Developing a Hermeneutic of Leading in Mission

4 views of Browning’s Practical theology:
- **Descriptive** – WHERE is God in what is?
- **Historical** – WHAT do normative text say?
- **Systematic** – Coherent, congruent, and ethical
- **Strategic** – What languages, relationship, strategies, and practices best accomplish the mission and ministry?

These 4 views play off and inform each other.

The role of **leadership** is to bring God’s people back into the **biblical story** – the living word of God.

The biblical story **centers a community** of faith, giving it its **identity**, and holds a community, giving it **space to wrestle** with what it means to be God’s people in the here and now.

**The Bible and Change**

- **Overarching** Christian story...
  - Genesis 1
  - Exodus 20
  - Promised Land
  - Gospels
  - Acts/letters
  - Revelation

- **Particular moments** in the Christian story...
  - Wandering in the Wilderness
  - Exile
  - Holy Week
  - Pentecost
  - Early Church

- **Particular passages** - one moment...
  - John 4 – woman at the well
  - Luke 15:11-32 – Prodigal Son

Some things are constant...
God wants to be in relationship with God’s people and the world

Some things do change...
God and God’s creation are dynamic, living entities

**Christian Community is dynamic.**
Leaders of communities of faith live in a tension.
“An era of de facto American Christendom in which the Protestant mainline churches had been the religious establishment of the culture was ending…

Furthermore, modernity and its hallmark values—reason, self-stability, progress, and optimism—were losing their sense of inevitability and their taken-for-granted status. A new secular, religiously pluralistic, and postmodern culture was emerging.” (Transforming Congregational Culture, Robinson, 3)

“We [the church] are no longer at the center of the religious culture, or of the theological spectrum, or even at the center of community life.” (Transforming Congregational Culture, Robinson, 3)

5 shifts in North American culture

- Obligation to motivation
- Erosion of trust and reliable authority
- New Religious Pluralism
- Mainline Protestantism and Morality
- Complacency of an Establishment

obligation to motivation

- As religious establishment, mainline churches relied on a sense of obligation for membership/constituency.
- IF people are motivated, they find meaning and value…then they become involved.

With this shift came the loss of the power of the biblical faith, which was replaced by a conventional morality.

Erosion of trust and reliable authority

- The problems people faced were deeper (and darker) than those addressed by a civic faith that was strong on good works.
- The culture of the 60s and 70s, the culture in which the church existed, shattered confidence in leadership and social trust dissolved.
- One could no longer assume stable family structures and the strength of individual character to which the mainline church called people into service.
New Religious Pluralism

- As a result of the 1965 Immigration and Naturalization Act, America rapidly became a more ethnically and religiously diverse society – new waves of immigrants came!
- We are living in the aftermath of that reality!
- As we begin the 21st century – There are now more Muslims in the United States than Presbyterians!
- The country has shifted from a religiously homogeneous Christian culture to a religiously pluralistic society!

Mainline Protestantism and Morality

- As the religious establishment, mainline Protestant churches had embraced the dominant values of modernity so fully that they lacked the capacity to critically assess modernity and its values.
- Reliance on reason, individual/human self-sufficiency, optimism and progress became embedded into mainline Protestant thinking.
- No Christian distinctiveness or capacity to challenge cultural values.

Complacency of an Establishment

- Too often mainline congregations/leaders assumed a guaranteed place and constituency!
- Slow to recognize this place was in jeopardy!

The church and culture became interwoven in ways that we [the church] were mostly unaware of – because we became accustomed to them.

realities in mainline Protestant churches

- Deeply held beliefs were challenged!
- The values and strategies that served the Christendom era no longer worked
- Competing alternatives loomed on the horizon
- The modern era is over/ending and postmodernity is emerging
- There is no shared meta-narrative or “agenda”
It is not an easy time to be a leader in the mainline Protestant church...

But it is also, paradoxically, a very good time to be a leader in the mainline Protestant church.

Adaptive work lies ahead...

And the adaptive work that lies ahead for the mainline Protestant church is, at its core, spiritual work!

10 shifts for congregations

- From civic faith to human transformation
- From assuming the goods to delivering the goods
- Congregational spirituality: from givers to receivers who give
- From board culture to ministry culture
- From community organization to faith-based ministry
- From democracy to discernment
- The budget: from ends to means
- From fellowship to hospitality
- Membership growth: from passive to active

6 strategies for leadership

- Get on the balcony
- Identify the adaptive change
- Regulating distress
- Maintain disciplines action
- Give responsibility back
- Protect leadership from below

reflections

- What was most helpful from Robinson?
- What questions are you left with?
- What “resources” does the church you are affiliated with have to offer this conversation?

Changing the culture of organizations, groups, and institutions – and even societies – is about changing the conversation...
“...Those leading change use new language (or rediscover older language), introduce different topics, formulate new agendas, and offer alternative ways of framing issues and situations.”

“...One might understand the Christian faith itself as, in important ways, an ongoing effort at changing the conversation and thus changing the way we understand our lives and the way we live in the world.”

“...In the sacrament of baptism we name and rename a child or an adult as ‘a child of God, a disciple of Christ, and a member of the church.’ During Lent and Easter we reframe loss and defeat as God's strange way of victory and hope.”

“...When we are asked to offer our gifts to God in the practice of offering, we are invited to set aside the dominant language of consumerism and scarcity and discover ourselves within a complex narrative of receiving, giving, and abundance.”

“...Each Sunday during worship people rename and reframe themselves as they confess their sins, listen as forgiveness is announced, and hear a word from the Lord proclaimed.”

“...Churches are ongoing attempts to change the conversation, whether they are our internal or personal conversations or the dominant and conventional ways that matters are construed in North American society.”

Robinson, Changing the Conversation, 1
Changing the Conversation

Robinson’s offering of a Third Way...

- by having and sustaining 10 crucial conversations
- that constitute an agenda for congregations of the mainline Protestant tradition
- in hopes of creating renewal and vitality in congregations in the 21st century.

Why a Third way?

- Current categories not all that helpful (i.e., liberal or conservation, traditional or contemporary).
- We live in a society that is drawn to polarities (i.e., pro this or pro that).
- Is a third way a compromise or constructive?

Who’s offering constructive help?

- Diana Butler Bass – intentional, Christian practices, alive and vibrant community of faith
- Missional Church – congregation as leavening influence in and for the world
- Michael Foss – congregation with culture of discipleship.
- Brian McLaren – rediscovery of local congregation with strong center and open posture.

Two conceptual frameworks

- Set theory –
  - Open-set congregations
  - Bounded-set congregations
  - Center-set congregations
- Third-way thinking –
  - Church-as-clinic
  - Church-as-court
  - Church-as-Community of Human transformation

Discussion points

- Why or how is the “conversation” to change?
- What is the third way?
- Choose two of Robinson’s conversations and reflect on how those conversations might intersect with congregational life, as you imagine it today.

Robinson’s 10 conversations

- Mega-shifts – it’s not about you
- Our agency – it is about you
- The heart of the matter – evangelism, worship, Scripture and theology
- Leadership – developing leadership capacity
- Purpose – why we are here?
- Future-orientation – vision – adaptive challenges
- Public face – and the role of the church
- Death/resurrection – death is not the end
- Where to start?