

Jim Herrington, R. Trisha Taylor, and Robert Creech, eds., *The Leader's Journey: Accepting the Call to Personal and Congregational Transformation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 236 pp.

This work addresses the lack of integration in pastoral leaders that occurs when they overfocus on the self to the exclusion of the influences of systems. The authors emphasize both personal and congregational transformation, but they make it clear that transformation begins with the self rather than with new techniques or fixes for the systems they serve. The authors' experience in pastoral ministry, counseling, and seminary enables them to avoid the staleness of untested academic theory. They address pastors, ministry leaders, educators, and seminarians by tackling a common pastime—complaining about the systems they serve—and inviting leaders to grow by changing themselves and remaining engaged with these systems. When leaders diagnose the problems of others or apply techniques to change others, they ignore the only thing they can control—themselves.

The book's premise centers on leaders considering "living systems" rather than applying leadership tricks. These pastorally seasoned authors prod leaders to "manage themselves rather than managing others" (p. 2). The primary disciplines drawn from are systems theory and spiritual disciplines.

This revised edition begins with the personal transformation of the pastoral leader in light of how Jesus interacted with living systems. The authors' specific examples of Jesus's interactions with his family, friends, and crowds provide excellent illustrations of systems theory practices (such as self-differentiation, reduced anxiety, and purpose clarity) for those crisis moments when the well-intentioned anxiety of others oppresses the pastor (see chapter 2). Second, the book provides a primer on systems theory or, as the authors call it, "leading living systems." This second move walks readers through learning to think, observe, and manage the anxiety within the leader during times of crisis and conflict. Chapters 4 and 5 are a treasure trove of wisdom-distilling systems theory for leaders. The third section returns the focus to the personal in order to deeply address the influences of the individual's family of origin. This part helps readers develop awareness of

their instinctive reactions (arising from each leader's first formation) that are helpful or harmful. Finally, part 4 brings the task of personal transformation to a climax by nudging pastors to practice spiritual disciplines within a community of peers. The authors emphasize throughout the book that making time for these spiritual practices is imperative. Reflection questions at the end of each chapter prompt reflection on concepts raised. Rather than being an awkward addition, the questions function like a counselor probing a reader's response.

A few reactions to the new edition are in order. First, this is a solid introduction to systems theory as applied in pastoral institutions. The authors provide an integrated introduction to living systems, leaning heavily on Murray Bowen's work yet acknowledging the foundational work of Edwin Freeman. This vital resource should find a home in a seminary's curriculum and serve as a tutor for almost every minister or church leader.

Next, this second edition updates chapters, personal stories, and sources. While the updated sources extend the interaction with appropriate voices and move away from outdated voices, the authors do not draw upon qualitative or quantitative research related to their work. They add two new chapters. Chapter 6 provides valuable, timely insight for leading in uncertain times, which is an excellent reminder to lower the anxiety within the leader in the midst of chaos and crisis. The other new chapter, chapter 11, is a defense of the use of systems theory by Christians. This chapter answers rather simplistic Christian dismissals of systems theory.

Third, the appendices provide details on practices. As an example, genogram diagramming is an excellent tool to explore transformation. This new edition, however, does not take the opportunity to connect with current discussions on gender identity nor to provide updated genogram diagrams for more varied gender identities within families.

Fourth, while some readers may think the book repetitive, its organization intentionally reflects the transformative journey of a leader, driving home the basics of systems awareness. The book begins at the personal level, moves to greater cognizance of living systems, raises awareness of the leader's family of origin as a living system, and finally closes with personal transformation using Christian spiritual disciplines.

Finally, the integration of Christian spiritual formation (especially from the work of Dallas Willard) and the practice of systems thinking (especially from the work of Murray Bowen) makes a welcome connection. When describing triangles, the authors connect Friedman's warning that trying to change others creates stress in the changer with Willard's notion that God values self-determination. "Ironically, we do not make others more responsible by taking responsibility for them" (p. 64). Ultimately, the authors help transform a leader's discipleship by returning to their "basic self" that is "less available to the anxious reactivity of togetherness forces" and thus "able to respond from a set of internalized principles . . . rather than from the pressures of the emotional field" (p. 152).

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