Quietly Courageous by Gil Rendle

Leading the Church in Changing World

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Opening Analysis:
We live in aberrant time of liquid culture. Change is rapid. As we move from a convergent society (conformity) to a divergent one (individuality), we break off into our social tribes. Coats and ties have lost to jeans and pullovers.

- *What if the questions we now face are not the product of things gone wrong but rather of the world grown different (p.9)? Asteroid has hit.*

- *In liquid time, learning must be continual (p.60). Vertical knowledge of experience rather than horizontal learning of classroom.*

- *Yesteryear when people moved in the community they were expected to find a congregation like mine on their own initiative and there were no evangelism committees. When people joined as members they knew they were expected to be part of a committee and easily self organized into patterns that were remarkably similar both across congregation and across denominations (p.36).*

Key Story:
Nashon is the quiet courageous leader at the Red Sea’s shore. Elders are in committee meeting with no answers for the deep waters, only arguments. Some one has to go into the water. He steps in water up to his ankles, waist, chest and finally over his nose. The sea then parts. He goes forward in God’s promise that the sea will open with a Promised Land waiting (p.3).

- *The established institutional church cannot now thrive on the good leadership it currently has. (p.4)*

- *Author no longer believes in linear problem solving for difficulties; no longer in experts leading; no longer in himself or any other as the agent of change for the future (p.15).*

The Challenge We Face:
- We’re faced with a condition rather than a problem. *That which is not a problem is a condition. Complex situations with unpredictable interactions have no solution and do not respond to the action oriented progression of problem solving steps (p.65, 214-215). Broken bone versus asthma?*

- We’re faced with presenting a new narrative. *To live in a new normal, people need a new story....honest story of the current reality....the quietly courageous leader must also break down or deconstruct the old story that held everything in place. Old polite stories that are left unchallenged and in place relieve anxiety- the very anxiety needed to move ahead (P222-7)… There is no more powerful and necessary place for quietly courageous leaders to begin than by offering a new*
narrative, a second thought that both captures the current reality and provides a better future (p. 220). Imagine with me, what if?

- We’re faced with re-imaging the church as a platform. *A platform is where others are invited to come to do their own work....instead of requiring the newly formed and curiously shaped new faith communities to conform to denominational standards, a platform denomination will help these new forms of faith communities to be more authentically themselves, thereby advancing the identity and purpose of both the denomination and the new faith communities* (p.265-6).

**Getting Started:**
- Converse and intentionally listen- *Wisdom no longer comes from the expert entering the room with answer in hand, and in fact we are at a moment when as soon as the expert appears, learning ceases* (p.241). The point of dialogue or conversation is that if people stay in this exchange of speaking and critical listening long enough, they will teach each other what neither of them would be able to see for themselves. They will make something in common (p. 244).

- Ask the right questions- *It matters what question the leader asks at such a moment because the next steps will be directed by the question* (p. 248). See list on page 245…Quiet courage is not to be found in the bold clergy leader who claims to have the answers for others. Quiet courage is with the one who is deeply disciplined in the faith but then stands with the people helping to name the next question that they will need to address together in order to be faithful (p.149)....questions not about who we once were or who we are now but questions of who we have been called to be (p.172).

- Loosen control and work the edge – *The lesson for the post-aberrant time is to loose, not tighten, controls* (p. 150). Continuing to explore the new principles or modes of operation that are developing as the promising styles of quietly courageous leaders, next to be described is the shift to help institutions get loose from their tight organizational past (p.254). Principles are: 1) Everything is in constant process of discovery and creating. 2) Life uses messes to get to well ordered solutions. 3) Life is intent on finding what works. 4) Life creates more possibilities as it engages with opportunities. (Dances with Wolves movie)

**Obstacles:**
- Nostalgia- *If the same people have the same conversation about the same questions, it will produce the same result. Nostalgia invites us to a one sided story; to rely on past diagnoses; and to avoid difficult questions* (p. 157-165).

- Functional Atheism- *The functional atheist is the one who speaks about God as the active agent of salvation in the life of individuals and in producing a wholeness in the world but who then assumes that nothing is going to change unless and until he or she puts his or her hand to it. Mystery does not operate in the hand of the functional atheist* (p. 77).
• Private and public agendas or missions- It is the public mission that stirs the heart and moves the blood, but it is the private mission that gets rewarded. The church claims a public mission to change people and to change the world in which those people live. However there are strong internal coalitions within a denomination...whose livelihood depend on their relationships with the denomination (private mission).... So it takes quiet courage and risk, for a leader to step out into waters where others may not follow and in which there is no guarantee of a better future (p. 7, 8) (Like a wheel within a wheel)

• Overplayed empathy and activity- There is a pressure to work hard to keep people happy. The leader faces the temptation of being a quivering mass of availability that is willing to do what is needed to satisfy the other person because the reward system...measures satisfaction and dissatisfaction (p.97and p.185).... Like tiredness, activity is also easily mistaken for leadership (p. 202).

Leadership Traits:
• Handle conflicting reward systems - Clergy depend on their denominational system for their certification and deployment in order to have a job and then depend on the local congregation for a paycheck and benefits that come with that job. Clergy in such situations are then subject to two reward systems that can easily compete with one another (p. 101)....Leaders must learn to be of their institutions. However they are not in the institution. They are not captured and constrained by the established rules, regulations, and practices protected by a nonporous boundary....on the other hand must direct attention and resources to the edge, where the rules and regulations are less constraining and may even need to be disregarded (p.264).

• Use church’s resources as far as you can- A first step for quietly courageous leaders is to recognize that the primary task of their leadership is not about protecting and preserving the institution of the church but about using the institution of the church.

• Trust in God’s agency of enough- What if God has already provided, and has activated, what is feared to be missing? Getting behind energy that is already flowing is not an act of scarcity but rather lending oneself to an ‘enough’ that is already at work (p.86-7).

• Tactfully challenge old assumptions- If congregations are still membership organizations in which ‘belonging is seen as the condition of full inclusion marked by a membership ritual with membership vows, it is difficult for the congregation to step out of the box to find ways to build relationships with people who want to participate in other than membership terms (p. 70).

• Do more than manage- Managers help organizations do things right; leaders help them do right things (p.71). A. Roxburgh- “…at each step of the negotiations God
gives Moses a way forward but no control.” Story of boy with the flashlight (p. 218).

Other Notes of Interest:

- The average age of clergy is 53 in mainline congregations as of 2015; the single age most represented is 60 (p.19)
- Placeholder clergy have the basic skills in the core functions….Talented but tenuous clergy are those who are more creative and able to see beyond the basic maintenance of the congregation….but tenuous clergy wait for permission to lead (p. 128).
- The average worship attendance needed to support the salary and benefits of a full time ordained clergyperson is 150. The current average worship attendance across all congregations in the USA is 75. It now requires that a congregation be twice the size of the average just to satisfy the basic institutional economic model (p.178).
- It is now estimated that a physician will form a diagnosis about treatment within the first fifteen seconds of greeting the patient (p.162).
- The revolutionary sees the ideological future that is splendid in all its promise. The reactionary sees the past in its entire splendor and resists the lies of the future (p.159).
- Quiet courage is needed when there is no going back because the back there that is remembered doesn’t exist anymore (p.21).
- …the word for courage is being willing to lead without regard for reward (p.103).
- A significant portion of the substantive work of quietly courageous leaders is to provide for the space and learning found in the mystery of the hand of God that will not only form the world differently in the future but will also surprise us in the process (p. 238).
- Alan Roxburgh who comments in this book once was consultant for FRP.

Signs of a Vital Church (p. 211):

- Radical hospitality
- Passionate worship
- Intentional faith development
- Risk taking mission and service
- Extravagant generosity

Dr. Gerald A. Little, 2020