The book has several strengths. A number of excellent resources in systems thinking were gleaned and blended with practical examples of ministry application. An important point was made that transformational leadership is more than just developing a learning organization that enhances cognitive knowledge or technical leadership skills. Rather, it involves a change in the life behavior patterns of the leader. The authors' years of combined experience with the dysfunctional areas with which ministers struggle were evident as they identified common problems. Those who have practiced ministry for any length of time will connect with and feel convicted by their list of unhealthy actions. However, the book was not intended just to make the readers feel guilty, but rather for them to do something about unhealthy patterns of behavior. The inclusion of self-assessment questions at the end of each chapter and the various lists of characteristics to implement in the life of the leader were helpful in this regard.

A couple of areas were inadequately discussed or avoided. Since the authors stated that Jesus is the model for a systemic approach to the transformational journey, more solid biblical exegesis would have been appropriate. Because this is lacking, it is difficult to discern whether perhaps at times the authors were simply looking for biblical proof texts to substantiate all of their ideas about systems thinking. The Jesus of the Gospels does not seem to fit that neatly into a systemic philosophy. A more thorough discussion for the biblical basis for their assumptions would have strengthened their case.

A surprising area of neglect was the failure to discuss the implications of emotional intelligence research in healthy differentiated behavior. The authors were careful to document their many references to systems thinking. Why did they not mention anything about emotional intelligence? Particularly relevant would have been a reference to authors like Daniel Goleman who claim that emotional intelligence research has shown that old behavior patterns can be changed.

For those who would like to get a concise overview of the application of systems theory to transformational leadership, this is an excellent resource. The authors do not present much in the way of quantifiable data for their ideas but do reference some more substantial works in the field. Ministers will affirm the perceptivity of the authors in their identification of unhealthy behavior patterns. Readers will benefit from the authors' ability to synthesize into practical application some of the more significant works relevant to transformational leadership.

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