

Prologue

Our Leading Edge



At exactly 2:31 P.M. in the afternoon of April 21, 2001, I heard the roar of a runaway train bearing down on our home. Having heard a similar sound as a child growing up in the Midwest, I yelled, “Tornado.” My feet went out from under me. Like a drunken sailor trying to walk on a lurching ship, I staggered out of my study and met my wife who had just been thrown against the wall of the hallway. This time I yelled “Earthquake” and yanked her under the nearest archway. Hugging for dear life, we did a drunken sailor’s dance on the rolling floor while walls creaked, windows rattled, and books fell. My journal now includes the entry

“Today, Jan and I survived an earthquake—7.3 on the Richter scale—Thank You, Lord.”

We live on a fault line in Seattle. This is a crack running deep into the earth where horizontal plates rumble against each other and create a tension that continues to build until it must be released by violent eruption. When this happens, the surface breaks open and the landscape is radically altered.

Physical earthquakes change landscapes; spiritual earthquakes change history. The Word of God warns us about cosmic clashes between the forces of good and evil. Like the Seattle earthquake, many of these clashes are deep within the core of the culture, building tension that will not be relieved until there is violent eruption on the surface. When it happens, the landscape of history is dramatically changed.

If we listen carefully, we can hear the rumbling of spiritual conflict deep within the core of our culture. Tension is building between the glorification of the Radical Self and the glorification of the holy God. Only one of these forces can be dominant in the culture, and only one can be pervasive throughout the culture. Currently, the Radical Self appears to be winning. Secular scholars themselves identify self-interest as the dominant force that is shaping American character and the pervasive force that is influencing American culture.

Into this scene step Christian leaders of the Wesleyan tradition. Responsibility rests on our shoulders for a counterforce that will con-

tend for the sovereignty of the holy God and the pervasive influence of biblical holiness among His people. A pitched battle is inevitable. On the front lines must be Wesleyan clergy and laity who take the risks of leadership because of our biblical identity, our missional convictions, our theological heritage, and our prophetic calling.

OUR BIBLICAL IDENTITY

Definitions of leadership are as plentiful as the number of volumes on leadership that crowd the business section in our bookstores. These definitions range from the simplicity of Peter Drucker's statement that "leaders are persons with followers" to the research-based conclusion of Roach and Behling that leadership "is the process of influencing an organized group toward accomplishing its goals." Christian writers tend to work off the same definitions while adding an emphasis upon character, citing biblical examples, and relating the results to redemptive outcomes. For the purposes of this book, our working definition will focus on the interaction between the biblical qualities of a leader and the response of those who are learning to lead. Leadership development, then, is the process of modeling and mentoring that comes through this interaction. Based on that understanding of biblical leadership, we offer this definition:

A biblical leader has a *God-given vision* that engages our commitment, a *Christlike character* that earns our trust, and a *Spirit-guided agenda* that mobilizes our energies.

Wesleyan leaders identify with all other Christian leaders in this definition. But there is more. We also need to ground our ministry in our missional convictions, take advantage of our Wesleyan heritage, and advance a working agenda for biblical holiness that gives distinction to our prophetic task.

Results-Driven Leadership. Where are the "results" or "outcomes" in this definition of biblical leadership? This is a natural question at a time when leaders are being called into accountability for the outcomes of their performance. Anyone who is acquainted with my history of educational leadership knows that I put a premium on performance for myself as well as for others. Annually, at the start of the academic year, I gave an address to the assembled college, university, or seminary community in which I announced my presidential goals for the year. At midyear, I reported on our progress toward those goals and, at the final faculty meeting of the year, invited evaluation of my leadership based on the achievement of those goals.

Why, then, do I not refer to “results, outcomes, and goals” in this definition of biblical leadership? Several reasons back up my decision. One is the belief that leadership development is defined as a qualitative process more than a quantitative product. While end results are in the mind of the biblical leader, they do not become a compulsion driving his or her ministry. The recent history of televangelists is a sordid reminder of what happens when the end justifies the means.

Another reason why I do not mention results is that this emphasis can be a concession to a secular definition of leadership. How often do we use the cliché of the “bottom line” in discussing the responsibility of leaders? The term comes directly from the corporate world, where leadership is ultimately judged by profits based on earnings and growth. Christian leaders have been seduced by this same motive. Think about the brag points that Christian leaders employ when they get together with colleagues. In response to the question “How are things going?” the answer becomes a contest in growth statistics. As the numbers escalate, the leader who cannot compete will resort to projections of potential gains or blame a downturn on uncontrollable forces. Without retreating behind the old saw that “we would rather be pure than big,” our leadership development needs to be defined by our integrity and our faithfulness rather than the numbers on the “bottom line.”

Most important of all, I do not mention results because biblical leadership is dependent upon the work of the Holy Spirit. Results-driven leadership tends to rely on human effort for its success. The penetrating words of John Stott at the 1974 Lausanne Congress on Evangelism still speak to this tendency. With the lofty vision of winning the world for Christ foremost in the minds of the delegates, Stott stopped us in our tracks when he said that we are only called to be faithful to our evangelistic task; the results belong to the work of the Holy Spirit. This truth is easily forgotten in a time when the techniques of leadership promise to close the gap between our efforts and our success so that the Holy Spirit is left out. When this happens, we distort the “Go, make, baptize, and teach” process of the Great Commission into a number count about which we can brag. We are already living with that distortion in statistics from across the world that show evangelism as our greatest strength but discipling as our greatest weakness. In our denominations, for example, if our converts were discipled into the measure of spiritual

maturity implied by full church membership, the statistics of decline would be radically reversed.

Our case is made by the authority of God's Word in Acts 2:42-47 that serves as the benchmark for a biblical church. We immediately identify with the functions of preaching, teaching, worship, and fellowship, along with the spirit of praise and compassion for all. But we cannot overlook the concluding truth, "*And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.*" (Acts 2:47, emphasis added). Biblical leadership, whether in the 1st or 21st century, leaves the results in the hands of God.

OUR MISSIONAL CONVICTIONS

Implicit in the title of this book, *Wesleyan Leadership in Troubled Times: Confronting the Culture, Challenging the Church*, are three missional convictions. The first is the conviction that *biblical holiness is a timeless and universal truth that still sparks our imagination and engages our commitment*. Biblical holiness has many definitions and many nuances on those definitions. John Wesley himself used such terms as "perfection," "holiness," "entire sanctification," "perfect love," and "full salvation" interchangeably to describe what he also called the "fullness of faith." While controversy swirled around the meaning, timing, and sequence of this work of grace, Wesley never wavered in his affirmation of the doctrine, experience, and practice of biblical holiness: "This it is to be a perfect man, to be 'sanctified throughout;' even 'to have a heart so all-flaming with the love of God,' (to use Archbishop Usher's words), 'as continually to offer up every thought, word, and work, as a spiritual sacrifice, acceptable to God through Christ.'"¹

Because this definition is consistent with biblical revelation, it is timeless across generations. Is it too much to expect that spiritual maturity in our generation still means "love excluding sin, love filling the heart, taking up the whole capacity of the soul"?² Or dare we believe that "faith working through love" is still the all-consuming motive for the heirs of the people called Methodists. "Be holy for I am holy" is as much God's command for 21st-century Christians as it was for 1st-century Christians. Furthermore, biblical holiness is "culture free." Whether the setting is the prosperous, high-tech Western world or the impoverished, primitive two-thirds world, the truth of biblical holiness still holds.

The second missional conviction undergirding this book is that