# Kingdom Leadership in the Postmodern Era     Len Hjalmarson

Today's church is in serious trouble. The crisis we see is a crisis in leadership, because leaders are often the first to resist change, fearing loss of position or influence. Perhaps Canadian leadership guru Michael Fullan is right when he observes that, "the two greatest failures of leaders are indecisiveness in times of urgent need for action and dead certainty that they are right in times of complexity."[1]

Thankfully, our dualistic and hierarchical[2] models of leadership are falling in favour of holistic and egalitarian models. The crisis is thus an opportunity to rediscover the vocation of the church as an authentic community, a missional and pilgrim people in a foreign land. We have the opportunity to move from leadership cults, to leadership cultures; instead of lone rangers, we need meaning makers; instead of the Wiz we need Dorothy. Back in 2003 Reggie Mcneal wrote,

> "The current church culture in NA is on life support. It is living off the work, money and energy of previous generations from a previous world order. The plug will be pulled either when the money runs out (80 percent of money given to congregations comes from people aged fifty five and older) or when the remaining three fourths of a generation who are institutional loyalists die off or both..."

> "A growing number of people are leaving the institutional church for a new reason. They are not leaving because they have lost their faith. They are leaving to preserve their faith." [3]

## New Directions for Leadership

Is leadership an ability, a relationship, or a dynamic and collaborative process? Our current understanding may not allow room for the new kinds of leadership rising around us.[4]

What kind of leadership is rising within the emerging church? Is it biblical? If so, does it look different from the leadership style we have seen in the past twenty years? Is leadership still about power, confidence, knowledge, and position?

The leadership style that once dominated our culture is becoming passé. Instead of the Lone Ranger, we have Frodo: the Clint Eastwoods and Sylvester Stallones are replaced by ordinary men and women. Frodo, Aragorn and Neo (the Matrix) are self-questioning types who rely on those around them for strength, clarity and purpose. Indeed, while they have a sense of the need and a willingness to sacrifice themselves, they may not even know the first step on the journey.

> *"I will carry the Ring to Mordor.. though I do not know the way."* [5]

This is a far cry from the confident, all-knowing presentation of the classical leader. It is equally distant from the Greek heroic journey (see James Houston's work, "The Mentored Life."[6]) Indeed, the contrast we are seeing is sharper the further we travel along the road from modernity to post-modernity.

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[1] Michael Fullan, *The Six Secrets of Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008) 16. Fullan observes that management theory, ".. has four defects: it is constitutionally incapable of self-criticism; its terminology usually confuses rather than educates; it rarely rises above common sense; and it is faddish and bedeviled by contradictions."

[2] Michael Frost and Alan Hirsch, *The Shaping of Things to Come* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2003)

[3] Reggie McNeal. The Present Future. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003.

[4] Kilpatrick, Falk and Johns. *Leadership for Dynamic Learning Communities* (University of Tasmania, 2002). See also Alan Roxburgh's recent work *The Sky is Falling*. Roxburgh adds *poet* to the leadership triumvirate of pastor, apostle and prophet.

[5] Frodo in Peter Jackson, "The Fellowship of the Ring." Wellington, NZ: New Line Productions Inc. 2001

[6] James Houston. *The Mentored Life.* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 2002)

In *Retrofuture*[7] Gerard Kelly indicts the established church for working overtime attempting to create a rational propositional faith in order to become acceptable to modern culture. Post-modern Christians do not reject the historic faith or the reality of revelation. Instead, they reject modern assumptions and embrace paradox and the postmodern critique of culture. Often this is done with the hope of stripping away modern distortions and recovering the ancient faith once delivered. We are learning that in order to move forward, we must reach back.

> *"Modern society was a culture that consumed its own past.*
> *In contrast, post-modern pilgrims honor the bones of the dead and make those bones live."*[8]

When church leaders fail to engage the postmodern moment, they risk becoming isolated from the culture they live in. This in turn guarantees that the church communities they build will gradually stagnate and die, becoming *museum* communities rather than m*issional* communities. Instead, leaders must listen to the tolling of the bell that indicates the passing of the modern world, and not ask for whom the bell tolls.

What are some of the elements of postmodern leadership that look different than the leadership that has gone before? There are many, and we'll consider the differences item by item.

## Rejection of Authority in Position

> *Let this mind be in you which was in Christ Jesus,*
> *Who, being in the form of God,*
> *did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,*
> *but emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant. Phil.2:5-7*

The empowerment of the early Christians by the Spirit of God sounded the death knell of the old priesthood. Suddenly all God's people were directly connected to the Head, with unmediated access to God.

Postmoderns reject authority in position in favor of authority in relationship. They do not buy into hierarchies, and they tend to assign authority only when it is earned. They don't respect leaders who are "over" but not "among." This aligns with the NT teaching on the priesthood of believers and Jesus teaching that "the greatest among you must be the servant of all."

> In the deepest sense, distinction between leaders and followers is meaningless. In every moment of life, we are simultaneously leading and following. There is never a time when our knowledge, judgment and wisdom are not more useful and applicable than that of another. There is never a time when the knowledge, judgment and wisdom of another are not more useful and applicable than ours. At any time that "other" may be superior, subordinate, or peer. [9]

Where the modern church echoed Reformation doctrine on "the priesthood of believers," cultural forces pushed us *in practice* toward a professional class.[10] The priesthood remained, with a more friendly face, limiting participation to the few rather than equipping and releasing the many. As a consequence, the church as a whole has asked men and women to open their wallets and shut their mouths. Since the medium is the message, and large gatherings tend to be stages for the few, it's no wonder that believers do not feel empowered to reach their world and instead defer to a special class of priest or missionary.

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[7] Gerard Kelly. *Retrofuture: Rediscovering Our Roots, Recharting our Routes* (IVP: 1998)

[8] Leonard Sweet, *Postmodern Pilgrims* (B&H Books, 2000)

[9] Dee Hock, *The Art of Chaordic Leadership*. In Leader to Leader, No. 15 Winter 2000.

[10] See Guder et al, *Missional Church.* Alan Roxburgh's contribution, "Equipping God's People for Mission" details the recent evolution of the clergy on pp. 196 ff.

Postmoderns may admit that hierarchy grants the illusion of structural efficiency, but they recognize that the model is from the corporate and technological world.  In the biological world (postmoderns prefer the organic metaphors), life loves redundancy.  *Why not* have fifty pastors in a community of two hundred adults?  New models of leadership are rising among postmoderns.  Peter Senge's comments, which open this article, call us to a level of shared leadership that evokes something closer to a family than a corporate structure.

Leaders like Senge are building on the concept of team leadership to look for more open models.  Some postmodern leaders like the metaphor of air traffic controller (ATC).  An ATC doesn't fly the airplane, he only establishes safe paths for flight and coordinates their interaction once airborne.  The ATC is almost an invisible part of the process, but his or her role is essential in enabling the flight.  Others prefer the metaphor of symphony conductor.

> "A good conductor does not merely tell everyone what to do; rather he helps everyone to hear what is so. For this he is not primarily a telling but a listening individual: even while the orchestra is performing loudly he is listening inwardly to silent music. He is not so much commanding as he is obedient."

> "The conductor conducts by being conducted. He first hears, feels, loses himself in the silent music; then when he knows what it is he finds a way to help others hear it too. He knows that music is not made people playing instruments, but rather by music playing people."[11]

Still others like a metaphor borrowed from the philosophical underpinnings of postmodern thought: the narrator.  John O'Keefe of GINKWORLD.NET talks about the story:

> No matter the story, no matter the ending, truth is in the narrative.  All story is valid, all story – both individual and group – can add to the collective of the community.  When we see life as simply a collection of story, we start to understand both our humanity and God's divinity.  The narrative allows for creative, adaptable, nonlinear thinking with group input and an interactivity based on transparency and a living worldview.  The narrative is, if you will, a new operating system for the church in the new millennium. Some may view this style of vision development as "vision by chaos," and they would be right.  But out of chaos, God creates order.

In this context listen to John's thoughts on the role of leadership:

> Postmodern people are not looking for a CEO, CFO, COO CIO, or any other 3-letter combinations you can think of that starting with the big "C."  Today, we are looking for the poet, the prophet, and the storyteller – the narrator.  We don't "lead" people as much as listen to the needs of people and guide them along the path of faith. (The community direction is not based on the desires of one person, but grows from the leader's understanding of the collective vision.)

> I think primarily, you don't lead, you example.  Notice I did not say, "you lead by example" – because that is somewhat impossible, and all the time doubtful.  To "example" you simply are you.

These emerging communities eschew titles and labels, recognizing that labels separate people in the community from one another.  Labeling a person by their function ("pastor") damages the wholeness of the relationship, and limits the recognition that many others may be functioning as pastors in their workplace, or in other webs of connection.

At a deeper level there exists the unspoken assumption that leaders have more to give than others, and that those who "follow" need us more than we need them.  In reality, the strong offer one gift, and the weak another.  Until we die to the idea that we are somehow "ahead of" or "above" the community of faith around us, we will continue to be frustrated in our attempts to have an authentic community that combines real relationships with real discipleship.  Jean Vanier writes,

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[11] Chaim Potok. *My First 79 Years: Isaac Stern*  (Da Capo Press, 2001)

We do not want two communities—the helpers and the helped; we want one. That is the theory, but in practice there is a tendency for the assistants to make their own community and be satisfied with that. Truly to make community with the poorest and identify with them is harder and demands a death to self.[12]

**Dorothy vs The Wiz**

Brian McLaren in an article titled, "Dorothy on Leadership," (Rev. Magazine, Nov/Dec 2000) challenges the modern assumptions of leadership and the successful pastor as CEO, alpha male, and corporate hero. McLaren describes his own attempt to emulate the Hybels, Warrens, and Maxwells of the world, and his discovery that in fact size XXL didn't fit him, just as Saul's armor wasn't designed to fit David.

More to the point, McLaren saw a cultural clash; the models that worked in the modern church no longer function in the postmodern church. Perhaps they were never very good models anyway.

McLaren muses that as he considered the problem a scene in "The Wizard of Oz" came to mind. The scene is when little Toto pulls back the curtain to reveal that the great Wizard of Oz is a very average guy hiding behind an imposing image. The 1940's world was a world immersed in modernity, a world enamored with Superman and the Lone Ranger, confident in its own ability and in the promises of science to solve all our problems. Yet the film exposes the Wizard as a fraud, expressing a relentless doubt and displaying an early pang of discontent with its dominant model of larger-than-life leadership. Brian wondered what image of leadership would replace the great Wizard.

The answer appeared in the next scene. No, it wasn't the lion, the scarecrow, or the tin man. It was Dorothy!

> At first glance, Dorothy is all wrong as a model of leadership. She is the wrong gender (female) and the wrong age (young). Rather than being a person with all the answers, who knows what's up and where to go and what's what, she is herself lost, a seeker, often bewildered, and vulnerable. These characteristics would disqualify her from modern leadership. But they serve as her best credentials for postmodern leadership.[13]

McLaren identifies ten Wizardly characteristics of modern church leadership., like "bible analyst" and "broadcaster" and "problem-solver" and "knower." He compares Dorothy to this picture and the result is completely different. Dorothy is a bit disoriented, and she gathers other needy people in the belief that all their needs can be fulfilled in a common quest. Dorothy doesn't have all the answers and can't solve all the problems, but she believes that somehow they can journey together. McLaren contrasts the characteristics of this post-Wiz leadership to the modern mode.

1. *From Bible analyst to spiritual sage*
2. *From Broadcaster to listener*
3. *From Technician to spiritual friend*
4. *From Warrior/Salesman to dancer*
5. *From Careerist to Amateur*
6. *From Problem Solver to Co-Quester*
7. *From Apologist to Apologizer*
8. *From Threat to Includer*
9. *From Knower to Seeker*
10. *From Solo Act to Team Builder*

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[12] Jean Vanier. *Community and Growth* (New York: Paulist Press, 1989) 30.
[13] Brian McLaren. *Dorothy on Leadership (*Rev. Magazine, Nov/Dec 2000)

One leadership type that McLaren does not list is the poet. Alan Roxburgh, in *The Sky is Falling*, notes a new leadership type: the poet. Roxburgh argues that poets had little value in the churches of modernity.[14] In modernity we sought to define problems toward a solution. But poets don't bring solutions; rather they bring questions that invite dialogue. Poets are non-utilitarian. They don't accept the view of a congregation as a tool for impacting the world. Rather, they see the congregation as the location of God's work of redemption and the incipient presence of the future kingdom.

The poet helps people make sense of their experiences. Poets remove the veil and give language to what people are experiencing. "The poet listens to the rhythms and meanings occurring beneath the surface." [15]

The leadership of poets is not expressed in a modern manner. Poets "are not so much advice-givers as image and metaphor framers... What churches need are not more entrepreneurial leaders with wonderful plans for their congregation's life, but poets with the imagination and gifting to cultivate environments within which people might again understand how their traditional narratives apply to them today."[16]

## Leadership by Wisdom and Example

> *The only way to propagate a message is to live it.* [17]

Postmoderns respect love and wisdom, but are quick to reject the connection between knowledge and authority. Since knowledge is always limited and conditional, wisdom has more value. Wisdom always has practical application. As St. Francis put it, "Preach the Gospel at all times; if necessary, use words."

Modernism (and much of what was called "discipleship") stressed "getting the right answer" (as if knowing something automatically transfers to lifestyle); post-modernism stresses "does it work?" It is important to give people space and time, within the context of a community of faith, to journey with us. Thus, a teacher of great worth in post-modern society isn't the one with the right answers, but the one who can ask the right questions, and then walk the road of discovery with others. Jen Lemen comments,

> "In the old way of looking at things, the ultimate point of the leader was to provide a kind of example of a way to be. pastors and missionaries were the ultimate Christians… if we didn't want to follow them, there was something wrong with us; if we didn't want to be like them, maybe it was because something was wrong with them. The whole thing made everyone contemplative about all the wrong things and pastors ended up boxed in and lonely while the rest of us sat around wistful that they could never really be our mentors, our friends, the kind of people we really needed to help us *become*.

> "I wonder if the point of the post-whatever-pastor is simply about holding space. Not space so you can examine me and try to be just like me as your leader, but space so that you can think about who you need to become, about who you are already in relationship to this alternate reality we call the kingdom.

> "The leader just shows you how not to be too afraid while you do that, how to relax a little, how to plunge ahead into chaos lighthearted and pull yourself out of the fire unscathed. A leader shows you by living beside you what it means to be terrified yet faithful, doubtful yet full of hope…"[18]

The good news is that proclamation and demonstration of the reality of Jesus Christ has always been an integral part of New Testament teaching. Paul did not come proclaiming "persuasive words of wisdom, but with demonstration of the spirit and power" (1 Cor2:4). If we choose to adapt to postmodern possibilities, we will find ourselves in a unique position to have great effect in the cause of Jesus Christ.

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[14] Alan Roxburgh, *The Sky is Falling* (Eagle, ID: ACI Publications, 2005) 166
[15] Ibid. 164
[16] Ibid. 166
[17] Jim Wallis, *The Call to Conversion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1981)
[18] www.jenlemen.com, Winter, 2003.

Where modern leaders were often valued for their knowledge and their decision making, postmodern leaders tend to be valued for their example.  It's tough to argue with this as a more biblical position, since the New Testament values character over gifting (1 Cor.13).

Where moderns trust the expert, postmoderns tend to respond or react to a person's energy or person more than to what he or she actually says or does.  If postmoderns trust the WHO of someone, the WHAT is negotiable and open to maturation.  Postmoderns will go along for the ride and enjoy the process even when the goals are not clear so long as the WHO is trustworthy.

The open-ended question of how we follow Jesus in a post-modern society can best be dealt with in the Hebraic learning tradition, which views the teacher (leader, pastor, narrator or whatever) as a co-traveler with the learner on a shared journey towards truth.  For the post-modern person, there is as much value in the question as there is in the answer, so reaching the goal becomes less of a focus.

An old exercise in the dynamics of leadership goes like this: a group of leaders is asked to (quickly!) write down the titles of the three sermons that most powerfully affected their Christian lives. Then the same group is asked to write down the names of the three people who most powerfully affected their spiritual walk.  Guess which list was quick, easy and encouraging, and which list prompted blank looks, head-scratching, and a certain level of anxiety?

> We now know that human transformation does not happen through didacticism or through excessive certitude, but through the playful entertainment of another scripting of reality that may subvert the old given text and its interpretation and lead to the embrace of an alternative text and its redescription of reality. [19]

An axiom of the educational and consultant circles is that we learn the least from the "lecture" method of teaching. Involvement and participation in the learning process has always been far more effective than simply listening. In spite of this, leaders invest inordinate amounts of time preparing sermons that have close to zero impact in growing disciples.

In order for "acquired or experience-forged wisdom" to be truly accessible, however, there must be ongoing, mutual relationship. Every parent knows that the lecture method of teaching is all but hopeless; on the other hand, children watch us closely and learn by our example. "More is caught than taught." A similar adage has been variously attributed to either Native American or Chinese wise-men:

> *Tell me and I may forget,*
> *Show me and I may remember,*
> *Involve me and I will understand.*

Roland Allen, the great missiologist, wrote in "The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church," that experience leads to learning "doctrine" and practices.  A person's experience ought to always out-strip their education. This way they know what they don't know, why they need to know it and have an immediate place to apply it. Motivation to learn and retention rates go way up.[20]

Leadership needs to be seen as a spiritual gift, not a position of power, prestige, or a pay-cheque.  Too often pastors and leaders suffer from the tyranny of the felt pressure to "grow workers", so that they cannot form genuine relationships with those around them.  They feel that the weaker ones don't represent a good "investment" of time because of the lack of "return" for the church's programs.  Many pastors are needlessly lonely and isolated because of this, many others experience burnout or the failure of their most intimate relationships, and many believers feel rejected and unwanted because leaders tend to prefer the company of the more "useful" followers.  (Note that Jesus choice of apostles is stunning from this point of view and anything but utilitarian).

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[19] Walter Brueggemann. *Cadences of Home*. (Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1997)
[20] Allen, Roland. *The Spontaneous Expansion of the Church* (New York: World Dominion Press, 1927).

If leadership is seen as less about power and authority (as modeled in the hierarchical, top-down styles of corporations) and more about gift and character, then we all become pilgrims on the same journey.

The modern leader was the CEO, the manager of people and systems. Larry Crabb, in "The Safest Place on Earth,"[21] comments that we have a choice: we can be either managers or mystics. Most of us feel somewhat out of place in community: we don't always feel safe and community itself is a mystery. We prefer structures we can understand and control. The problem is, God is less interested in predictability and control than we are! Or, from another perspective, He wants to be the one in control, and He doesn't always tell us in advance what He is up to! Or yet again, He may be more interested in the process than the goal; as leaders, we get fixated on goals because our identity is generally tied up in a particular view of success.

**Webs of Connection and Meaning**

Some who read this will be wondering, "You are dismantling our old system, but you haven't given us a structure to replace it? How then do we establish order and avoid chaos?"

First, we have to trust that what appears to be chaos may hide an incipient new order. We may not see the new order as it is emerging because our attention is formed by a modern paradigm.[22] We need new lenses.

> Our God is a God of beginnings. There is in him no redundancy or circularity. Thus, if his church wants to be faithful to his revelation, it will be completely mobile, fluid, renascent, bubbling, creative, inventive, adventurous, and imaginative.[23]

Second, quantum physics is teaching us that we don't need to understand and control the variables before order emerges, and leadership often arises spontaneously where it isn't expected.

Third, we have envisioned leadership as an individual and lonely pursuit. This worked in the modern world of commerce, and it works for an audience, but the practice is damaging to organic and communal life.

Unfortunately, we have built congregations rather than communities, buildings rather than temples of living stones, and audiences rather than families of faith. Building communities requires completely different skills than building an audience. Clay Shirky writes,

> [Building a community] will require different skills and attitudes than those necessary to build an audience. Many of the expectations you make about the size, composition, and behavior of audiences when you are in a broadcast mode are actually damaging to community growth. To create an environment conducive to real community, you will have to operate more like a gardener than an architect.[24]

In his article Clay outlines five things that broadcasters must consider in the connectivity age:

1. Audiences are built. Communities grow.
2. Communities face a tradeoff between size and focus.
3. Participation matters more than quality.
4. You may own the software, but the community owns itself.
5. The community will want to build. Help it, or at least let it.

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[21] Crabb, Larry. *The Safest Place on Earth*. Word Publishing, 1999.

[22] Simone Weil's dictum is accurate: *culture is that which forms attention.*

[23] Charles Ringma. *Resist the Powers* with Jacques Ellul. Navpress: 2000.

[24] September 9, 2002 on the 'Networks, Economics, and Culture' mailing list

Clay spells out some of the essential differences between a centrally controlled organization (what I call "institution") versus a true community. Clay continues:

> Broadcast connections can be created by a central organization, but [community] connections are created by the members for one another. Communities grow, rather than being built. New members of an audience are simply added to the existing pool, but new members of a community must be integrated. One of the most important things you can do to attract community is to give it a fertile environment in which to grow, and one of the most damaging things you can do is to try to force it to grow at a rapid pace or in a preset direction.
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> Small groups can be highly focused on some particular issue or identity, but such groups can't simply be inflated like a balloon, because *a large group is a different kind of thing than a small one*.
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> Community is made possible by [structure], but the value is created by its participants. If you think of yourself as owning a community when you merely own the infrastructure, you will be astonished at the vitriol you will face if you try to force that community into or out of certain behaviors.
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> Real community is a self-creating thing, with some magic spark, easy to recognize after the fact but impossible to produce on demand, that draws people together. Once those people have formed a community, however, they will act in the interests of the community, even if those aren't [the leaders or managers] interests.[25]

We do need structure, and we will need new models of leadership.. but first we need new metaphors. The imaginative architecture of the modern world is collapsing, and we need a new architecture.

Models have a static and inflexible nature. If we start with models they seem to develop a life of their own that acts back on the original vision and pushes toward institutionalization.

Models are too easily reproduced, so we tend to adopt models apart from a context. Because they are highly rationalized, we often make the mistake of thinking that adopting a new model will bring a new result. In reality, a new model imposed on an old environment simply creates dissonance and dis-ease. Instead, we need to cultivate environments.[26] Building on the organic metaphor, Joseph Myers writes that we must cultivate the soil. He continues,

> We shape environments, as opposed to creating groups. When the environment is healthy, people will find connection on their own and form groups spontaneously. This approach gives freedom and responsibility to people, because they experience belonging and a sense that this helps them with their life.[27]

Again, models push definition. This is risky, because definitions require careful mapping, and as a result, we only account for the things that easily measured. But in a world where spirit and faith are primary, the things that are fixed and measurable are only a starting point. In a world where the task is love and the matter is humanity, we need to respect fluidity and mystery.

In "The Discoverers" Daniel Boorstin relates Ivan Turgenev saying to Leo Tolstoy,

> Would to God your horizon may broaden every day!
> The people who bind themselves to systems are those
> who are unable to encompass the whole truth and try to catch it by the tail;
> a system is like the tail of truth, but truth is like a lizard;

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[25] Ibid.

[26] Brennan Manning. *The Signature of Jesus*. Multnomah, 2004.

[27] Joseph Myers. *The Search to Belong.* El Cajon, C: EmergentYS, 2003, p.76

it leaves its tail in your fingers and runs away knowing full
well that it will grow a new one in a twinkling.[28]

I wonder why we are so enamored with models, labels, and diagrams?  I know why they attract me -- they offer the illusion of control.  But control is precisely the monster of modernity.  Brennan Manning writes that, "If we really knew the God of Jesus, we would stop trying to control people 'for their own good.'"[29]

In telling a story, metaphors help in developing an imaginative architecture that remains flexible and evokes rather than defines reality. Description always risks becoming definition, tending to an inflexibility that loses as much information as it includes.

In appealing to imagination, metaphor and story involves a playful attitude that engenders risk and creativity.[30]  These are qualities essential in learning and discovery, and learning and discovery are essential to life and growth and transformation.  Is it any wonder that Jesus "spoke to them in parables?"

An illusion lies at the heart of the modern mindset.. the illusion that we have the power to create spirit, that we in our human brilliance can establish the kingdom of God.  But we cannot... we can only gain the kingdom in a lifetime of surrender...[31]

> *But to apprehend*
> *The point of intersection of the timeless*
> *With time, is an occupation for the saint--*
> *No occupation either, but something given*
> *And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,*
> *Ardour and selflessness and self surrender.[32]*

Models, by their nature clear and defined, approach a kind of intellectual dishonesty.  They imply a level of control we rarely attain, and a level of knowledge we don't have.  Moreover, models are typically applied without regard to context.  They are too readily given away, granting the listener the illusion that they can reproduce the same reality, as if something as mysterious as community can be manufactured like a chocolate cake, by following the correct formula.  It is this error that ends in confusing the vehicle for the journey, and the menu for the meal.

Around 2003 Michael Toy mailed me a summary of a discussion with Doug Pagitt.  Doug was proposing we ditch the word "leadership" with all its military implications, and find new language for talking about those who tend to communities.  His preferred analogy was an organic gardener. What sort of wisdom comes out of the world of gardening, plants, and soil? We learn that:

- We can take crap and use it to nourish things
- it isn't "dirt," it is soil, and the preparation and maintenance of the soil is really important
- things that are garbage are used to grow the garden
- vigilance is important
- be willing to take smaller fruit in order for it to be truly healthy
- gardening requires a systems understanding
- gardens die every winter and require replanting

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[28] Daniel Boorstin. "The Geography of the Imagination," In *The Discoverers*. New York: JM Dent and Sons, 1984.

[29] Brennan Manning, source unknown.

[30] See also Kevin Vanhoozer on C.S. Lewis. Kevin writes of Lewis that he saw "imagination [as] a truth-bearing faculty whose bearers of truth are not propositions but myths." In *Christianity and the Postmodern* Turn (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2005) 84.

[31] George Hunsberger in his chapter, "Missional Vocation" in Missional Church (Guder et al) points out that the NT verbs that reference the kingdom of God are all passive. We "receive" the kingdom, we don't achieve it.

[32] Eliot, T.S. *Four Quartets*. London: Faber and Faber, 1960.

- things can only grow in certain climates
- hybrids don't reproduce
- if you use miracle grow to start, you have to keep boosting the amount
- what you plant next to what is important
- you have very little to do with the success of the gardern, photosynthesis is still a mystery, you can't make it grow, it is a miracle
- backs and knees are sore because you are down in the dirt, you don't stand above the garden
- we need to protect the garden from bunnies. Worms are good, bunnies are bad.
- organic fruit doesn't all look like the stuff in the market. Quality is over beauty, and there is no uniformity.. you share from the excess.

The evidence is in favor of leadership as an organic and communal enterprise. In a paper in 2002, Richard Ascough notes that Paul avoided hierarchical, externally imposed models of leadership in favor of promoting self-organizing, self-governing, adaptive groups. He comments that, "Paul's leadership style could thus be characterized as involving what modern scientists call 'chaos theory.'" Chaos theory is a biological model that sees an organization as a living, self-organizing web of relationships. [33]

Recently the buzzword has been teamwork. Unfortunately, we tend to understand teams in a secular corporate sense: a team is a group of people coordinated by a competent manager. Larry Crabb argues that we have a choice to make: we can be managers or mystics.

**Team or Community?**

Furthermore, a team is not the same as a community. When Ephesians 4 gifting is functioning in a community environment, it can be very difficult to tell who is leading. Leaders may be invisible, encouraging, empowering, and equipping as they work alongside others sharing similar tasks.

There are two types of ministry environment. In one environment a team or teams are formed to assist leaders to develop and implement their vision (purpose). In the second environment a community is formed around a shared sense of passion (belonging). In the team environment success is understood as empowering the group to reach agreed goals. In the community environment success is understood as empowering individuals to belong and to reach their creative potential.

In the team environment roles tend to be set in concrete and leaders are indispensable. In the community environment leaders may be invisible, and leadership roles and functions are often shared. At different times in the life of the community, depending on need and context and the empowerment of the Spirit, various ones take the lead depending on their competencies, deferring to the voice of the Lord. The key qualities in this context are those of Dorothy: humility and discernment.

In his own take on leadership as process Dwight Friesen observed that, "Leadership is about conversation. Leadership has less to do with the clarity of vision, and much more do to with the quality of conversation." He continues,

> How one fosters conversation is everything. Bringing self to the table, creating open space, speaking, naming, surrendering the need to be right, etc. Hidden agendas, unstated vision, passive aggressive needs to control, and rigid categories are just a few of the many ills ready to subvert [a learning] conversation."[34]

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[33] Ascough, Richard. "Chaos Theory and Paul's Organizational Leadership Style " (Journal of Religious Leadership, Vol. 1, No. 2. Fall 2002). 21-43.

[34] From the blog at http://dwightfriesen.blog.com June, 2005 . Note also that German sociologist Niklas Luhmann describes human community as "a network of conversations." From this perspective the best way to nurture community is to facilitate and sustain conversations. Organizational analysts Brown and Isaacs asked effective leaders to describe quality conversations. The characteristics were listed as * a sense of mutual respect * taking time to talk and reflect on what is really important * listened even when there were differences * accepted

Similarly, Mort Ryerson, chairman of Perot Systems, said that the primary task of being a leader is to make sure that the organization knows itself.

> "That is, we must realize that our task is to call people together often, so that everyone gains clarity about who we are, who we've just become, who we still want to be. If the organization can stay in a continuous conversation about who it is and who it is becoming, then leaders don't have to undertake the impossible task of trying to hold it all together."[35]

## Leadership as Meaning Making

Ron Martoia was asked in an interview, "What do you see as the two biggest problems facing leaders in the emerging church?"

> "The first thing is lack of maps and few cartographers. Our modernist moorings, where being seminar junkies and bookaholics was rewarded with the right answers for our analytical questions, makes ministry in this emerging era very problematic. The fact is indigenous ministry will not tolerate book answers to our questions. And the maps may look very different from what we are used to.

> "The second big issue is how to create more workable models of life change and transformation. We find the information revolution so sexy. But the reality is for all the information floating around in the church there seems to be a nearly inverse proportion of life change."[36]

Some will remark that this all sounds very nice, but what about the practical question: who decides the direction? Whether we have a map or not, we have decisions to make.

But what if leadership has more to do with finding meaning than in setting direction? "Strange attractors," in the world of physics cause order to emerge from apparent chaos. "Strange attractors" are like guiding principles or values and have more impact on individual behavior than good management.

Postmodern leaders resist taking control because they know that focus is more important than individual behaviors. Taking control would mean replacing individual initiative, and re-centralizing authority, thus impeding the natural development of community. If our goal is to be in control, we needn't worry about the growth of community; a hierarchy will do. If our goal is to build a congregation, we only need a few leaders, who will soon burn out with the impossible task of holding it together. Instead, leaders need to know how to support, as leadership coach Margaret Wheatley put it,

> ".. self-organizing responses. People do not need the intricate directions, time lines, plans, and organization charts that we thought we had to give them. These are not how people accomplish good work; they are what impede contributions. But people do need a lot from their leaders. They need information, access, resources, trust, and follow-through. Leaders are necessary to foster experimentation, to help create connections across the organization, to feed the system with rich information from multiple sources-all while helping everyone stay clear on what we agreed we wanted to accomplish and who we wanted to be."[37]

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and not judged by the others in the conversation * exploring questions that mattered * developing a shared meaning that wasn't originally there.

[35] Quoted in Margaret Wheatley, "Goodbye Command and Control," in Leader to Leader Magazine, July 1977. See also Capra, *Creativity and Leadership in Learning Communities,* "The most powerful organizational learning and collective knowledge sharing grows through informal relationships and personal networks -- via working conversations in communities of practice."

[36] Ron Martoia. Interview at Ginkworld.net, 2003.

[37] Margaret Wheatley. In "Leader to Leader." No.5, Summer, 1997.

If our goal is to grow communities and to empower ministry and life, we dare not build a corporate culture or settle for a congregation. We dare not be the savior or the one with all the answers, or the one who is indispensable, replacing the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, postmodern leaders don't mind fluid structures and are comfortable with chaos because they are more interested in finding meaning than in building structures or establishing order. Margaret Wheatley comments that "We instinctively reach out to leaders who work with us in creating meaning."[38]

Wilfred Drath and Charles Paulus pursued this direction in a book titled "Making Common Sense: Leadership As Meaning-Making in a Community of Practice."[39]

Drath and Paulus argue that the old understanding of leadership rested on a set of assumptions about human nature and motivation. The dominance-cum-social-influence view assumes that humans are naturally at rest and that they need a motivation force to get them going. 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 actions make sense.*

From this theory appears an important difference and a powerful advantage. When we no longer see dominance and social influence as the basic activities of leadership, we no longer think of people in terms of leaders and followers. Instead, we can think of leadership as a process in which an entire community is engaged. This enables us to disentangle power and authority from leadership. Authority is a tool for making sense of things, but so are other human tools such as values and work systems.

Drath and Paulus have helped me make sense of my own world; I am not a high "D," yet I find that people listen to me and come to me for advice. As a result I function as a mentor, and rather than offering answers I have found that my role is to engage in honest dialogue and reflection with them and help them see their lives from a new perspective. This ability to name and interpret life is an essential quality of discovery and growth, which in turn is at the heart of making meaning.

Too often our leadership models, so heavily tied up with views of authority toward efficiency and productivity, have resulted in our missing the context and essence of leadership. We focused on what we could quantify and became like the captain of the ocean liner who carefully steered around the iceberg.. forgetting that what we don't know and can't control makes up the greater part of the unseen reality. Working with the unseen elements of growth requires intimate connection (community) and comfort with process and paradox.

**Cult or Culture?**

> Moses wanted to turn a tribe of enslaved Hebrews into free men. You would think that all he had to do was to gather the slaves and tell them that they were free. But Moses knew better. He knew that the transformation of slaves into free men was more difficult and painful than the transformation of free men into slaves...Moses discovered that no spectacle, no myth, no miracles could turn slaves into free men. It cannot be done. So he led the slaves back into the desert, and waited forty years until the slave generation died, and a new generation, desert born and bred, was ready to enter the promised land." [40]

This quotation really worries me. I worry that it may not be possible to build a new kind of community with those who have participated in the old one. I worry that institutional people are devoid of initiative, accustomed to being spoon fed, afraid of being labeled rebellious if they think for themselves, and sometimes place the pastor in the role of the Holy Spirit.

[38] Margaret Wheatley. *A Simpler Way* (San Francisco: Barrett-Koehler Publications, 1996)
[39] Wilfred Drath, and Charles Paulus. M*aking Common Sense*. Center for Creative Leadership, 1994.
[40] Eric Hoffer, diary entry, May 20, 1959. Source Unknown.

The hope, of course, is that we can build alternative communities with new converts, and with those who have detoxed[41] from the old system. Those who, as Reggie McNeal puts it, left the institution "not because they had lost faith, but to preserve it."[42]

We also need new leaders, and they won't be created in institutional settings. As Jordon Cooper points out,

> ..for many church leaders who have been trained by the church, creativity and new ideas put the old institution at risk. They are more comfortable as guardians rather than leaders. To ask them to change or lead in innovative ways is like asking for water from a stone. They may be a great pastor and shepherd and speaker but it is a rare person who is comfortable taking risks in church leadership and is willing to face the consequences of failure..[43]

The only kind of leader who can lead institutional people is the "hero," the type of leader who can create followers but not empower disciples. But we don't need more leadership cults; we need to build leadership cultures, where the DNA itself is spread through the tribe. The DNA of the Lion of Judah produces prophetic and priestly communities, immersed in a common story.

Unfortunately, we don't have the option of leading or announcing an Exodus. We can witness to the truth with out lives, but we can't call people to follow us out. Only the Lord can or should do that. If we call people to follow us, we recreate the personality cult, and we create more followers. But only Jesus should be creating followers... We need people who carry the vision in their minds and spirits, a Spirit-born vision of an alternative community.

While the cult of leadership is stronger than it has ever been, it's nothing new. Paul himself warned us against self-promoting prophets and apostles. He warned us against following men because of their popularity or position...

> *For God has chosen the foolish things of the world*
> *To put to shame the things that are wise.*
> *And God has chosen the weak things of the world*
> *To put to shame the things which are mighty (1 Cor. 1 v.27).*

Jesus taught us that there should be no "Lords" among us but only friends and fellow servants. Unfortunately, the modern secular business models we imported into the church have largely taken precedence, and hierarchy is the norm. In the name of leadership and efficiency we have continued to give life to a clerical model that disempowers the people of God from a true priesthood.

At the same time, our leaders are often technicians and marketing specialists. We need a new kind of leader, unconcerned about issues of marketing and structural maintenance and focused instead on discipleship and transformation, faithfulness, brotherhood and authenticity. We need leaders who are willing to step down in the world. As Mark Strom put it,

> Paul would not allow any human system or convention to hedge the communities against the risks of working out what it meant to live by the dying and rising of Christ. Such security would only throw the community back on their own resources and reinforce individual and communal boasting.... Paul urged leaders to imitate his personal example of how the message of Jesus inverted status... He refused to show favouritism towards individuals or *ekklesiai*. The gospel offered him rights, but he refused them.[44]

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[41] Jason Zahariades. *Detoxing from Church*. Online http://www.theofframp.org 2003
[42] Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future* ( San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003)
[43] Jordon Cooper. *Creativity in the Local Church*. In Seven Magazine, 2002.
[44] Mark Strom. *Reframing Our Conversation with Paul (Deerfield, IL:* IVP, 2000)

And finally, the practical reasons are missional ones.

> Some leaders fail to create a culture of leadership, and instead foster a personal cult. A cult is a rudimentary, incomplete, inherently ephemeral phenomenon that fades away when the personality that creates it departs. A culture is much more durable and robust than a cult, because its survival and power do not depend on the presence and personality of a single individual.[45]

We need enduring communities that witness to the reality of the Gospel and its life transforming power. These communities will not be built by charismatic leaders, because those leaders build audiences and followers, not families and priests.

Furthermore, our failure to build authentic and invitational missional communities where each individual owns the collective vision will mean that vision will continue to be enforced from above.  But this is self-defeating, since it results in a few doing and owning the ministry again.  Self-organizing responses only exist where individual initiative is fostered and free.

None of this means that we do not need strong leaders: but not "the hero."  The dominant cultural frame of our time for leadership can be summarized in that single word. Responding to this cultural limitation in an interview in 2001 Margaret Wheatley argued that we need to move *from hero to host*. In an interview with the Robert Greenleaf Centre for Servant Leadership she said,

> We need to move from the leader as *hero*, to the leader as *host*. Can we be as welcoming, congenial, and invitational to the people who work with us as we would be if they were our guests at a party? Can we think of the leader as a convener of people? I am realizing that we can't do that if we don't have a fundamental and unshakable faith in people. You can't turn over power to people you don't trust. It just doesn't happen. The other part about the timelessness of servant-leadership is, what do you do if you can't control events? There is no longer any room for leaders to be heroes. I think one really needs to understand that we have no control, and that things that we have no control over can absolutely change our lives. I think it will take a little while for Americans to really accept that there is no control possible in this greater interconnected world. There are lots of things we can do to prepare, but there is no control.[46]

Similarly, twenty years earlier, Richard Quebedeaux wrote that we need strong leaders, but beyond the celebrity or pragmatist, to show us the way to the abundant life.

> No medium or method of conveying the Christian gospel can meet people's basic needs for recognition, involvement, worthiness, growth, and indeed salvation itself without the loving give and take of person-to-person interaction over a long period of time. This is what community really means, and this is exactly where popular religion and its leaders are not successful.

> In a secular society, in a world where homelessness is the norm, the only way religion can really be "successful" is to provide a home for the homeless -- a family that includes not just my kind of people, but God's kind of people, who love him with everything they have, and who love their neighbor as much as they love themselves. The church does need to become God's ideal family, both in word and in deed.[47]

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[45] Deering, Dilts and Russel, "Leadership Cults and Culture," in *Leader to Leader*, Spring, 2003.

[46] Larry C. Spears, "The Servant Leader – From Hero to Host," http://www.margaretwheatley.com .
Accessed January, 2010.

[47] Richard Quebedeaux. *By What Authority: the Rise of Personality Cults in American Christianity.* (New York: HarperCollins, 1982) 177-183.

## The Context of Post-Modern Leadership: Preaching to Exiles

> The usefulness of a metaphor for rereading our own context is that it is not claimed to be a one-on-one match to "reality," as though the metaphor of "exile" actually describes our situation. Rather a metaphor proceeds by having only an odd, playful, and ill-fitting match to its reality, the purpose of which is to illuminate and evoke dimensions of reality which will otherwise go unnoticed and therefore unexperienced. [48]

Walter Brueggemann's "Cadences of Home" is provocative, prophetic and insightful. He examines models of the church in Scripture and concludes that the model dominating modern experience is that which arose during the Israelite monarchy, a relatively short period in Israel's history. The conditions that produced that model and made it workable were swept away in a cultural geo-political upheaval.

That upheaval is not unlike that which we are experiencing in our own time. Similarly, the model that has dominated since the Industrial revolution, a time of the dominance of Christian culture, is now being swept away. There are signs of collapse everywhere. Even those who are not theologically reflective feel the tension and the "cognitive dissonance...." The western church has largely lost its connection with culture. Worse, it accommodated itself to the old culture to the point of irrelevance.

But what will replace the monarchical model? Brueggemann finds other models in the Old Testament, rooted in times of exile and transition. "How will we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" Even our familiar lands are rapidly becoming foreign to us. But this is a time to rediscover that "we are strangers and aliens here..."

> Ezra is the great "new church start" leader. A new church means reformulating the faith in radical ways in the midst of a community that has to begin again. For Ezra, as for Moses, new church starts do not aim at strategies for success, but at strategies for survival of an alternative community. What must survive is not simply the physical community; what must survive is an alternative community with an alternative memory and an alternative social perspective rooted in a peculiar text that is identified by a peculiar genealogy and signed by peculiar sacraments, by peculiar people not excessively beholden to the empire and not lusting after domestication into the empire.. [49]

As we deconstruct, and as we tentatively look for the presence of God in times of upheaval and uncertainty, we must find a way to utter those fresh, subversive, and liberating words. Whatever we make of the current situation, we can't despair –because OUR GOD REIGNS.

## New Maps and New Territory

Let's return to Ron Martoia's thoughts as we close. Ron described the two largest problems facing emerging leaders as a lack of maps and map makers, and the dearth of models that root life change and transformation. I've thought a lot about both these issues, and recent developments in communities both old and young may offer a new way forward. Better yet, the new way is really an old way rediscovered for a new generation.

Alan Roxburgh penned a series at ALLELON entitled "Missional Mapmaking." In part one he wrote,

> When driving, we see through the windshield but not the windshield itself. Most of the time we are unaware it is there. Maps work the same way. Most of the time we imagine the 'maps' of the particular

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[48] Brueggemann, Op Cit.
[49] Ibid.

city where we live in our heads and just take them for granted. We use them to move about easily and freely but hardly ever stop to think about the maps themselves.[50]

Until, that is, the maps no longer describe the territory. Yet even then they can exert a powerful forming influence, because they are transparent to us. Modernity is the cultural map that shaped and continues to shape the imaginations of leaders in many communities. But the dissonance between that map and the new landscape is helping us to "see our seeing." This opens wonderful new possibilities for engagement, if we do not react in fear.

One of the possibilities re-emerging is found in missional orders. A missional order, or a rule of life, defines a set of shared practices that a community decides is essential to its faithfulness. Note*: shared practices,* even more than shared values. While we often agree on shared values, we are not always shaped by those values. They can remain ideals. We are much more powerfully shaped by shared practice.[51]

The shared practices that make up missional orders vary from community to community, but they tend to comprise traditional practices and disciplines: prayer, study, mission, and hospitality. These practices take shape in a common covenant, a structure that is rooted in grace and in the daily life of the community. Some of the better known communities that participate in missional orders are Rutba House, the Church of the Savior, and Celtic communities like the Northumbria Community. But many more communities are recognizing the potential of these structures to root transformation and missional engagement.

The concept of "rule" connotes for many a new legalism. In the context of our fragmented and individualistic culture it shouldn't surprise us that some respond to that meaning. But the essence of the idea has more to do with rhythm and freedom. Andy Raine writes,

> A Rule is a means whereby, under God, we take responsibility for the pattern of our spiritual lives. It is a 'measure' rather than a 'law'. The word 'rule' has bad connotations for many, implying restrictions, limitations and legalistic attitudes. But a Rule is essentially about *freedom*. It helps us to stay centred, bringing perspective and clarity to the way of life to which God has called us. The word derives from the Latin 'regula' which means 'rhythm, regularity of pattern, a recognisable standard' for the conduct of life. Esther De Waal has pointed out that ' regula' 'is a feminine noun which carried gentle connotations' rather than the harsh negatives that we often associate with the phrase 'rules and regulations' today. We do not want to be legalistic. A Rule is an orderly way of existence but we embrace it as a way of life not as keeping a list of rules. It is a means to an end – and the end is that we might seek God with authenticity and live more effectively for Him.[52]

I observe that when we lose a sense of rhythm we lose a sense of self. We seem to lose a foothold in reality, and our anxiety about self and meaning increases. Just how important are rhythms to human community anyway?

In the busyness and fragmentation and limitless options of our culture we have all but lost touch with anything related to rhythm. We have ways to avoid the change of seasons. We even strive to avoid aging. Only priests and women, who know the rhythm of life in their bodies, seem to have any sense of rhythm these days.

For this reason and others there is something the Church calendar and liturgical response that draws and encourages me. I am reminded that feelings alone will not carry me through. I embrace a discipline - a pattern of formation that sows to the Spirit even when I am tired or discouraged. And I know that as I enter the discipline I connect with a wider community of God's people, even when I do not see them or

[50] Alan Roxburgh, *Missional Mapmaking*. At ALLELON January, 2008. 1.

[51] See also Bass, Dorothy C., Ed. *Practicing Our Faith: A Way of Life for a Searching People.* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997).

[52] Andy Raine, the Northumbria Community. Accessed April, 2008.

know them. There is an element of mystery in this knowledge, and a sacramental vision. In recovering these dimensions of the gospel we may recover something deeper still: a sense of our participation in the ongoing story of God's work in history; a living memory of our identity as God's people.

## Conclusion

> In times of profound change, the learners inherit the earth, while the learned find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists. Al Rogers

Many leaders are failing to engage postmodern culture because they have not understood the opportunities. Others have confused postmodernity as an intellectual movement and postmodern culture with its particular value set, like tolerance and moral relativity, and then tossed out the baby with the bathwater.

This chaotic and uncertain process leads to a neglect to re-evaluate one of the critical pieces in discovering new forms: leadership. While it is critical that we hold on to biblical values and purpose (function) it is equally important that we don't idolize the old forms. Forms change, the gospel remains the same.

If we view the Kingdom as transforming culture (a process that will only find its full expression and completion with the return of Jesus), then we are not only free to explore culturally relevant ways of expressing our faith, we are actually compelled to continually re-evaluate, re-imagine, and re-tell our Story in ways that our listeners can understand and embrace.

When cultures collide, as modernity and postmodernity are currently doing, those who find themselves caught in the collision can feel that their world no longer makes sense. Old paradigms collapse, and the frame of meaning is lost. Those who are meaning makers tend to be listeners and observers, and they join the process of communal searching and learn to ride the shock waves.. they contextualize meaning and discover a new way of making sense of the new world. They arrive at a liminal place.. a place between the two cultures where new possibilities arise.

We need leaders who will sacrifice their personal advancement to inspire the risk and sacrifice necessary to bring change. We need dreamers and visionaries who understand how dangerous a dream can be. Frost and Hirsch note that "It is this capacity to articulate a preferred future based on a common moral vision that allows people to dream again.." [53]

> *All people dream, but not equally.*
> *Those who dream by night,*
> *in the dusty recesses of their minds,*
> *wake in the day to find that it was vanity.*
> *But the dreamers of the day are dangerous,*
> *for they may act their dreams with open eyes*
> *to make it possible.*
> > T. E. Lawrence ("Lawrence of Arabia") [54]

*This article appeared in Reality Magazine in 2004 and on the Christianity Today Canadian website in 2005. Last updated in August, 2010.*

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[53] Ibid., 209

[54] T.E. Lawrence *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (New York: Doubleday/Anchor Books, 1991)