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## The God Dimension in Leadership

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## EDITORIAL

# THE GOD DIMENSION IN LEADERSHIP

The universe of leadership books is staggering. A search on Amazon gave 188,543 results. I am not quite sure how the search engine arrives at that number, but in the last few years this number has reached tsunami levels. If you are in the market for leadership wisdom, this is your time. That's why our collaborators at JACL select a few titles each issue and review them for you.

What makes the topic of leadership such a seemingly inexhaustible theme? Is it because leadership is a constant companion of modern life? We all have experienced its sway either as agents or addressees of leadership. For you, perhaps, leadership has been a life-giving force that illuminates, energizes, and invigorates, allowing you to take risks for new possibilities or pursue a fresh path, where before you had seen only the jungle of obstacles and bulwarks like the Berlin Wall. Or maybe you have lived through leadership as an oppressive gloom that snuffed the joy out of life, putting you on guard until it had suffocated any thoughtful initiative in you, giving you a taste of hell.

What makes leaders potentially so life-giving or live-taking is the fact that leaders create spaces, physical or in many other ways, in which people have to live the errands of life. In our change-rattled, hectic urban world, the best of these spaces are places that keep us focused on our mission, inspire strength, and bring us together to aggregate our efforts into achievements never possible on our own. Or they are places where even our best efforts seem to lose their luster in the banality of the moment.

Many contemporary leadership books seem to struggle with the issue of how to mobilize the best of human nature and engage it towards worthwhile human endeavors. This issue is especially critical in the Christian church, which is called to live life as a sign and instrument of God's purpose in a world struggling to find its bearings in the face of overwhelming challenges that have escaped human solutions. But it is not only the world which is struggling; the church has its struggles, too. While the voices of Christian

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leaders in the parts of the world where Christians are in the majority are still influential in their communities, where do these leaders go to refill their energies in the exhausting face of never-ending need? And in the places where the church has been relegated to irrelevancy status in the public sphere and church buildings are converted to more “useful” spaces at an alarming rate, where does the Christian leader go to keep courage and new vision?

In the face of the enormous challenges the Christian leader faces in the different circumstances around the world, typical leadership appears strangely impotent. Most leadership theories assume contexts that are fairly predictable and stable, that can be addressed with good “strategic plans” but that seem powerless in the face of pervasive hopelessness, established obstacles, or relentless evil. As I leaf through many of the leadership models found in my library, I seem to find countless approaches that promise to help leaders to bring order into the chaos of messy problems—but they have little to say about what to do when you have tried all the approaches and the light is still out.

In this issue, the *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* celebrates 10 years of serving the Christian leadership community. During those years we have tried to publish articles that challenge you to explore the many facets of servant leadership as a never-ending source for leadership wisdom in real life. One of the most challenging insights of the servant leadership approach for Christian leaders is the fact that God Himself chose to approach humanity that way. Christian theology has long maintained that who God is determines how He acts. Jesus dying on the cross for humanity reminds us of the inexhaustible mystery that by His very nature God is a servant.

The nature of God—more specifically His Trinitarian nature—is the central paradigm of thought in this issue of JACL. Does God’s Trinitarian nature have anything to say to Christian leaders about leadership? Get ready for some meaty reading. We look at this question in several ways. First, Justin Bowers explores how the creation act of the Triune God might shape a deeper understanding of how teams of leaders collaborate to create. Brian Ruffner and Russell Huisling then look at the remarkable transformation of the apostle Peter as a leader who experienced God the Father as a God of grace through Jesus Christ, a God who reshapes people into His image and character through the Holy Spirit. If leadership derives from God’s action of recreating His image in humanity, what might this mean for human leadership? It is a remarkable vision that treats leadership as an activity that at its core leads to a deeper knowledge of God.

While the church is meant in God’s eyes to be a community where this transformation towards God’s image takes place, real life in society and in the

Church is often plagued by self-interest that is destructive. Even trusted leaders like David left a miserable trail of moral failure and folly, immersing a community into scenarios of death and tragedy. How does a Christian leader face the destructive power of unethical behavior? In “Diabolical to Dialogical,” Brian Ruffner highlights the nature and role of redemptive confrontation and dialogue and the role of communal watchfulness.

You will see a new name in this issue. Petr Cincala has joined our team as Managing Editor. He will fill the shoes of Shirley Freed, the Executive Editor of JACL for the last five years, who has retired to her beloved Canada. Petr has been a missionary pastor in the Czech Republic, where he led a community center reaching out to post-communist atheists. Recently Petr became the Director of the Institute of Church Ministry at Andrews University and the American Director of Natural Church Development, a parachurch organization that resources the American Church through diagnostic and educational revitalization tools. In this issue Petr introduces himself in an inspirational article. He also interviewed the founder of Natural Church Development, Christian Schwarz, who as a remarkable world voice from Germany has helped tens of thousands of churches around the world to become more effective centers of Christian influence. I hope that you will find inspiration and challenge to be a better leader.