# PREFACE

A public conversation on the role of ethical leadership is escalating in our society. As I write this preface, our nation is involved in two costly wars; struggling with a financial crisis precipitated by unscrupulous ethical practices on Wall Street; recovering from a presidential campaign that degenerated into character assassination based on race, religion, and unresolved cultural wars; and hearing a confused and frightened citizenry that is asking, "Which way is north?" Leadership studies abound with various approaches to this question. Among the most popular are theories of adaptive strategies, authenticity, personal efficacy, character development, and more recently, a growing literature on emotional and social intelligence, connectivity, and resonance.[1] Absent from many of these approaches is attention to the relationship between spirituality and ethics and how it informs and shapes human consciousness so that leaders are predisposed to make fitting decisions and are enabled to carry out appropriate ethical actions among competing claims and a cacophony of voices and visions.

A major assumption of this book is that leaders of the new century must not only be aware of environmental realities that shape the challenges and issues that they must confront. They must also be aware of the inner environments that shape character, civility, and a sense of community. Leaders who are not awake, that is, aware of the interiority of experience, the subconscious elements that often drive behavior and action, are increasingly in very vulnerable circumstances and can endanger the mission of a team, organization and, as we have witnessed too many times to ignore, very large numbers of people. Therefore, we ask, what are the critical resources and methodologies at our disposal to develop a new generation of emerging leaders who are *awake*—physically and emotionally

whole, spiritually disciplined, intellectually astute, and morally anchored? In this book, I attempt to answer this question and to address the challenges and issues attendant to ethical leadership by using a model that I developed as part of a research project funded by the W. K. Kellogg Foundation in the early 1990s, my continuing editorial work on the Howard Thurman Papers Project, and my work with the Morehouse College Martin Luther King Jr. Collection at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia.

Basically, the model revolves around three ethical practices: character, civility, and community. Each practice represents a corresponding dimension of the personal (character), societal (civility) and spiritual (community). In the research funded by the Kellogg Foundation project, which examined the development of ethical leadership from the black church tradition, we discovered that narrative-based ethics was the most appropriate way to understand how character, civility, and community were formed among leaders in that tradition.[2] After four years of work with "at-risk youth" in the poverty-stricken areas of Rochester, New York, we developed a curriculum for training emerging leaders that has resulted in my work at the Leadership Center at Morehouse College and VisionQuest International at colleges and universities, and with private and public leaders, here and abroad.

The audience for this book is primarily the intelligent lay reader. It is not limited to academics, theologians, leadership scholars and practitioners, but to a large spectrum of individuals who are interested in the relation between spirituality, ethics, personal development, calling, and a deep sense of justice. I introduce, to some, the legacy of Howard Washington Thurman (1899-1981) and the better-known work of Martin Luther King Jr. (1929-1968) as critical resources in the development of a model of ethical leadership that promotes the relationship between spirituality and social transformation. My work on Thurman and King, published as *They Looked for a City: A Comparative Analysis of the Thought of Howard Thurman and Martin Luther King Jr.* (University Press of America, 1989), is the early blueprint that led me to further investigate the black church tradition as a source for the development of ethical leadership. A basic premise that informs their place in this earlier publication is that out of their particularized social historical locations, they provide a larger vision for the place of ethical leadership in America and the world. King's description of leaders as *transformed nonconformists* and Thurman's idea of *apostles of sensitiveness* describe in part what I have in mind when I speak of ethical leadership.

The underlying theme that runs through the manuscript is the need for spirituality, ethics, and leadership that will require a new way of looking at

all three components—especially around issues of difference. In the Introduction, "At the Intersection Where Worlds Collide," I offer a personal story which contextualizes the language of "lifeworlds" and "systems," liberally borrowed from Husserl, Heiddeger, Arendt and Habermas, but without a lot of chatter about the history of the terms. I am most interested in helping readers to understand that fragile lifeworlds, as described, are under assault by vast and often impersonal systems that place leaders in very dangerous, vulnerable, and practically impossible situations (the intersection). Leaders, therefore, who aspire to ethical life and practice, need to cultivate certain habits and practices that allow them to negotiate and hopefully transform the intersection. I am not at all convinced that the proliferation of rules, laws, and penalties that promote governance, transparency, and accountability among public leaders—though necessary—are adequate. I believe we need to look at the question of ethics and leadership differently in order to address the challenges of the intersection.

Often when we use terms like "ethical leadership," it is done without any critical or reflective thought. The words *ethical* and *leader* are so well entrenched in everyday speech that it is difficult to dislodge them from their popular, though largely unexamined, meanings. When most people think of ethical leadership, they tend to imbue leadership with values or a certain kind of moral character that we have witnessed in particular individuals. These associations are correct, but ethics and leadership are a lot like love and war: all is fair, but underneath their common employment lie a multitude of sins and methodological errors.[3] The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein challenged his listeners to really "look" at a phenomenon beyond its accepted linguistic configurations and to ask the harder question of "What do I mean when I say *x, y,* and *z*?" For instance, *ethical* in certain contexts does not properly apply in others. Clearly, the moral quagmires of same-sex marriage, euthanasia, stem cell research, and abortion are testaments of what is at stake for ethical questions raised in public life. Moral norms and customs that are so easily accepted within certain communities of discourse and practice run into complex conundrums when placed in a larger public debate where a diversity of views prevails.

The question of leadership is just as difficult to address when we are forced to look at it. For instance, are all leaders, by virtue of the label, good leaders? Can one be a leader and not be good? Is there something inherent in the definition of *leader* that suggests some moral obligation? When leaders fail to be "good," what are we implying about the definition of *leader*? Is leadership tied to position only, or are other assumptions being made

about "leadership" and "good"? If all leaders are not "good," and if position is not the defining variable of leadership, then what is? What do we mean by a "good leader" anyway? This book is a call to leaders at the intersection who dare to remember, retell, and relive their stories as a basis for personal and social transformation. I begin by remembering and retelling my own story, and throughout the book I interweave personal memories and meditations that I hope will inspire and challenge others to do the same.

Chapter 1 introduces the ethical leadership practices of Howard Washington Thurman and Martin Luther King Jr. as critical resources in the development of ethical leadership. Their remarkable lives and social witness are not only tributes to the legacies of excellence that they leave for us, but also are rich in explicating the problematic issue of ethical leadership in the twenty-first century. In chapter 2, "What Is Ethical Leadership?" I provide an early working definition of ethical leadership that incorporates the dynamics of spirituality, ethics, and leadership as a way of addressing the challenges of character, civility, and community. It outlines four traditional ways that the modern world has conceived the practices of ethics and how these practices impact leadership at the intersection of *lifeworlds* and *systems*. I present a fifth, non-exclusive way of doing ethics that I describe as the way of the storyteller. Here the emphasis is on narrative-based ethics and the ways in which leaders critically reflecting on collective memory and specific cultural narratives are enabled to reconnect with forgotten practices. These practices form certain kinds of communities of discourse and practice that represent virtues, values, and virtuosities (excellencies) that allow retrieval and appropriation for the present. In chapters 3-5, utilizing the three pivotal practices of character, civility, and community, I discuss the critical virtues, values, and virtuosities that are integral to the practices. I invite the reader to rethink these pivotal practices in respect to race and difference, which are long-standing issues that test the vision of America and its quest for character, civility, and community. Respectively, under chapter 3, "Character at the Intersection," I discuss three virtues: integrity, empathy, and hope; chapter 4, "Civility at the Intersection," the three values or social practices: recognition, respect, and reverence; and chapter 5, "Community at the Intersection," three virtuosities: courage, justice, and compassion.

Chapters 6-8 present practical skills and competencies that emerging leaders need in order to negotiate and transform the traffic at the intersection. These last chapters integrate the proposed model of ethical leadership for the development and training of emerging leaders using the defining

concepts and practices of character, civility, and community. Chapter 6, "Staying Awake at the Intersection," addresses the challenge for emerging leaders to become aware of internal and external environments that engender possibility, hope, and vision. Emphasis is placed on the role of spirituality and imagination in public life with specific emphases on character, civility, and community. Chapter 7, "Remembering, Retelling, and Reliving Our Stories" is one of the most practical of the discussions that encourages emerging leaders to return to personal narratives that are connected to larger social historical narratives that form character, civility, and community. Chapter 8 introduces a process for ethical decision-making for leaders involving *looking, listening*, and *learning*; and *discerning, deliberating,* and *deciding* with attendant examinations of specific cases of ethical leadership.