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## As one with authority: reflective leadership in ministry

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## One With Authority: Reflective Leadership in Ministry

Jackson W. Carroll

Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991

234 pages

“And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes” (Matthew 7:28–29). In contrast to the way in which the crowds experienced Jesus, Carroll claims that many clergy today experience themselves and their ministry as having no or very limited authority.

In 1986, through The Alban Institute, Washington, D.C., Jackson W. Carroll published *Ministry as Reflective Practice*; in *As One With Authority*, the William Douglas MacKenzie Distinguished Professor of Religion and Society at Hartford Seminary, Hartford, Connecticut, builds on that document. Ministry as reflective practice calls for reflective leadership in ministry which raises both theoretical and practical issues of authority. Carroll asks how a sense of clergy authority might be recovered—one that honors shared ministry among clergy and lay leaders while appreciating the distinctive leadership styles and tasks of each clergyperson.

What does the author mean by “authority”?

“Authority is the right to exercise leadership in a particular group or institution based upon a combination of qualities, characteristics, or expertise that the leader has or that followers believe their leader has” (14). In many respects, authority is both granted and earned.

Today there are a number of factors which make it difficult for clergy to lead with authority. Carroll rightly notes that some of these factors are: crisis of belief (cf. Reginald Bibby: “The gods of old have been neither abandoned nor replaced. Rather, they have been broken into pieces and offered to religious consumers in piecemeal form” [quoted on 22]); marginalization of the church (there’s a “shift in the social location of the church from the center to the periphery” [23]); the volunteer nature of the church (people often get involved in voluntarism to satisfy their own needs; let me do my own thing my own way); shared ministry with laity (individualistic and voluntaristic values often go hand in hand with an egalitarian emphasis. “Hierarchies of any kind have been profoundly suspect” [30]) It is this latter emphasis, i.e. shared ministry with laity, that Carroll pursues devotedly, passionately and reflectively as he identifies and explores the *relational* character of authority, which is precisely the character that legitimates leadership and the appropriate use of authority.

Authority is not something that an individual, as an individual, possesses in the absence of a group or organization’s acknowledgment that she or he has the right to exercise power... Legitimacy as a leader ... is based more informally on a congregation or community’s tacit agreement that a pastor has won the right to lead

by virtue of either her or his religious authenticity or demonstrated competence or both. Authenticity and competence may have been assumed as a basis for ordination and a call, but they have to be proved in practice before a congregation or community accords the pastor full legitimacy to lead (37–38).

In many and various ways, the “leader is granted authority to lead because she or he is believed to protect, interpret, and represent the group’s core values and beliefs and contribute to their realization” (43).

Carroll is emphatic in stating: “*If we have authority as clergy, it is because laity perceive us to be reliable interpreters of the power and purposes of God in the context of contemporary society. And this involves both spirituality and expertise, not one without the other*” (54). Such authority may either be *authority of office* or *authority of person*, with the former needing the latter for compassion’s sake and the latter need the former for tradition’s sake. “While the function of authority of office is to protect the sanctity of the tradition, *authority of person* guards against clergy functioning that is devoid of personal authenticity, whether of spirituality or expertise” (55).

The church as the “Body of Christ” is involved in the continuing incarnation of the Word; as such, and based on Jesus’ ministry, people are called into new and liberating relationships with God and with one another into a new community which functions as “a community of meaning, belonging, and empowerment” (83). Within this community, Carroll notes that there are three core tasks for the clergy: as interpreters of meaning (99), as builders of community (104), and as empowerers of public ministry (108).

As clergy lead their congregations in confronting questions of meaning, engage in community building, and enable public ministry, they confront various levels of complexity (119)... Learning the biblical story, the history of the church, theology, and the theories and techniques of ministry is one thing. Having the ability to use these resources creatively and constructively in practice, even to invent new resources, is quite another—especially as one confronts the complex “messes” of practice with which the modern world confronts us! The expertise that gives clergy their authority is the combination of specialized knowledge *and* the ability to draw on it reflectively in the midst of practice. Both are essential (121).

By “reflective leadership”, Carroll means “the capacity, in the midst of the practice of ministry, to lead the church to act in ways that are faithful to the gospel and appropriate within the situation” (122). In conjunction with this conviction, Carroll states: “It is when a lively sense of calling undergirds and fuses the expertise of reflective leadership with sacramental presence that we experience a renewal of our authority as ordained leaders in the church—an authority that builds up the body of Christ and empowers it to continue Christ’s ministry in the world” (202). Key characteristics are authenticity, presence, and empowerment!

Often writing autobiographically, Carroll provides much testimony and reflection through personal experience in ministry, as well as vignettes of others' pastoral or lay ministry; all this engaging narrative gives the reader ample opportunity to engage her/his faith and ministry stories reflectively. This is a text which will be of great value to all leaders in the church, whether clergy or laity. It is also a book which will serve as an excellent study text, whether in seminary courses on ministry and leadership or congregational adult study groups desiring to strengthen their ministries.

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### **Dinner With Jesus and Other Left-handed Story-sermons**

Donald F. Chatfield  
Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988  
128 pp. \$9.50

This book is a collection of twelve story-sermons composed by Donald Chatfield, a Presbyterian minister and Professor of Preaching at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary in Evanston, Illinois. The title matches the author's imagination. He describes a left-handed sermon as "one that encourages the right side of the brain to take the lead for a while" (9). Congregations not used to the story-sermon or narrative style of preaching may need some help in listening; apparently the congregations Chatfield served responded enthusiastically. Chatfield introduces each sermon, telling us something of its genesis, the intentions he had for it, and how it developed.

The first sermon, "Dinner with Jesus", takes the form of an inter-office memo from Matthew to his supervisor in the tax office, explaining his abrupt departure and submitting his resignation. Chatfield is at his best here in the use of humor and creative anachronism. "The Greatest Gift" is a story of Christmas. A single, middle-aged, Protestant woman sets out to purchase a Christmas gift for herself and discovers, in a Roman Catholic church, the greatest gift of all. "The Sign of Jonah" was meant for children, and so Jonah is a youngster who is convinced the Ninevites have stolen his Swiss Army knife. A fine yarn especially in a youth retreat or camp setting. "So It Was You All the Time" is an engrossing pacing through Abraham's life. It is safe to say that all people have experienced God without being aware of God's presence; here is a poignant reminder of that presence, encouraging reflective searching for those times when God was indeed present, yet silently so. "The Pilgrim's River" is in the "fantasy" mode, or perhaps the allegorical mode. The Christ motif is evident, but following the river