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JOHN C. MAXWELL

The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership: Follow Them and People Will Follow You – Revised & Updated 10th Anniversary Edition
NASHVILLE, TN: THOMAS NELSON, INC., 2007. 309 PAGES

In this book, John C. Maxwell summarizes over 40 years of his life as a leadership speaker, writer, and trainer into a practical list of 21 essential rules of effective leadership. This book is actually a revised and updated edition of his best-selling 1998 book, also titled *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*. To be an effective leader, Maxwell believes that we need to learn and apply all 21 rules.

In each of the 21 brief chapters, Maxwell clearly and concisely explains a key leadership law. For each law, he provides interesting illustrative stories of well-known people such as Abraham Lincoln, Henry Ford, Winston Churchill, Condoleezza Rice, and other historical figures who successfully applied or did not apply each law. Exercises are provided at the end of each chapter designed to assist the reader in applying the laws to both their work and personal life. A useful leadership evaluation survey is also included that allows readers to determine their aptitude for each law.

Maxwell claims the 21 laws can be learned. The author strongly believes that if you practice and apply the 21 laws, people will follow you. Alternatively, if you do not follow them, you will never become an effective leader (xxi).

One law discussed is “the law of influence” (13). True leadership only comes from your ability to influence others. This influence must be earned from your followers. Several factors leading to influence with your followers include your personal character, vision for the future, and intuition (17-18).

A new leadership concept offered by Maxwell is “the law of addition—leaders add value by serving others” (47). This law is one of two new laws that Maxwell added to the current revision of this book (xix). Serving others mean that you treat people well and you give them credit for their hard work (49). True leaders serve others by helping them advance and add value to their lives (51). True leaders genuinely respect the worth of others.

Another significant leadership insight discussed is called “the law of solid ground” (61). Maxwell is emphatic in stating that trust “...is the most important thing. Trust is the foundation of leadership. It is also the glue that holds an organization together” (61). Trust is a very fragile component of leadership. Once trust is broken, it is usually very hard to repair and can be the cause of complete erosion of your ability to lead others. To maintain trust, Maxwell states that it may even be required for a leader who makes a mistake to publicly apologize and ask followers for their forgiveness (63).

A wonderful leadership idea explained in this book is “the law of connection” (113). Maxwell states, “When it comes to working with people, the heart comes before the head” (115). Outstanding leaders must have the ability to connect emotionally with others in a caring way. To connect with others, Maxwell recommends that you must first deeply know yourself, communicate with openness and sincerity, and “practice what you preach” (118).

Another way effective leaders can demonstrate care of others is related to the “law of empowerment” (141). Leaders should be very intentional to identify followers with leadership ability, encourage them, provide them with resources, authority, and responsibility to be successful, and then turn them loose to achieve success (145). True leaders help others reach their potential by providing encouragement and giving power to them. Empowering others is the hallmark of a strong leader.

In the “law of the picture” Maxwell asserts that “people do what people see” (155). A great leader must be both highly visionary and highly practical (158). Great leaders must model their vision in such a way that the picture of their vision comes alive to followers (159). Maxwell claims that followers are watching what you do much more than listening to what you say. To be convincing, truly effective leaders must live out what they say and believe. Critical in this process is digging deep within ourselves and working on changing ourselves before we can try to improve others (162).

A final leadership law I found significant is the “law of timing” (233). Maxwell claims that timing is often the difference between success and failure for a leader,

and that the wrong action at the wrong time leads often to disaster (236). Great leaders have to learn precise timing in choosing a leadership action that is appropriate for a particular situation.

The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership presents insightful leadership laws by an internationally recognized leadership expert, speaker, and author. The laws are presented and written in a concise and easy-to-read style. These 21 laws represent one of the best collections I have ever reviewed of leadership knowledge. I highly recommend this book as required reading for any person aspiring to be a true leader in any type of organizational setting.

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BRUCE MILNE

Dynamic Diversity: Bridging Class, Age, Race, and Gender in the Church
INTERVARSITY, 2007. 190 pages

For the last half of the last decade, conventional wisdom for churches focused on the Homogeneous Unit Principle (HUP)—the sociological reality that people prefer to be with others like themselves. Countless articles and books were written, classes taught, and even institutes and centers formed around this principle. However, with the massive global movement of people and a growing reality of multiculturalism, this principle and the practices that have perpetuated homogeneity have come under scrutiny. This changed landscape has forced the church to revisit its practices in light of Scripture. God is painting a “new-humanity” art piece and is doing so in the church.

Bruce Milne’s *Dynamic Diversity: Bridging Class, Age, Race, and Gender in the Church* is one of the latest books to address this changing perspective. Milne states his audacious claim at the outset that “all congregations, everywhere are called to be...bridging-places, centers of reconciliation, where all the major diversities that separate human beings are overcome through the supernatural presence of the Holy Spirit” (14). At the center of his theological moorings stands the metanarrative of God’s reconciling the lost world and creating from that lost world a reconciled people that are reconciling to each other, in accordance with our “primal longings” to return to that pre-fall state of human life (57-8). He bases his understanding of the “new humanity” on Ephesians 2:11-22, with more than ample support from the whole of Scripture, church history, and the theological work of the biblical and historical church.

It is notable that Milne’s understanding of this “new humanity” is not to be confused with the racist ideas of a “cosmic race”¹ or the U.S.’s melting-pot narrative.² In this new humanity, people maintain their distinctive selves while engaging distinct others. This follows Social Trinitarian theological conversations, which Milne successfully employs.³ In the Trinity, we are introduced to the God who is “diversity in unity,” the one who in God’s self is a loving community of three (45-5). Human beings, created in God’s image, are likewise created to be

fully self, yet wholly in relation to the other: "...as we commit ourselves to one another in our churches, and give expression there to a unity of life through the Holy Spirit which affirms and transcends our many differences and diversities, we are actually being Godlike! We are following the inner constraint of God the Spirit to reproduce himself, and his likeness, in his human creatures, the special objects of his love and concern" (55-6).

As such, the church of the Trinity is to reflect unity in diversity crossing those barriers, which all too often divide us. The HUP is a true statement of the human condition left unreconciled. It displays to us our condition, affirming the barriers of race and ethnicity that still make 11 a.m. on Sunday morning in America the most segregated hour of the week. But Milne effectively points out other barriers, which are often overlooked and are just as detrimental to the church's witness. Among these are gender, age, and socio-economic distinctions. Of the many books written on diversity, this one stands out for its far-reaching critique of the spectrum of ways in which the HUP has played out in the church (44-51, 101, 165-66). If there is a weakness to this part of the conversation, it comes at the discussion on language.

I am conflicted by Milne's concession that "differences of language means that not all Christians will find a place in the same congregation" (101), which implies that Babel's curse is greater than the Fall's. I am equally conflicted by his statement that "our language is not of ultimate value; it too needs to be offered to God in the 'living sacrifice' which his cross requires of us all" (101). Too often this is the mantra of dominant cultures—in the U.S. that would be English-speaking Euro-Americans—where the expectation is that the other is to conform, even in their heart language, to the norms of their new culture. Greater sacrifice is expected of those with the least to offer, those who have left country, culture, and context, by those of us who have the most to give. This seems out of sorts with Jesus' way. I would suggest that more imagination is needed on this point.

I appreciated Milne's work on the practical issues of worship, leadership, discipleship, and fellowship. While in these issues Milne seems less explicit in arguing his thesis, overall these were helpful chapters. Greater integration of these elements might have been more fruitful, but it is difficult to do everything, and Milne

has done considerably more than most. He gets at this integration using missional language in chapter nine, “A Heart for the World” (151-66). In retrospect, it is possible to see how he brings the church’s witness of Christ’s reign as exemplified by its diversity to full bloom in this final chapter. And this is the point: as we serve the Father with the Son through the Spirit in the world, we are at our best as God’s witnesses when we demonstrate God’s ability to make us into one new people. “The persuasiveness of the preaching of the gospel of reconciliation with God is conditioned by the degree of the experience of reconciliation in the congregation in whose presence, and on whose behalf, the message is being proclaimed” (160)

Lastly, *Dynamic Diversity* is successful on many levels, but perhaps it is most successful at calling us to do the hard things for the right reason. Milne makes no claim that embracing diversity across race, ethnicity, age, gender, and socio-economic status is an easy process in which to engage. He warns that perseverance and grace are necessary when a church attempts to “...include within the congregation’s embrace people who are ‘different’ [because it] exposes the church to additional challenges and calls for a deeper spirit of faith that the Lord is at work through such relational tensions” (139). This becomes possible, he argues, because “new-humanity congregations learn to listen to those whose skin is a different color, whose language and customs are different, and who have different opportunities and priorities, and different needs clamoring to be addressed” (152). The kind of love required can only come from a costly commitment to God and others (Matt. 22: 37-40). Milne reminds us that Jesus’ call is a call to the cross, to self-denial, and to follow him in all things (Matt. 16:24): “Quite simply, making it as easy as possible is nowhere on Jesus’ radar screen” (153).

This is a necessary challenge. Our congregations have become havens for our comfort. They reflect *our* values, not God’s. For the last half of the twentieth century, the American evangelical church prolonged the previous centuries’ racism, ethnocentrism, and classism with a sociological principle (HUP) that should have demonstrated the truth of our condition, not justified it. At the same time, we have perpetuated sexism through a patriarchal approach to ministry and congregational life. More recently, we have gone to “war” over styles of worship that reflect ageism. While Milne is more generous to these passing trends (169-170), it is appar-

ent that we have built churches that reflect us at our worst, not the Creator in all God's creative best.

Milne's work is a wonderful reminder that we are God's art supplies. God is dabbing the brush in all sorts of paint, using all kinds of media, and expressing multiple styles on the same canvas to create a beautiful and amazing self-portrait. As we become one in our diversity (Jn. 17: 20-21), we are witnesses to the world that God is beautiful and grand, that God transforms barriers into bridges, and that God is "...still at work, drawing the nations in all their diversity to himself" (165).

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