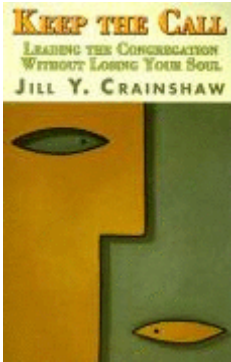


Book Reviews

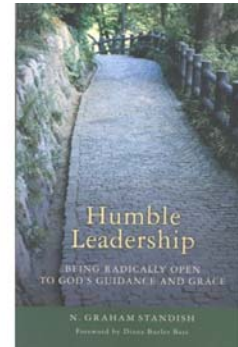


Keep the Call: Leading the Congregation Without Losing Your Soul

by Jill Y. Crainshaw
Abingdon Press © 2007

Humble Leadership: Being Radically Open to God's Guidance and Grace

by N. Graham Standish
The Alban Institute © 2007



The number of books and articles on leadership, both in the secular press as well as religious literature, is mind boggling. Here are two more which I read back to back. Two more different books on the subject could not be found.

The work by Jill Crainshaw, faculty at Wake Forest University Divinity School in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, is evocative, poetic and artistic in language and imagery. The bibliography is amazingly broad and she calls upon a large and divergent series of authors and voices. Her invitation to listen for the soundscape of a congregation caused me to listen more acutely to the words and tones of conversation and worship in my community of faith. If I were particularly stymied by the congregation I was serving and wanted a work that might help me look at things through different lenses – or hear differently through retuned ears - I would recommend this book. It is not your typical book on leadership.

Crainshaw sees ministry in three parts - ministry as proclamation, ministry as formation and ministry as transformation - and explores these through a hypothetical congregation and its female minister. I kept looking for her views on not losing your soul in ministry, which holds such a dominant place in the book's title, but that had to wait until the last few pages. This book is no cookie cutter approach to ministry and by the end of it I realized that she gives permission to be more relaxed about leadership. As such, I read it as a healthy response to the seeming success of the mega church movement of her country.

Interestingly, I read Graham Standish's book also as a response to the mega-church movement. Because both books seem to have that as a backdrop, it raises the endless challenge of finding works that are pertinent to our Canadian context. However, there are easily transferable ideas and images such as a wonderful chapter in Crainshaw's work on asking questions, imaginative questions.

In contrast, Graham Standish, pastor of Calvin Presbyterian Church in Zelienople, Pennsylvania, is a more linear non-poetic treatment. I appreciated just reading a book on

humility as a central focus as it relates to leadership and each of the chapters presented excellent material: Self-aware leadership; Prayerful leadership; Unifying leadership; Spirit-led leadership; and Humbly effective leadership. There was totally new information in this book. In the chapter on self-aware leadership, the psychological pitfalls of personality disorders was particularly helpful (i.e., histrionic, narcissistic, dependent, and obsessive-compulsive personalities) as I could put personal experiences to the descriptions and reflect on how I could have handled those situations differently. In his chapter on prayerful leadership his examination of unhelpful leadership not rooted in prayer, what he calls functional, traditional and biblical leadership, was also very helpful. This book would not only be good for an individual to read but also useful for a clergy group to study together.

One underlying question got raised for me through reading the book by Standish. He uses the term “the will of God” throughout the book but I had the sense that there was an unexamined background assumption that the will of God was very much like a roadmap. If only one could be attentive and discerning enough the map for the road would be clear for all to see. Instead of a road map I experience God’s will more like the movement of energy streams. The enterprise of attentiveness and discerning will occasionally result in the kind of clarity that a good road map provides but much more often it helps us to be aware of the direction the winds of the Spirit are blowing. In so many areas of life, there is usually more than one approach that can be taken that is God-centered and moving in the direction that the Spirit is flowing (to use a water image). As Crainshaw argues, ministry is a process. That thought brings us back to the significance of asking imaginative questions. How many times have I sat with a person and it is the question they ask, not the solution that they offer, that nudges the door open to God’s direction and desires.

John Buttars, for The Centre for Clergy Care and Congregational Health © 2008
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