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Book Review: The Steward Leader: Transforming People, Organizations, and Communities by R. Scott Rodin

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Karr: Book Review: *The Steward Leader: Transforming People, Organizations* as we look at the inbreaking of the work of God into the lives of these Bible characters, we invite our children to find the similar inbreaking of God into their own lives.” (29) The storyline of Scripture is not about us. It is not about God breaking into our lives or transforming an ordinary week—Scripture is about the unfolding redemption plan of God for His glory. It is about the Creation, the Fall, redemption, and consummation. Children desperately need to learn the story of Scripture; they need to learn it so that they can see that the Bible is about so much more than them and understand that God has been working out His plan since before time began. They need to see the gracious work of their heavenly Father through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and Christ. They need to long for what is yet to come, and Beckwith is right in that they will never do that by learning some moral principles from a story out of an old book. Their lives will not be transformed until they see the big picture; but the big picture is not just about falling in love with God. The big picture is about seeing what He has been doing all along to redeem His fallen creation and bring glory to Himself.

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Beckwith has asked the right question and made a number of insightful critiques. Her experience allows her to see problems in children’s ministry that are missed by many. Her challenge for thoughtful creativity and personalization of ministry to each context struck at the heart of my own tendency toward ease in ministry. However, she falls drastically short in understanding the whole picture of Gospel ministry. In the book, pragmatism and experience replace Scripture and its authority in effective ministry. Her resistance to a formulaic approach is commendable, but unfortunately, she adopts a host of practices that are foreign to Scripture and teach children to rely on emotional experience rather than God’s Word. A middle ground between a wholesale focus on personal experience and a wholesale focus on principles must be found. Ours is a passionate relationship with the Creator of all things who has given His unchanging Word to us to which we cling.

R. Scott Rodin, *The Steward Leader: Transforming People, Organizations and Communities*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2010, 197 pp., \$22.00.

Reviewed by Dr. Allan Karr, Associate Professor of Missiology and Church Planting, Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary

How refreshing to discover that *The Steward Leader* articulates a holistic lifestyle, because as a first impression, I thought this book was going to be simply another addition to the lengthy body of information in the trendy topic of

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leadership. The author's credentials are impressive yet strengthen my supposition that it might be a book limited to institutional leadership principles. R. Scott Rodin was the president of Eastern Baptist (now Palmer) Theological Seminary and is now the managing principal of OneAccord NFP. He is a Senior Fellow of the Engstrom Institute and has served as president of the Christian Stewardship Association. Rodin instead surprised this reader with a book that was more about spiritual health, integrity, and character as the foundation for a transformational lifestyle of leadership. Early in the book, Rodin articulates that "steward leaders are godly stewards first, and it is as godly stewards that they are called to lead" (24). Furthermore, Rodin states, "I will conclude by offering ideas about how the life of the steward leader affects the people he or she serves, and through them the organizations the leader is called to lead. I called these 'trajectories'" (8). These "trajectories" demonstrate a transformed life that leads to a holistic lifestyle of transformation. This book is one of the best this reader has discovered on the topic of leadership. While it is about leadership, that is only a small part of the whole. This book is about living a transformed lifestyle.

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Rodin introduces his book as "an invitation to a journey" (7). I have noticed that this is a common theme in many current books, and it is one that resonates with the themes that Rodin establishes as foundational. Rodin positions himself as a learner who has been wrong in the past, and he asserts that a leader needs first to live in the truth of his personal transformation by God. Early in the book, Rodin reflects his own personal spiritual pilgrimage and gives a definition of a godly steward. Rodin states, "As God's people, we are called to reflect the image of our Creator God through whole, redeemed relationships at four levels—with God, with our self, with our neighbor and with creation—bringing glory to God and practicing in each the ongoing work of the faithful steward" (33). Upon this definition, Rodin develops his foundation for a leader who lives a holistic transformational lifestyle.

The concept of being a steward goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden and how we identify ourselves in relationships since then. Rodin hits the nail directly on the head and drives the point deeply into a beautiful foundation he is building. Rarely do I find a book with which I resonate so completely with the premises of the author. How we live our lives and lead others directly flows from our identity in Christ, and the repercussions of that identity as we relate to others and creation. I found myself cheering sentence after sentence when I was reading, in part because many who have written on leadership have focused on the institutional aspects of the idea, yet Rodin builds his concepts upon God, Creation, the Gospel and the potential leader's identity in this context.

four levels of transformation and four trajectories that a transformed leader takes. These trajectories follow his thesis of four kinds of relationships: Creator God, ourselves as God’s children, our neighbors, and God’s creation. Before we can lead organizations effectively, these all need to be healthy relationships in the leader’s personal life. Only in this state of being transformed can a leader then lead an organization toward this kind of Spirit-led and empowered stewardship. In many ways, these ideas are counter-cultural to traditional corporate culture, even in the Christian context. Rodin implies the evolution his thinking has undergone in his “journey.” He was “successful” in efficient corporate leadership earlier in his life. As he was being transformed, however, Rodin came to realize that there were deeper spiritual principles that in many ways swam upstream against mainstream corporate thought, yet resulted in spiritual fruit and a holistic transformed life of the leader and the organization that he leads. It also meant that there was an entirely new set of criteria for determining success.

The strengths of *The Steward Leader* are many, but I would like to focus on two of them. They are related and overlap, yet I will discuss them as separate yet intertwined concepts. The first is the spiritual transformation component that is emphasized as needed for the leader. This is clearly the result of a maturing process Rodin has experienced in his journey, yet it is rare that I see it expressed in leadership information to this extent. I could not be more in agreement with the author. On the final page of the book, Rodin transparently shows his audience a prayer that he often prays. Included in his prayer are these words, “It is not my organization, it is yours. So I depend on your Spirit to show me what to do” (182). Rodin speaks throughout the book of a deep dependence upon God and a realization that his strength as a leader comes from a supernatural power that only comes from God. Too often, leaders in our day, even ones who declare themselves Christian, still rely heavily on their personal giftedness, skills, intelligence, work ethic, personality, and creativity as their strategy for living and leading with success. Unfortunately, there is success accomplished at some levels using this strategy, yet Rodin shows us in his book that there is a better way, a transformed way that comes from God and living according to His principles of leadership. The end result is much different kinds of organizations that more resemble the kingdom of God.

A second strength of Rodin’s work is the concept of community that is discussed in the context of relationships with our neighbors. The idea that an organization is a community is biblical, yet the “owner-leader” dominant culture of present day corporate thinking seems to move in the other direction. When our

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relationships with our neighbors are transformed, we move in a trajectory that results in our organizations becoming healthy communities. This seems to be rare, yet it also seems to be the great yearning of people working together in organizations. People desire to be involved in organizations like this, yet they are very rare, in part because there are so few leaders who understand the values of being a “steward leader.” There are few transformed leaders, so there are even fewer transformed organizations, which can then transform society and culture. Rodin is very persuasive and inspiring in this section of his book.

No glaring limitations are in this book or its ideas. However, the weakness will be that the audience will read it and only follow or understand part of the principles. *The Steward Leader* is a holistic concept. Following only a few of the ideas or principles will not result in transformation of the leaders or of the organizations they lead. It starts with foundational principles and then builds from there. It starts with very personal and private issues in the life of a leader and then moves out concentrically into all the relationships of the leader’s life. The reader cannot jump into the process in the middle, nor just add a supplemental idea to his or her leadership process and practice. It is a holistic journey that I fear most leaders will miss, ignore, or just choose to follow the trajectories that they have followed thus far in their lives, which have resulted in a modicum of success.

Rodin has made a great contribution to the body of information broadly defined as “leadership.” I am going to use this book as a text in some of the classes I teach. However, the bigger application for this reader will be that I am going to ask the people in the organizations that I lead to read this with me and join me in the journey of being a “steward leader.” As we are personally transformed and move in the steward trajectories, I hope that our organizations are healthy and transformed as well, and reflect that they are part of the kingdom of God.

John H. Armstrong. *Your Church Is Too Small: Why Unity in Christ’s Mission Is Vital to the Future of the Church*. Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2010. 220 pp. \$19.99.

Reviewed by Robert I. Garrett, Jr., Director, MA in Global Leadership, Dallas Baptist University.

The title of this book calls to mind the title of a book quite popular a full generation ago. *Your God is Too Small* (J. B. Phillips) argued for a broader view of God’s place in the life of every believer. Armstrong likewise argues that the church has become too small in the minds of many Christians. This narrow image which