

## Discernment as Practical Wisdom: Toward a Disruptive Practical Theology of Ministry Leadership

John Senior

Leadership is a slippery concept. Those committed to the work of ministry formation in particular, and practical theology in general, struggle with leadership education for at least three reasons. First, leadership is difficult to define. For theological educators, leadership is not quite a discrete ministry practice alongside others in which ministry leaders regularly engage, such as preaching, pastoral care, administration, religious education, or public witness. Instead, leadership, when done well, mobilizes a broad range of practices distinctive to the work of ministry. Leadership is therefore more like a meta-practice, a competency worked out through a complex set of practices that together facilitate some kind of work. What kind of work?

This question opens to a second slippery feature of leadership: the kind of work leadership is has been overwhelmingly defined and theorized in disciplinary frames that are instrumental in nature—particularly in business, military, and political contexts. By an “instrumental” frame, I mean interpretive models whose focus is the achievement of particular ends or outcomes: making money, winning wars, advancing political agendas. The instrumental character of leadership, many theorists have posited, reflects a

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John Senior directs the Art of Ministry program at the Wake Forest University School of Divinity, Winston-Salem, North Carolina. Email: [seniorje@wfu.edu](mailto:seniorje@wfu.edu).

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community or organization's shared values and interests, the realization of which is the leader's task to facilitate.<sup>1</sup>

A cursory Google search for the phrase "leadership books" calls up myriad texts by CEOs, generals, presidents and senators, and business consultants—but not many by ministers or theologians (none, actually, that I can see at the time of this writing). However, religious leaders routinely adapt leadership strategies from these dominant leadership disciplines. Thus, theological educators are familiar with, among other leadership models, "transformative leadership," "strengths-based leadership," "adaptive leadership," and "servant leadership" (which, interestingly, has moved back and forth between business and theological contexts).<sup>2</sup> But what are the advantages and disadvantages of such adaptations? Some Christians would find it odd to suggest that the work of ministry—like business, war, or politics—is finally instrumental in nature, oriented to achieving particular outcomes. Others, by contrast, would disagree and argue that the work of ministry is deeply instrumental in nature. Ministry is about saving souls; one can even count them. Nevertheless, the question remains: to what extent are instrumental leadership models helpful in doing the work of ministry faithfully, and when do they get in the way?

Thirdly, context matters. At this point, one need hardly retell the story of the profound and rapid reshaping of Christian traditions in the North American context. The dominant cultural position of white Protestant Christian traditions is on the wane.<sup>3</sup> Relatedly, configurations of church that have been dominant across traditions no longer resonate with the religious experiences and identities of younger generations.<sup>4</sup> The problem is this: any model of leadership presumes a relatively stable institutional ecology (for example, the American military, the global marketplace, a functioning government) in which the exercise of leadership is intelligible. Until recently, theological curricula have made (or, to their peril, still make) the assumption that seminaries and schools of theology train leaders to step into relatively stable institutions, taking over, more or less, where their predecessors left off. But those days are done. Theological educators are wrestling with the question of what it means to train ministry leaders for emerging ecclesial institutions whose form and configuration, and thus leadership demands, are not clearly known. Of course, some things are not likely to change: the Word will be proclaimed, souls will be cared for, the faithful will be disciplined and educated, public spaces will need prophetic witness,

etc. But just how these practices will be configured in emerging ecclesial institutions, and therefore what leadership as a meta-practice will look like, is still a (very interesting) mystery.

Taken together, these three challenges invite two fundamental questions. First, is there anything distinctive about ministry leadership? This article represents a first-pass response, in the affirmative, to this complex question. I want to suggest discernment as a frame for theorizing ministry leadership. Discernment is a disposition of attunement, cultivated through reflective practice, to a calling or vocation. A vocation, in turn, is God's ongoing invitation to participate in God's redemptive and reconciling work in the world.<sup>5</sup> Discernment is therefore the mode of knowing appropriate to questions of vocation. As theologian Elizabeth Liebert argues, discernment is a process, a gift, and a habit. Although the capacity for discernment is a gift that "arises from God's gracious initiative," discerning persons deepen their attunement to God's call through structured and habitual practice.<sup>6</sup> As a disposition of leadership, the work of discernment facilitates a community's hearing and response to God's call in its corporate life. Discernment does have an instrumental valence in that it seeks to answer the questions: What are our goals, and what should we be doing in order to achieve them? But discernment is fundamentally attuned to ontological rather than instrumental questions. Discernment is indexed to vocation, and vocation implies a transformation of individual and corporate identity through participation in God's redemptive purposes.<sup>7</sup> Discerning leadership, then, empowers a collection of individuals to be a community in the presence of God through shared work and purpose. The rest of this essay considers how discernment grounds ministry leadership and how theological educators might incorporate discerning leadership into supervised ministry curricula.

#### PASTORAL IMAGINATION AND THE *TELOS* OF MINISTRY LEADERSHIP

As many Christian faith communities find themselves in a season of momentous change, ministry leaders—even veteran ministry leaders—can't help but feel disoriented in their vocations. Why is that? One explanation is that context profoundly shapes practice, and when context changes, practices can feel dislocated, out of place, irrelevant. Just ask the wainwrights, coopers, and cobblers whose professions were intelligible in the context of premodern marketplaces but are now much less so. To be sure, the ministry

practices that traditionally constitute Christian leadership—preaching, pastoral care, Christian education, administration, etc.—have endured many iterations of Christian community. But they have undergone modification and reinvention as ecclesial institutions themselves have undergone modification and reinvention. It is no wonder, then, that ministry leaders are wrestling with the question of what it means to lead faith communities with a set of practices that, while certainly not irrelevant, are also not quite at home. Ministry leadership is, in many contexts and at least for the time being, misplaced or displaced. Ministers and theological educators must therefore ask themselves: Where and how does ministry leadership happen?

Against this background, North American practical theologians, particularly those working in white mainline Protestant traditions, have been preoccupied over the last decade or more with the question of what grounds ministry leadership. Many practical theologians have argued that good ministers are formed through practice—the ongoing, faithful practice of ministry practices of the sort identified above. The work of ministry, these theologians suggest, takes a distinctive shape and form in the lives of well-formed ministry practitioners. For some, Jesus Christ constitutes the center of ministry practice, giving it its shape and continuity. Jesus Christ is the *telos*, the end, of ministry practice, not so much in the sense of a goal but in the sense of a center, a ground, and a purpose. Thus, the Leadership Education program at Duke Divinity School poses the question: “What is distinctively Christian about being a Christian leader?” In response, the website offers: “It is the end—the goal, the purpose, the *telos*—that shapes Christian leadership and makes it most distinctively Christian. Our end is to cultivate thriving communities that bear witness to the inbreaking reign of God that Jesus announces and embodies in all that we do and are.” Christian leadership is “Christ-shaped;” Jesus Christ constitutes the “background” and “pattern” of all that Christian leaders do.<sup>8</sup> Working in a Christ-like pattern, Christian leaders will expect that what conventionally counts as brokenness and failure will contain the seeds of resurrection and life.

In the same vein, much attention has been given to two other related concepts: “pastoral imagination” and “Christian practical wisdom.” In the 2008 volume *For Life Abundant*, Craig Dykstra paradigmatically articulated the idea of pastoral imagination as the disposition to “see what is going on through the eyes of faith.”<sup>9</sup> For Dykstra, pastoral imagination is a learned capacity, developed over time through the ongoing and faithful practice of

ministry over the course of one's life.<sup>10</sup> The pastoral imagination is a kind of "unusual intelligence," Dykstra argues, but it is not simply a "cognitive phenomenon." Rather, pastoral imagination is a capacity for deep seeing and interpreting, engaging "mind, spirit, and action," and embodied in emotion and affection.<sup>11</sup> Pastoral imagination is a disposition rather than a belief, though it reflects, Dykstra argues, a fundamental commitment to what he calls "the buoyancy of God," "the knowledge that . . . in every possible circumstance and condition in life and in death—we are upheld by God's own everlasting arms."<sup>12</sup> Dykstra shares with other contributors to *For Life Abundant* a commitment to a notion of pastoral formation that happens in and through the faithful practice of ministry coupled with consistent reflection on ministry practice. Practice gives rise to pastoral dispositions and habits that engender a kind of wisdom about the life and work of ministry. Skillful ministry entails a way of knowing that resists the technical application of rules and principles to life. Rather, practical wisdom is a kind of knowledge of the fitting, knowing how to do, as Aristotle argued, "the right thing, in the right way, and at the right time" in order to achieve what is beneficial in any situation.<sup>13</sup>

Several of the contributors to *For Life Abundant* expand on the idea of practice as the basis of pastoral formation in a subsequent volume titled *Christian Practical Wisdom* (2016). As its title indicates, the latter volume endeavors to define a broader theoretical frame for practical wisdom as it pertains to Christian life and ministry. It does so by developing the Aristotelian notion of *phronesis* as a frame for practical theology. In the introduction, the authors define practical wisdom as "the ability to render a proper assessment of a situation and to act rightly as a result." The idea of Christian practical wisdom strengthens and deepens the insights that emerged in *For Life Abundant*; practical wisdom is knowledge that directs action, arising from practice and informed by skillful deliberation aimed at the good. *Phronesis*, in other words, goes beyond knowledge of the good to enabling the realization of the good.<sup>14</sup> What makes Christian practical wisdom "Christian" is that the *telos*, the end or goal and ground of "the good" towards which wisdom is oriented. For the authors of *Christian Practical Wisdom*, the *telos* and ground of Christian practical wisdom is "the abundant life for all creation provided by God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is already breaking in on the world though it is not yet fully realized."<sup>15</sup>

More recently, the inquiry into pastoral imagination has shifted from the “what” to the “how”—how do ministry leaders learn pastoral imagination? In 2016, Christian Scharen and Eileen Campbell-Reed published a study through Auburn Theological Seminary entitled “Learning Pastoral Imagination: A Five-Year Report on How New Ministers Learn in Practice.” In this study, Scharen and Campbell-Reed tracked fifty ministers from the end of their time in seminary through the first five years of their ministry. The authors identify six major findings that describe how ministry leaders learn pastoral imagination. Learning pastoral imagination is an integrative, embodied, and relational process; it requires “integrated teaching” attuned to the challenges facing ministry in the contemporary context; it involves both daily, routine practice as well as thoughtful reflection on moments of “crisis or clarity”; it also requires mentoring from wise practitioners who “offer relational wisdom through shared reflection”; it invites complex engagements with “social and personal forces of injustice”; and it opens to the capacity to “[inhabit] ministry as a spiritual practice.”<sup>16</sup> Learning pastoral imagination takes time and involves deliberate attention to the daily patterns and practices of the ministerial vocation. But it also happens at key turning points. Scharen and Campbell-Reed identify three “key themes” in the stories of seminarians and early-career clergy that create the conditions for critical moments: first, the “tensions between concepts and lived practice,” the challenge of mobilizing intellectual resources (from seminary education and other sources) to facilitate theological reflection on experience and of allowing the messiness of experience to complicate and recast intellectual resources; second, the “experience of being overwhelmed,” the growth opportunities present in navigating situations to which pastors feel unequipped to respond; and third, “the risk of responsible action,” of learning how to make difficult decisions and to respond to the consequences of decision-making in responsible ways.<sup>17</sup> This finding is particularly striking for theological educators because it invites the question: How might theological educators structure experiential learning opportunities that invite these kinds of experiences?

#### PRACTICAL WISDOM AND THE ABSENCE OF PLACE

Taken as a whole, these conversations are striking for a number of reasons. First, one notices that the preoccupation with a center in these con-

versations contrasts sharply with the absence of place. This literature is conspicuous in the way that it yearns to ground the minister's competence and vocational identity in something secure—some *telos*, something “really real,” meant to anchor the integrity of ministerial leadership in a season of gale-force cultural and historical disruption. But any notion of leadership needs an accompanying conception of place—an institutional setting in the context of which any model of leadership is intelligible. It is no surprise, of course, that a center is substituted for place in these discussions since the traditional places in which ministry happens, and in the context of which ministry practices have made sense, are changing in profound ways.<sup>18</sup> A minister cannot ground his or her leadership in a stable idea of church if the church is undergoing dramatic reconfiguration. But a minister can ground his or her leadership in Jesus Christ as the ultimate source of practical wisdom.

The problem is that leadership is irreducibly place-based; thus, practical wisdom about ministry leadership depends on place. If, as Aristotle claimed, practical wisdom is doing “the right thing, in the right way, and at the right time,” it must also include a “right place.” Rightness depends in part on context, how human beings arrange the many institutions in and through which they live their lives together. Good pastoral care in a hospital, for instance, bears many family resemblances to good pastoral care in a university setting—but the particularities of each space will determine just how that practice is exercised. Practical wisdom must include some understanding of place-based skillfulness, an ability to read particular spaces and respond in ways that are fitting. This is especially important in the current cultural and historical moment because church happens and is happening in unexpected places and spaces.

Another striking feature of these conversations, related to the first, is the linear and progressive trajectory on which pastoral development is imagined to unfold. Teleological framings of leadership formation invite an understanding in which ministry leaders are being formed in the direction of some *telos*, some model of a well-formed ministry leader at which all ministers should aim. Scharen, for example, draws on the well-known work of Herbert and Stuart Dreyfus to elaborate a “framework for developmental learning” of pastoral imagination that moves from novice through expert stages.<sup>19</sup> As in any other profession, there is surely such a thing as a developmental process whereby ministry leaders deepen and expand their

skillfulness, pastoral wisdom, ministerial identity, and capacity to see and respond to the world through the lenses of faith (pastoral imagination). Developmental theories, in various forms, offer helpful heuristics for mapping out the terrain of pastoral formation. The challenge, however, comes in carefully interrogating the meaning of *telos* in a developmental theory—specifically, the notion that there is something like an end, a “finished product” of pastoral formation. In fact, ministry leaders who imagine that they are finished products and who stop listening to God because they think that God is done shaping them are the ones who often get into trouble (ethically and otherwise) in pastoral ministry. A teleological theory of leadership development of the kind discussed above need not inevitably close off continuing growth. But it raises the question: How does God’s continuing, often disruptive, call figure in leadership development, and how might that be understood in theological perspective?

#### A DISRUPTIVE CENTER: DISCERNMENT AS PRACTICAL WISDOM

To explore that question, H. Richard Niebuhr’s understanding of God’s transformational presence in history as articulated in *The Meaning of Revelation* (1941) is helpful. Christianity represents, Niebuhr writes, a “permanent revolution,” a “*metanoia*,” that “does not come to an end in this world, this life, or this time.”<sup>20</sup> Human beings are meaning-making creatures, “believing animals,” and human beings make meaning in terms of some fundamental pattern or patterns. These patterns Niebuhr calls “gods.” They could be gods of nation, money, self, or some other center of meaning. To have a god, Niebuhr argues, is to have a history because gods orient human beings to questions of identity and purpose in past, present, and future terms.<sup>21</sup>

To be Christian is to have one god. The Christian God reveals Godself as “our knower, our author, our judge, and our only savior.”<sup>22</sup> In the moment of revelation, God does not reconfigure the “outer history” that we know through empirical data and serial time. The world doesn’t suddenly change. Rather, God in God’s self-disclosure shifts our experience of what Niebuhr calls “internal history.” We interpret our experiences through new patterns; we learn to see differently, as Dykstra would say, through the lens of faith. But for Christians, God’s revelation is not static; instead, it continually confounds and reorients the patterns in terms of which we understand God, ourselves, and others. God’s self-revelation always relativizes the human

capacity to know God. In the moment of revelation, Niebuhr argues, “All thought about deity now undergoes a metamorphosis. Revelation is not a development of our religious ideas but their continuous conversion. God’s self-disclosure is that permanent revolution in our religious life by which all religious truths are painfully transformed and all religious behaviour transfigured by repentance and new faith.”<sup>23</sup> The experience of revelation as a “painful” turning again and again, in a posture of repentance, towards God is finally an act of grace. No human skill, capacity, or disposition can initiate the kind of turning that revelation invites.

To return to Scharen and Campbell-Reid’s study, one can ask: How do the three “key themes” that feature so prominently in their participants’ experiences—i.e., the dissonance between theory and practice, the experience of being overwhelmed, and the feeling of the weight of responsibility—figure into the process of learning pastoral imagination and leadership? These three kinds of experiences represent sudden, dramatic interruptions, even clean breaks, in the learning process. Professional development becomes nonlinear in these moments. Eve, one of the seminarians Scharen and Campbell-Reid interviewed in their study, describes a situation to which she responded as a chaplain in a hospice care center that involved a dying man and his spouse who suffered from dementia. This particular situation, Scharen and Campbell-Reid suggest, contained all three “key themes.” “We asked Eve what the experience taught her,” the authors write, “and she expressed gratitude, [Eve said] ‘a feeling of thankfulness just to be in those moments. Just what a gift it is. And the gravity of the situation.’”<sup>24</sup> Interestingly, Eve’s response to the question about learning reflects religious affection more than professional edification. Eve is not saying that she learned to be thankful but rather that the experience called forth gratitude. It is not as though Eve was incompetent, that she made mistakes as a novice from which she learned to be a more skillful and wiser ministry practitioner. The situation just happened, and her response was, in many ways, already quite fitting—even though she was unpracticed. The learning came later, in processing work with her CPE supervisor and peer group.

Any model of ministry leadership that responds adequately to the challenges of our current historical moment will account for and appreciate moments of revelatory disruption, reflecting the decentering presence of the Divine Center. Paradoxically, God is both an anchor, a grounding for ministry leadership, as in the teleological frames examined above, and a

decentering presence, sparking creativity and constructive change. This is where discernment as a framing of ministry leadership is helpful. The idea of discernment implies a God who not only has called but is still calling and whose continuing call, if it is to be heard, requires a capacity of attunement to that call. Discernment also implies an openness to a disruption of settled interpretations of one's call and God's movement in the world in favor of divine urgings in new directions. Christian traditions of discernment, from the "discerning spirits" tradition (*discretio spirituum*), perhaps most familiar from the work of St. Ignatius, to traditions that explore discernment as a virtue (*discretio*), exemplified in the writings of Thomas Aquinas and Catherine of Siena, are too rich to explore in depth here.<sup>25</sup> But all of these traditions emphasize, albeit in different ways, discernment as a capacity to grow towards and into God's creative purposes in the world, particularly as they are patterned in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. These traditions also value discernment as a disposition to appreciate the surprising depths of God's call.<sup>26</sup>

I want to suggest that discernment as the capacity of attunement to God's surprising and disruptive creativity in the world is what distinguishes the exercise of Christian leadership in all of its particular practices. Discernment frames "Christian practical wisdom" in a distinctive way. For Christian leaders, disruptive, revelatory moments do not merely represent a deficiency of skill or wisdom inviting learning opportunities that advance a continuous development (though they may also be that). Christian leadership is in many ways most at home in moments in which God's "permanent revolution" (to use Niebuhr's phrase) is most disorienting and where God's presence is fullest. Christian leaders never arrive; they are constantly on the lookout for God's revelatory in-breaking into the world.

As a result, discerning ministry leaders will not only seek to become more skillful in the traditioned and traditional patterns of time-honored ministry practices; they will also look for opportunities to reframe settled leadership practices in order to respond to God in more fitting ways. Moreover, in a moment in which place has emerged as an especially elusive condition of the fitting, wise ministers will be attuned to the ways in which God works to reconfigure the places and spaces in which ministry happens. Take the practices of public leadership. Leah Gunning Francis in her book *Ferguson and Faith* (2015) offers an ethnographic account of clergy leadership in the September 2014 protests in Ferguson, Missouri, following the

August 9 shooting of Michael Brown. Gunning Francis focuses on the way local clergy adjusted their practice of public leadership to better support millennial activists who took to the streets in protest of the shooting. Ferguson clergy learned that the younger generation of activists did not want or need clergy leaders to assume the role of mouthpiece of the movement, the paradigm of public ministry leadership solidified during the Civil Rights struggle of the 1950s and 1960s.<sup>27</sup> In the Ferguson protests, local clergy had to discern whether there was a different way in which they could support the work of the young activists. The clergy leaders moved into supporting roles, standing with protesters, praying for activists, mediating communication and legal assistance to those who were arrested, and making space for younger activists to lead. One clergy leader describes how clergy intentionally “took our cues . . . from the young folks, particularly the Millennial Activists United. They were kind of calling the shots that evening.”<sup>28</sup> Another noted his realization of the need to repent for the “the inconsistent presence of the black church in the community,” which invited humility about the clergy’s presence in public space.<sup>29</sup> In short, Gunning Francis writes, “The argument could be made that the *young leaders* ignited the leadership among the clergy; they created space and impetus for the clergy.”<sup>30</sup> Notice where space emerges here. Young activists rejected public space as it was defined by the representative roles that clergy played in the Civil Rights movement, but they did create space for Ferguson clergy to participate in supporting roles. Ferguson clergy might have ignored or misread God’s movement in public space during the Ferguson protests. Had the clergy insisted on playing a traditional public leadership role, the young activists would have rejected their participation. Instead, Ferguson clergy listened carefully and read the public space skillfully. Careful discernment about the practice of public leadership, given the energy, initiative, and voice of millennial activists, led local clergy to reconceive their leadership during the Ferguson protests.

#### CONCLUDING THOUGHTS: DISCERNMENT, PLACE, AND SUPERVISED MINISTRY

As I have wrestled with the question of what it means to be a theological field educator in a disruptive time, I have learned that it is important to hold open the possibility that theological educators, who value expertise so highly, may not be best positioned to understand ministry leadership in

the communities in which they are working. In an unsettled time, wisdom about ministry leadership is emerging all around us. Academics are good at careful and thoughtful research—at coming up behind realities and making meaning out of them. For that very reason, academics are often on the trailing edge of emerging wisdom about the practice of ministry leadership. Theological educators should therefore look to ministry leaders in their local ecologies who are not only skilled practitioners of traditional ministry practices but who, in a posture of ongoing discernment, exercise leadership in creative and innovative ways. Key questions are: Who are the local ministry leaders who demonstrate an openness and attentiveness to God’s ongoing call, not only in their own vocations but also in the vocations of the communities they lead? Which ministry leaders are willing, in appropriate moments, to lay aside some of the traditioned ways in which they have learned to do ministry in order to shift their practice through faithful and creative experimentation and innovation? Which ministry leaders entertain expansive notions of what ministry is and in what spaces ministry happens? And how do communities of faith embody and learn to embody this same discerning spirit (what Dykstra would call “ecclesial imagination”)? Working within their institutions, theological educators can make space for local ministry leaders to explore the wisdom they are learning about the practice of ministry in ways that benefit students in their own process of ministerial formation.

## NOTES

- 1 Thus, four decades ago, political scientist and historian James MacGregor Burns famously defined leadership as “leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values and motivations—the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations—of both leaders and followers.” James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 19, emphasis in the original.
- 2 A useful overview and critical analysis of prominent leadership models is provided by John P. Dugna, *Leadership Theory: Cultivating Critical Perspectives* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2017).
- 3 For a comprehensive treatment of the cultural decline of white mainline Protestantism in America, see Robert P. Jones, *The End of White Christian America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017).
- 4 Studies abound on this point, including, recently, Robert P. Jones and Daniel Cox, *America’s Changing Religious Identity: Findings from the 2016 American Values Atlas* (Washington, DC: Public Religion Research Institute, 2017).
- 5 For more on the idea of vocation, see my discussion in John Senior, *A Theology of Political Vocation: Christian Life and Public Office* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2015), chapter 1.
- 6 Elizabeth Liebert, *The Way of Discernment: Spiritual Practices for Decision Making* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 8–9.
- 7 Richard Lischer contrasts the ideas of profession and vocation: “What distinguishes a vocation from the rigors and standards of a profession is this: you have to die to enter a vocation. A profession brings out the best in you. A vocation calls you away from what you *thought* was best in you, purifies it, and promises to make you something or someone you are not yet.” Quoted in L. Gregory Jones and Kevin R. Armstrong, *Resurrecting Excellence: Shaping Faithful Christian Ministry* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 95, emphasis in the original.
- 8 “Questions We Answer,” Leadership Education at Duke Divinity, accessed January 31, 2018, <https://leadership.divinity.duke.edu/what-is-distinctly-christian-about-being-a-christian-leader/>.
- 9 “This way of seeing and interpreting,” Dykstra writes, “shapes what the pastor thinks and does and how he or she responds to people in gestures, words, and actions.” Craig Dykstra, “Pastoral and Ecclesial Imagination,” in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 41.
- 10 Dykstra, “Pastoral and Ecclesial Imagination,” 42.
- 11 Dykstra, “Pastoral and Ecclesial Imagination,” 48–49.
- 12 Dykstra, “Pastoral and Ecclesial Imagination,” 55.
- 13 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, ed. Roger Crisp (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 111. As Christian Scharen writes in his piece in *For Life Abundant*, “No instruction or program can simply transmit the wisdom and imagination that good pastors seem to have.” For Scharen, learning is deeply embodied. And the kind of knowledge appropriate to ministry is akin to what Aristotle meant by *phronesis* (practical wisdom), knowledge that emphasizes the fitting—the ability to do “the right

- thing, in the right way, at the right time." Christian Scharen, "Learning Ministry Over Time: Embodying Practical Wisdom," in *For Life Abundant: Practical Theology, Theological Education, and Christian Ministry*, ed. Dorothy C. Bass and Craig Dykstra (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 267.
- 14 Dorothy C. Bass, Kathleen A. Cahalan, Bonnie J. Miller-McLemore, James R. Nieman, and Christian B. Scharen, "Engaging the Intelligence of Practice," in *Christian Practical Wisdom: What It Is, Why It Matters* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2016), 4. This framework is prefigured in Eileen R. Campbell-Reed and Christian Scharen, "The Unfolding of Pastoral Imagination: Prudence as Key to Learning Ministry," *Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry* 32 (2012), 102–17; and Eileen R. Campbell-Reed and Christian Scharen, "'Holy cow! This stuff is real!' From Imaging Ministry to Pastoral Imagination," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 14:4 (October 2011), 323–42.
  - 15 Bass et al., "Engaging the Intelligence of Practice," 11.
  - 16 Christian A. B. Scharen and Eileen R. Campbell-Reed, "Learning Pastoral Imagination: A Five-Year Report on How New Ministers Learn in Practice," *Auburn Studies* 21 (Winter 2016), 14.
  - 17 Scharen and Campbell-Reed, "Learning Pastoral Imagination," 15, 21.
  - 18 It is probably more accurate to say that there is a very clear conception of place embedded in these conversations—a concept of ecclesial institutions rooted in mainline Protestant experiences of the mid-twentieth century.
  - 19 See Scharen, "Learning Ministry Over Time," 268–69. See also Campbell-Reed and Scharen, "Learning Pastoral Imagination," 5.
  - 20 H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), xxxiv.
  - 21 Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*, 42.
  - 22 Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*, 80.
  - 23 Niebuhr, *The Meaning of Revelation*, 95.
  - 24 Scharen and Campbell-Reed, "Learning Pastoral Imagination," 16.
  - 25 For a summary of these theologies of discernment, see Diana L. Villegas, "Discernment in Catherine of Siena," *Theological Studies* 58 (1997), 19–38.
  - 26 Elizabeth Liebert notes the way in which discernment is attuned to the "dynamic, yet constant" nature of God's will. She writes: "[God's will] is full of ever-new meaning to be discovered as our life unfolds, yet it is also constant in the promise of grace, salvation, and ultimate care." For Liebert, God invites human beings into co-creative work; thus, God creates space for human beings to freely choose how they will respond to God. For that reason, she writes, "I prefer to speak of God's *call* rather than God's will—for I believe that 'call' is more reflective of the open, relational, and non-pre-determined nature of God's relationship with us than the classical term 'will' often connotes." Liebert offers a helpful and enriching challenge to the model of discernment that assumes an infinitely large and static God. What is surprising about God's call does not, in Liebert's approach, derive from God's unwieldy bigness but rather from God's creative responsiveness to human freedom. Liebert, *The Way of Discernment*, 31.

- 27 For a helpful critique of the role of religious leaders in the “modern civil rights movement,” see Rahiel Tesfamariam, “Why the Modern Civil Rights Movement Keeps Religious Leaders at Arm’s Length,” *Washington Post*, September 18, 2015, accessed January 31, 2018, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/how-black-activism-lost-its-religion/2015/09/18/2f56fc00-5d6b-11e5-8e9e-dce8a2a2a679\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.236736a8117a](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/how-black-activism-lost-its-religion/2015/09/18/2f56fc00-5d6b-11e5-8e9e-dce8a2a2a679_story.html?utm_term=.236736a8117a).
- 28 Leah Gunning Francis, *Ferguson and Faith: Sparking Leadership and Awakening Community* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2015), 17.
- 29 Gunning Francis, *Ferguson and Faith*, 51.
- 30 Gunning Francis, *Ferguson and Faith*, 5, emphasis in the original.