



# Editorial

Andrew Stobart

I

Leadership, like holiness, eludes straightforward definition. There are a couple of reasons why this observation rings true. First, and perhaps most crucially, there is no such thing as ‘raw leadership’, which exists in a contextual vacuum. Just as holiness is the holiness *of* God, or the Church, or Scripture, or theology, so leadership is the leadership *of* a community, an organisation, a church, a group, a family, or a nation. Leadership is therefore a derivative concept, rather than an originating one, as much shaped by the culture in which it is recognised, authorised and offered, as it gives shape to that culture. It may well be a necessary tautology to be reminded that leadership without follower-ship is not in fact leadership, no matter how much we might wish otherwise.

A second reason for the elusiveness of definition is that leadership, again like holiness, is much easier to describe in relief. Good leadership is appropriately celebrated as the success of the company of people that is being thus well led. On the contrary, failure of whatever kind is more often attributed to specific leadership deficiencies: the leader was too controlling or not in control, too tentative or too bold, too imaginative or not imaginative enough, too ambitious or too cautious, and on and on through as many binaries as you can name. In the words of one recent study, reviewed later in this issue, leadership is often thought of as the ‘panacea’ for the issues that befuddle society and organisations today.<sup>1</sup> If only we could ‘get the right leaders’, then all would be well. We recognise leadership in its absence, or in its failure, more clearly and readily than when it is working.

The connections between leadership and holiness, however, are not merely conjunctive. As well as sharing the difficulty of definition, the two concepts have a more intrinsic link, which can be revealed by digging into the Wesleyan tradition.

In his 'Rules for a Helper', John Wesley instructs the early Methodist leaders, 'Make "Holiness unto the Lord" your motto.'<sup>2</sup> Wearing this badge, early Methodist leaders were to attend carefully to themselves and their societies so that the outcome of their energies would be to 'build them up in that holiness without which they cannot see the Lord'. Holiness, it might be said, is the *purpose* of leadership. At their best, all the various instruments of leadership within the Wesleyan tradition are best understood as mechanisms for convening and nurturing a society of holiness, which can be presented to God and to the world as the fragrant presence of Christ.<sup>3</sup>

Leadership, in the best Wesleyan tradition, is only ever for the sake of holiness; or better, for the sake of the holy God who intends his community to inhabit and enjoy his holy, wholesome, perfect life. If, as Calvin Samuel notes in his recent monograph on holiness, this suggests that we hold out 'a self-consciously utopian vision of the world',<sup>4</sup> then we are merely locating leadership on an eschatological stage, and are standing in the good company of the prophets and the apostles before us. In so far as that holy vision remains over the horizon of the future, leadership offered today will be provisional and hopeful, humble and yet confident in its dependence upon God. As we have said, leadership, like holiness, eludes straightforward definition.

## II

The contents of this issue of *Holiness*, arranged around the theme of leadership, provide resources for further reflection on the role that leaders play – the place that they occupy – in the journey of God's people from here and now, to the 'there and then' of creation's divine denouement. These articles, reflections and reviews warrant careful reading and discussion, keeping the following questions in mind. Do I recognise the leadership described here? How might this subject matter challenge my view of *who* leads, and *why* they lead? What are the challenges for the leadership that I seek to offer? Who and what is shaping my view of leadership? Should these articles prompt such a discussion, then the labours of their authors, and of this journal, will have been worthwhile.

For instance, how might the findings of Leslie Francis and Adam Stevenson, in their research into the psychological type and temperament profiles of British Methodist preachers and ministers, affect the way that you view the respective offerings in worship week by week? In so far as leadership of worship in British Methodism is so often shared between lay and ordained, how might the respective gifts offered by each be celebrated and combined to help the Church navigate its onward journey in faithfulness? The next instalment of Alan Palmer's series on acedia contributes to this conversation, particularly with regard to introverts in the Church, who have often felt compelled to mimic a more extroverted ministerial model. Understanding the healthy contributions that both introverts and perfectionists can make to leadership enables us to recognise and moderate the less healthy aspects of introversion and perfectionism.

Neil Richardson's article opens up the often-overlooked idiom of the 'leadership of God', grappling with the difficult theological themes of suffering and judgement, concluding strikingly that 'God leads from the cross' (p. 38). Offering leadership in the context of extreme pain and loss is explored again in Gordon Leah's examination of the conversations about God in Albert Camus' novel, *The Plague*. In a quite different way, Janet Morley's personal reflections in her article prompt us to consider the role of leaders in 'guarding the "holy fire"' of spiritual life through the experience of dementia. A painting and reflection by Jane Leach, *Containment*, speaks to this involved and involving leadership task, asking readers to consider how they are holding others – and being held themselves – through their leadership.

'Holiness and Christian unity belong together as twin aspects of the same relationship with the Trinity such that the pursuit of either involves the pursuit of the other.'<sup>5</sup> These words from the Methodist–Roman Catholic dialogue report, *The Call to Holiness*, stand at the beginning of David Carter's article 'Holiness and unity', describing an ambitious agenda for church leadership today as we seek to move beyond the schisms of the past. Ed Mackenzie's article acknowledges that the 'habitat of holiness' is not only the Church, but also the home, where parents in particular have a crucial role in offering appropriate and compelling leadership in discipleship to their children.

Ed Mackenzie's recent book, *Networks for Faith Formation*, co-authored with Steven Emery-Wright, is one of nine works considered in the Reviews section. From photography to policing, and Methodists in fiction to Methodists in history, the books reviewed here offer helpful pointers for your next reading after *Holiness*.

A further recent publication, *Leading by Story* by Vaughan Roberts and David Sims, stands out as a particularly significant contribution to the theme of this issue. As a result, staff and students of Wesley House made it the subject of a recorded conversation in January 2018. Written up here, 'Storying the leading' explores the central themes of Roberts' and Sims' book, applying them in a cross-cultural setting. Whatever else you read of this issue, this long review article is deserving of attention, since it offers a significant (and potentially transformative) heuristic tool to the task of leadership today: "Storying the leading" ... is essential for all leadership today, if the Church is to be self-aware, globally conversant, and open to the many gifts that God gives through others' (p. 164).

### III

As with the previous issue of *Holiness*, we are indebted to the trust fund named by and for John Newton Davies and Sarah Davies, which is currently helping to finance this open-access journal.<sup>6</sup> At a time of transition and growth for Wesley House, recalling the life and witness of those who have trained to be leaders of God's people in this place is a crucial leadership task for ourselves, as we navigate today's challenges and opportunities. It is a task we fulfil with gratitude and seriousness, not least in our daily prayers as a community.

You, the readers of this journal, are, by extension, part of the Wesley House community: a global community in the Wesleyan tradition of scholarship and prayer. As editor, I recognise the hiatus in the appearance of this issue, due in no small part to my own move to be part of Wesley House's residential community as Director of Research. Joining the community in a new way, I have begun to see in higher definition how the founding aims of this House have shaped a story to which I, and you, now belong. As Roberts and Sims note in their book, at times a story can itself be the leader.<sup>7</sup> Caught up in this story of scholarship and spirituality, faith and formation, research and renewal, *Holiness* is committed to offering the critical space for global, practical, informed reflection, so that the narrative of Wesleyan tradition may continue and flourish.

Andrew Stobart, Commissioning Editor  
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## Notes

1. Vaughan S. Roberts and David Sims, *Leading by Story: Rethinking Church Leadership*, London: SCM Press, 2017, p. 3.
2. 'The Twelve Rules of a Helper', 1753, in *Constitutional Practice and Discipline of the Methodist Church: Volume 1*, London: Methodist Publishing House, 1988, pp. 77–78.
3. 'But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him' (2 Corinthians 2:14).
4. Calvin Samuel, *MORE>Distinct: Reclaiming holiness for the world today*, London: IVP, 2018, p. 119.
5. 'The Call to Holiness', para 5. The full text can be found online: <http://worldmethodistconference.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/The-Call-to-Holiness-Final-copy-28062016.pdf>.
6. For further information on John and Sarah Davies, see *Holiness* 3(2) (2017), 'Holiness & Reformation', pp. 156–159.
7. Roberts and Sims, *Leading by Story*, p. 49.

