

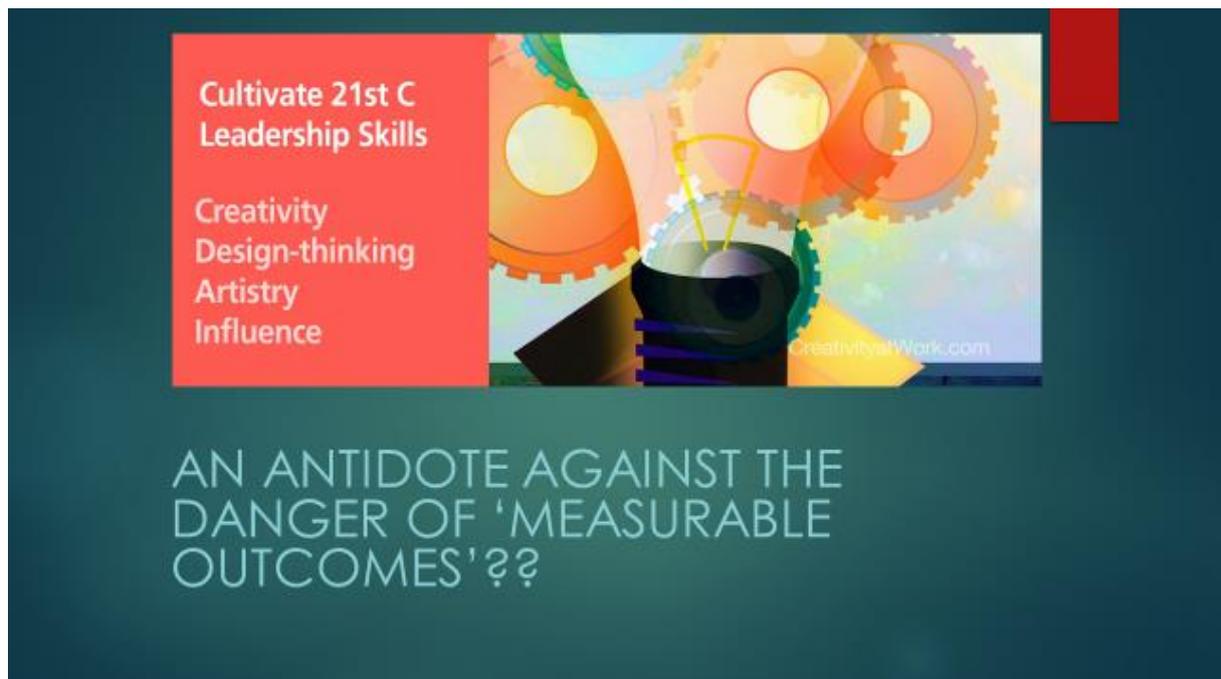
How Should We Think About Leadership As We Approach the year 2020?

Introduction

I wonder why there should be any **reference to the year 2020** in the title of my seminar? Is this a kind of magic use of numbers? What will be said when we have approached 2020?

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going to heaven, we were all going to the other way – in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its nosiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.

These opening words in Charles Dickens' novel *A Tale of Two Cities* could well come to mind when we observe the landscapes of our societies and of our schools today. To demonstrate condition of “the worst of times” and the opportunity of “the best of times,” examine the following illustration: (PP 1).



First of all, I will mention what I call “the tyranny of numbers” a great danger to true leadership -- “the worst of times.”

This is an artistic representation of how we should cultivate leadership in the 21st century -- as “the best of times.”

It succinctly captures the essence of the antidote against rational, impersonal thought, the practice of dreaming in statistical overviews and of being a leader who depersonalizes each member of the organization to a mere number.

Quote (taken from the gospelcoalition.org site):

'We are in the age of gargantuan numbers, truly instant information, ceaselessly hyperactive social media, and the worldwide web has become a flood-drive Niagara of raw, uninterpreted information and emotion that pounds down us by the minute with its ceaseless roar and its drenching delude. Who can hear themselves think, let alone make sense of it all with genuine reflection and seasoned judgements?

No wonder it is tempting to give up and go with the flow, rushing along with the crowds and swept past the best as we chase after the most. It is all too easy to get caught up in the sensational and forget the significant. Those who make this mistake miss the important for the urgent and become attuned to popular approval rather than divine authority. They count opinions rather than weigh them. (...)

This idolatry of numbers has become worse because our public administration (government) lean on us heavily and require that we provide "measurable outcomes" for every project, plan, and possibility that dare to knock on their door, when often the desired outcomes are quite unquantifiable, at least in advance....

Every age is fooled by its own fashions, and it is time to subject modern idolatry of opinion and numbers to decisive Christian thinking.'

Consequently, the truth portrayed in this picture (PP 1) is that effective leadership requires creativity, imagination etc.

(PP 2)

Please turn with me to the next exciting picture on the screen. This is a wonderful picture, but it actually shows an extreme danger when interpreted as a prophetic insight.... We will all be required to descend into a deep and steep slope -- into a very dark valley -- before reaching the year 2020 successfully. To move from the 'old' to the 'new,' you will have to pass a very big chasm; paradoxically, the only way uphill is downhill. Innovation often happens along this way.

The truth in this picture, as far I can see, is that (1) very often we should take a step backward to go forward, and (2) there is no easy way to extract the gold of true wisdom as a leader.

The Alchemy of Coaching Leadership: Finding the gold of wisdom that guides your Hero's Journey of transformation (from 9/25 - -----)



In a certain sense this picture agrees with the words of Jesus on true discipleship and its costs (Luke 14: 25-33), doesn't it?

As Christian leaders, however, we must first and foremost realize that we stand on the *threshold* of the "old" and the "new" each and every day. And, as you all understand, I speak of the 'already' and 'not yet' of the world to come, the kingdom of God. This is how we should approach the times. Not only when considering the theme 'when we approach 2020' just for a moment now, but every day of our lives. Therefore, I would like to suggest another title for this lecture: *How should we think about leadership when the Kingdom of God is approaches and as we approach the year 2020?*

There is a very striking word in this title. Do we really think about leadership as we '**should**' do? Will such an expression have any sense when we approach 2020? I am not sure, but it could be that after two or three decades of the postmodern 'how could,' there will be a (re)turn to the old-fashioned 'how should,' a way back to the normative level.

Regardless, as Christian people we do have the *norma normans* in the Word of God. Does this mean that we should be a leader as Jesus was? Never forget, Jesus is not our *CEO-example*! The following warning should not only be taken to heart in church, but no less in leadership positions:

'With Jesus as C.E.O. as the dominant Christological orientation for our time, what is to prevent the consumer-driven church from selecting a minister to function as

buoyant master of ceremonies and entertainer and partly as a Wal-Mart-style manager and motivator, with the goal of happier, greater, bigger, and more?'.¹

We will deal with the question in the title of our topic in the light of Scripture and not by means of a social identity theory or anything like that concept.

(PP 3/4)

When we come to an answer to our question in the title of this topic, I will first give you an answer by showing you a picture you will consider in the next 25 minutes.

My friends, do you have a taste for 'M + S' or the smell of M&M's? If you do, we can take-off and start seriously.

The Alchemy of Leadership: Finding the Gold of Wisdom by **M & S** or – if you like – **M & M's** for Guiding a Servant's Journey of Spiritual Transformation

M + S =

I love you



¹ André Resner, *Preacher and Cross. Person and Message in Theology and Rhetoric*, Grand Rapids 1999, 6.

Outline M & S with M & M 's

- ▶ Mirror <-> Sight
 Longing

- ▶ Maturity <-> Spirituality
 Loving

- ▶ Master <-> Servant
 Liturgy

I. **Leading by Longing – Mirror and Sight**

Leading is – among others – about *perceiving*. It is about voicing a *vision* by using a hermeneutic of *amazement*. By this I mean a hermeneutic -- a way of thinking through the reality you face -- that looks into, and then through, the multidimensional lenses of this reality, e.x. a text that inspires you (theological, pedagogical or whatever else), the environment you face (in school, in our society etc.). To lead is to see and invite others to see. This is about the formation and *reformation* or shifting of *perspective*.

There is a striking parallel (*analogy*) with what Christian *faith* does and is. Martin Luther said it his way (in his commentary on Hebr. 11:27): ‘to see what you do not see and not to see which you do see’.² So, then, leaders facing reality are called to *re-envision* reality, even small things of life, and in this way a kind of *reframing* of perspective takes place. According to John Calvin, real knowledge – faith- knowledge – is a *kind of perceiving*. For him, knowledge is more than taking notice of the state of affairs around you, but is rather an attentive perception of life. Like the Apostle Paul, he used the metaphor of a mirror. To Calvin, this suggested a perception of God, although indirect and vague, that would otherwise be unknown – a perception that, like a mirror in direct sunlight, would often shock, captivate attention and create fascination. This is even so if it is through the reflections of a murky mirror. In summary, the mirror represents the palette of earthly media through which our multi-coloured knowledge of God can be reflected in order to create as well as nourish our faith.³ Only in this way a leader will be able to reflect on the reality he faces and reflect on it to perceive understanding of what is at stake. And, indeed, in this way one sees reality always in connection with God either in perfect harmony with His

² M. Luther, *WA*, 57/3, 188: *Haec enim est fidei natura Videre, quod non videt, et non videre quod videt.*

³ Cf. C. van der Kooi, *Als in een spiegel. God kennen volgens Calvijn en Barth*, Kampen 2022, 22-23.

revelation in Scripture or in contrast -- because of sin and all kinds of evil in this age - with that picture. My main point so far is: standing on the threshold between God's new creation and the old age of the world, leaders are called to perceive the former within the latter.

Leaders, when approaching 2020, do *have a vision* by means of seeing/ perceiving what is going on. There surely is much in this vision – perhaps better: *in front of* this vision or *in confrontation with* this vision – that leads the leader into sighing (as in Romans 8). But he is called to seek signs of God's face in the fragments of our existence, mirrored in that broken glass and often with very dim glasses. In other words: he is longing, because he has a desire for the “new” while realizing he is with his Christian school part of the “old” age. This vision, because of a desire for the Kingdom of God, is gift of the Holy Spirit indeed and He leads to perceiving reality (cf. Phil. 1:10-11).

How should we think about leadership? Leading should be driven by ongoing longing. Not so much about our ideals as about what God has prepared for those who love Him. Christians who want to think through a normative view of leadership should apply a theology of seeing (by faith) and of longing (because of a strong desire)⁴. We approach 2020 in an economy of desire. Our schools are to be places with an economy of desire as well. Our ‘schools of desire’ do have a wellspring which is inexhaustible!

‘As we study Scripture, engage in corporate worship, imitate the saints, serve our neighbors in our vocations and the works of mercy, love our enemies, and so forth, our desire is being drawn out of its self-absorption so that it may flow as it was created to flow – towards God and neighbor in the love that desires communion.’⁵

But, then, a ‘therapy of desire’ (Martha Nussbaum) is necessary. That’s what a Christian vision is about: the education of desire, because we are longing for a staff, teachers and pupils who are engaged in this vision and shared desire.

‘Education is the recognition that the imagination only flourishes when it is trained, pruned, disciplined, and that requires goals. All human cultures rest on an education of desire in this sense. Jesus speaks of it as discipleship. He calls people to be disciples, which is to say to learn discipline. He is engaged in an education of desire.’⁶

II. Leading by loving – Maturity and Spirituality

After I have invited you to apply a theology of desire -- seeing reality as a mirror of God's glory -- I want to suggest that we need another theology as a complement, namely the theology of wisdom to become a full-grown spiritual man (woman).

There would be much to say about wisdom literature in the Bible, but I just want to summarize it now. You are a qualified Christian leader when you are a seeker of wisdom. There are at least four virtues that characterize our leadership when we are students in the

⁴ Cf. Esther Jonker & Herman Paul (eds.), *Verlangen. Een theologische peiling*, Zoetermeer 2014.

⁵ Daniel M. Bell jr., *The Economy of Desire. Christianity and Capitalism in a Postmodern World*, Grand Rapids 2012, 164-5.

⁶ T.J Gorringer, *The Education of Desire. Towards a Theology of the Senses*, London 2001, 91.

school of wisdom. One main virtue and three others which flow from the main one I want to share with you.

The first and foremost virtue is the fear of the Lord as “the beginning (*reshit*) of knowledge” (Prov. 1;7). It is the first step or first principle (*tehillah*) of wisdom (Prov.9:10). This has at least two aspects:

- a. Fear as a deep and radical respect for the Godness of God, and when this is an experienced reality, it leads a leader to tremble before God and confess his human frailty and sinfulness (cf. Isaiah 6). This aspect is called a child-like, high esteem of “Our Father, Who art in heaven.” A leader who never trembled before God is an unstable leader, because he trusts himself. Because, if we are filled with the fear of the Lord, we need not tremble before any earthly person, circumstance of power (cf. Prov. 29:25).
- b. Trust -- the conviction that God will hold up God’s end of the relationship God has formed with us. It is to choose God as the object of the loyalty of our heart. A child-like dependence on this heavenly Father (cf. expressions as ‘walking with God’) -- He is the almighty God and caring Father (Psalm 103) - and love for Him. And love always is related to priority. What has your priority...? That’s what you love. (Of course, I know that there will be many obligations you have to fulfill, but nevertheless, what’s the direction of our heart?)

So ultimately, loving God and trembling before Him go hand in hand. This kind of spirituality – the fear of the Lord – is to be nourished. Otherwise, where should your wisdom come from...?

Three other virtues flow from this wellspring, ‘the fear of the Lord’:

1. *The listening Heart*

The young king Solomon, suspecting that he would be called upon to offer wisdom in all kinds of dicey situations, made a request to God, ‘Give your servant a *lev shomea*’. This can be translated either ‘a listening heart’ or a ‘discerning mind’ (1 Kings 3:9).

‘The hearing ear and the seeing eye – the Lord has made them both’ (Prov. 20:12). The listening heart is the habit of attentiveness to what God is seeking to say in daily life situations. It means paying attention to situations that seem to contradict one’s own assumptions and listening to the experiences of others before we universalize our own.

2. *The Cool Spirit*

If you tremble before God and trust in Him, self- control results. This is the very opposite of the fool: one of the quintessential traits of the fool is the absolute lack of self-control (Prov. 25:28). There is a world of difference between a wise man – with a cool spirit – and ‘hotheads.’ A life of self-control is a life of moderation, discipline and integrity.

3. *The Subversive Voice*

At first glance, this expression may sound a little bit strange, because of the negative connotations of the word ‘subversive’. But true wisdom encourages to question all kind of reigning assumptions, current attitudes and actions either in the religious or political realm. There are, then, a lot of ‘unconventional’ proverbs in the Book of Proverbs, aren’t there?

Leading by loving is leading in the fear of the Lord. That is the spirituality which gives you focus and priorities. This the spirituality every Christian leader needs. But there is the need of *maturity* in spirituality as well, otherwise we are in the great danger of becoming fools. I am very happy to bring to present an old book of a Dutch minister (who was in Dachau in the Second World War), Rev. J. Overduin. The title of his book is something like this: *Becoming Like a Man. On spiritual maturity*. Here are some headings he deals with:

- Spiritual stability (steadfastness) and spiritual agility (Phil. 1:9-10)
Otherwise there is the great danger to be elastic where God us called to stand fast and the other way round.
- Spiritual self-knowledge and self-acceptance (1 Tim. 1:15b – 1 Cor. 15:10b)
- Spiritual impartiality, resilience, responsibility etc.

(If anyone would like to translate some chapters of this book into English, I'll gladly offer a copy!).

III. Leading by Liturgy : The Master As a Servant

How should we think about leadership? Our Master served as a Servant. Jesus as the Messiah shows us God's royal rule in the form of a servant (Isaiah 52-53; cf. Phil. 2:6-11). God rules in the form of self-giving love. The Servant, however, is Lord!

What is meant by 'leading by liturgy'? I would like to give you some directions to think along two lines.

1. The verb *leitourgeo* has its origins in the Greek *polis*. It meant *a public activity for the benefit of the people on one's own costs*. So, the rich people of a certain polis paid their taxes to the government for the benefit of the community.
Our Master is now serving as the *leitourgos* in heaven (Hebr. 8:2, 6). Leaders are, in a certain sense, called to be a *leitourgos* in their organizations. We all are obliged to serve for the benefit of others in a servant-shaped leadership.⁷
2. This second line of thinking about leadership is by means of liturgy I derived from the book *Practice and Profile. Christian Formation For Vocation*.⁸ In this book there is a call to leaders to introduce and nourish a certain kind of worship in their schools. This conviction is based on a study of James Smith in his book *Desiring the Kingdom*.⁹ Smith's central thesis is that liturgies – whether sacred or secular – shape and constitute our identities by forming our most fundamental desires and our most basic attunement to the world.

⁷ Cf. Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 183-207; Patrick Nullens, 'Leadership Spirituality as Participating in Christ, King, Prophet, and Priest', in: Patrick Nullens & Jack Barentsen (ed.), *Leadership, Innovation, and Spirituality*, Leuven/ Paris 2014, 99 – 118; Parker J. Palmer, *Leraar met hart en ziel. Over persoonlijke en professionele groei*, Groningen 2005 [vertaling van Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach – Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life*, 1998].

⁸ Johan Hegeman e.a. (eds.), *Practice and Profile*, 153-211 (on 'Being Spiritual').

⁹ James K.A. Smith, *Desiring the Kingdom. Worship, Worldview and Cultural Formation*, Grand Rapids 2009.

‘they [sc. liturgies] prime us to approach the world in a certain way, to value certain things, to aim for certain goals, to pursue certain dreams, to work together on certain projects. In short, every liturgy constitutes a pedagogy that teaches us, in all sorts of precognitive ways, to be a certain kind of person. Hence every liturgy is an education ...’.¹⁰

Right, but the authors of *Practice and Profile* have made some just, critical remarks. The most important one is this: ‘We doubt, however, whether liturgies as liturgies sufficiently educate us in professional training without the necessary coaching (...). [I]t has never been shown convincingly that experiential learning can replace knowledge gained by more cognitive methods’.¹¹ There is more than the pedagogy of *precognitive ways*, although this is a very important notion.

Nevertheless, when we are convinced that we are called as leaders to inform the head of our people to move their heart, then, as far I can see, our schools should be developed more on the basis of so to say liturgy. By this concept of liturgy I have in mind a broad spectrum of aspects -- praying and reading of scripture, singing songs and learning to be silent -- but also shaping their minds to reflect on what is called ‘transcendence’ and sharing with each other in groups, for instance in a Bible study or during a meal, as a form of fellowship. And all this in interrelationship with teachers and pupils, staff and the people who serve the organization in many practical things.¹²

Liturgy is about ‘living God’, about God’s amazing grace, the wonderful ways of God, but His deep mysteries as well (you all know the famous poem of William Cowper), so in joy and fear:

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs
And works His sovereign will.

Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy and shall break
In blessings on your head.

¹⁰ Smith, *Desiring*, 25; cf. Wil Derkse, *Een levensregel voor beginners. Benedictijnse spiritualiteit voor beginners*, Tiel 2003.

¹¹ Hegeman, *Practice and Profile*, 158-159.

¹² A wonderful example one finds in: Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Gemeinsames Leben* (1939).

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.

His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding every hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.

Dear friends, I want you to encourage with the words of James (1:5-7).