

CHURCHLINK

WE B Z I N E

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Review of Ben Campbell Johnson and Andrew Dreitcer, *Beyond the Ordinary: Spirituality for Church Leaders*

Johnson, Ben Campbell, & Dreicer, Andrew. (2001). [*Beyond the ordinary: Spirituality for church leaders*](#). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co. 168 pp. \$18.00

I was first introduced to the writings of Ben Campbell Johnson in the mid-1980s when I ran across his little books *To Pray God's Will* and *To Will God's Will*. From the first book, I obtained a helpful structure for prayer that Johnson developed from a concept of W. E. Sangster, and I have used that outline during my devotions ever since. Through the years, I have managed to read many (but not all) of Johnson's writings on spirituality, and I have always received inspiring ideas from each one.

Beyond the Ordinary was published in 2001 when Johnson was professor emeritus of Christian spirituality at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia. The co-author Andrew Dreitcer was associate professor of spirituality and director of spiritual formation at Claremont School of Theology in California. I recently read this book, and I thought it was worth bringing it to the attention of *ChurchLink* readers.

The book is targeted at church leaders who desire to deepen their understanding of Christian spirituality. It will inspire church leaders to make their own spiritual life a top priority, and it will encourage them to try out spiritual practices and disciplines previously unexplored. The book consists of ten chapters, each of which concludes with "Questions for Reflection and Discussion" and "Suggestions for Journaling." I will summarize briefly the main points of each chapter.

Chapter One, "In Search of a Vital Spirituality," addresses the lack of attention to spirituality by church leaders and the suspicions that some church leaders have toward it. The authors describe three "Dimensions of Spirituality": the sacramental, the activist, and the mystical.

Chapter Two, "The Spirituality of Ministry," emphasizes that spirituality is not just a matter of private devotions but also relates to the public roles of congregational care, preaching, and administration. The authors warn against the trap of becoming a "shopkeeper" pastor or a "Constantinian" pastor who fails to understand that his primary role is to help people pay attention to God in their lives. This chapter reminded me once again that Job #1 of the minister is to stay close to God. Everything else in ministry flows out of the minister's intimacy with God.

Chapter Three, "A Spirituality Grounded in the Word," describes how to meet God in Scripture. They criticize three different rationalistic approaches to the Scriptures that primarily seek information from it rather than an encounter with the living God in it. The authors describe four ways that the Scriptures enable us to experience transformative intimacy with God: by speaking

a message to us, by slowly nourishing us (through the spiritual discipline of *Lectio Divina*), by placing us in the story, and by inspiring the imagination.

Chapter Four, “Myth in Congregational Spirituality,” presents the interesting concept of a “myth” that had its birth at the first gathering of a church and has since influenced the church’s official meetings, affected the church’s worship services, and dominated the church’s atmosphere. The authors call on church leaders to examine their church’s myth so that they understand the forces that have shaped the story of their church. They provide advice on how to embrace the myth and how to transform it if necessary.

Chapter Five, “The Spirituality of Vision,” exhorts church leaders to be sensitive to God’s desires for the future of their church. The authors describe three kinds of visions: original vision, prophetic vision, and mystic vision.

Chapter Six, “The Importance of Spiritual Companionship,” discusses the role of the church leader as spiritual guide to others and the need for church leaders to have spiritual friends. The authors describe five dimensions of the spiritual journey: naming our desire, naming God, naming our relationship with God, waiting for God, and receiving God.

Chapter Seven, “The Practice of Discernment,” focuses on how to discover God’s guidance when faced with a decision. Johnson has written several books on this topic, and this chapter provides a helpful summary of concepts that he has taught elsewhere. The authors present two models of discernment that have been practiced by Christians through the centuries: one developed by Ignatius of Loyola and one developed by the Quakers.

Chapter Eight, “Refreshment for the Soul,” reminds church leaders of the need to return continually to drink from “the Well.” Failure to do so will result in burnout and spiritual stagnation.

Chapter Nine, “Resting in God,” discusses the need to cease our activity and just enjoy the presence of God with us. The authors describe several “Resting Modes of Prayer,” including contemplation, the Jesus Prayer, and centering prayer.

Chapter Ten, “Spiritual Leadership on the Cutting Edge,” calls on church leaders to become spiritual revolutionaries by focusing on the nine cutting-edge issues raised in the previous nine chapters.

This book can provide a spiritual shot-in-the-arm for those church leaders who find they are starting to run dry. It may renew your desire to seek greater intimacy with God, and it will provide some practical ideas for making further progress on your spiritual journey.