

**Animated to Serve:  
A Review of *The Spirit of Servant-Leadership*,  
edited by S. R. Ferch and L. C. Spears.**

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Robert Greenleaf's (1977/2002) iconic statement in his seminal essay, *The Leader as Servant*, identified the servant leader as one who makes a determined choice to serve: "The servant-leader is servant first. It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead" (p. 27). This provocative statement begs the question of what motivates leaders to make this often counter-cultural decision to lead as servants. Greenleaf (1996) later elaborated and proposed that the animating force behind that pivotal decision is that of spirit: "I would prefer to say that spirit is the animating force that disposes one to be a servant of others" (p. 5). This spiritual aspect of servant leadership has not been the focus of much of the burgeoning literature on servant leadership. A stirring new book from Paulist Press entitled *The Spirit of Servant-Leadership* (2011), edited by Larry Spears, from the Spears Center for Servant-Leadership, and Shann Ray Ferch, from Gonzaga University, seeks to address this gap in the literature on servant leadership.

Both editors of *The Spirit of Servant-Leadership* (2011) come with impeccable credentials to this project. Spears served for 17 years as the president and CEO of the Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership. He currently serves as the president and CEO of the Larry C. Spears Center for Servant-Leadership and has recently been named the Gonzaga University School of Professional Studies' inaugural Servant Leader Scholar. Spears is often named as the world's preeminent thought leader on servant leadership and has labored lovingly to illuminate Greenleaf's vision with countless publications, seminars, conferences, and presentations devoted to the better understanding and practice of service as leadership. In the servant leadership scholarly community, Spears is well-known and respected for his empowering humility, encouraging stance towards other scholars, and his singular commitment to serving. Ferch is a professor of leadership at Gonzaga University in the doctoral program for leadership studies. He is the editor of the *International Journal of Servant-Leadership* and has championed the inter-disciplinary approach to research and writing on servant leadership. Ferch's own writing has been focused on the transformative and healing nature of servant leadership. Building on the insights of his psychology background and a deep commitment to the spiritual values of his own faith tradition, Ferch places a central focus on the power and transforming abilities of forgiveness in the life of the leader and in organizational leadership. In keeping with his multi-disciplinary approach to research and writing, Ferch recently won the prestigious 2010 Katherine

Nason Bakeless Literary Publication Prize for a collection of short stories entitled, *American Masculine: Montana Stories*.

*The Spirit of Servant-Leadership* (2011) is a well-structured, yet organic collection of writings on the heart/spirit of servant leadership. In keeping with what Ciulla (2008) proposed as the “fusion of horizons” in leadership studies, Ferch and Spears’ (2011) volume collects various writing and research approaches on servant leadership. The volume includes explorations on the interior life of the leader (Larry Spears & Shann Ferch), poetry (Margaret Wheatley), reflections on indigenous wisdom (Lane Baldwin), studies of historical situations and figures (Shann Ferch & María Ortíz), principles of management (Jeff McCollum & Joel Moses), distinctive practices of servant leaders (James Autry, Jan Gunnarsson, & Olle Blohm), conceptual studies (David Wallace, George SanFacon, & Larry Spears), practices for cultivating servant leadership (Deborah Welch & Virginia Gilmore), and the future of servant leadership (Maren Showkeir & Jamie Showkeir). The inspiring foreword by David Wallace sets the stage by arguing that servant leadership is rooted in an attitude of generosity of spirit, and the compelling preface by Ferch challenges the reader to further that generosity of heart into practices that consider the act of leading as servant to be transformative and life-giving. The volume closes with a provocative essay by Wheatley, in which the traditional use of power to command and control by leaders is questioned and an alternative approach of generous trust and empowering service as leadership is proposed.

Perhaps the most important contribution of *The Spirit of Servant-Leadership* (2011) lies in the consistent focus in all the essays, articles, and poetry in the volume on the heart or interior life of the servant leader and the inevitable personal and societal transformation that it can facilitate. It is in step with what Lipman-Blumen (1996) has called a global reexamination of our traditional approaches and practices of leadership: “...we finally began to reexamine more critically our traditional concept of leadership. It is based on an outmoded ego ideal glorifying the competitive, combative, controlling, creative, aggressive, self-reliant individualists” (p. 2). Spears (2011) predicted that this compelling idea of service as leadership is producing a “quiet revolution” (p. 8) that has the power to change our world:

Servant-leadership is providing a framework from which many thousands of known and unknown individuals are helping to improve how we treat those who do the work within our many institutions. Servant-leadership truly offers hope and guidance for a new era in human development, and for the creation of better, more caring institutions. (p. 20)

Ferch (2011) echoed this quiet hope that a leader’s determined inner choice to lead as servant can effect a lasting transformation not only in our personal leadership style, but also in our organizations and ultimately our world:

The interior balance between darkness and light, an honest accounting of our own darkness, and the choice to approach and humbly seek light may be the most durable metaphor of relational intimacy. Leaders who give themselves over to the most hope-filled wishes of the human community, the most important of our dreams, become the servant-leaders who walk in such a way that others become wise, healthy, and free. (p. 48)

*The Spirit of Servant-Leadership* (2011) is a welcome and much-needed addition to the growing number of voices and publications arguing for a virtuous approach to leadership. Spears and Ferch boldly broaden the horizons of our understanding of servant leadership and yet gently call us back to the small, still place inside where our best choices are made—the choices that affect our view of the world and our understanding and practice of leadership. May this volume

be the first in a series of reflections on the power of spirit/Spirit to animate our often-flawed desires to lead as servants. Maybe a next volume could focus on the various, rich religious traditions that have emphasized service as a central value in their approaches and calls to leadership, including Greenleaf's own tradition of Christian Quakerism. Another volume could perhaps explore how servant leadership can provide answers to the growing need for sustainable economic and environmental approaches to leadership. Ferch and Spears' (2011) volume assists the aspiring and practicing servant leader to look back, look within, and to look forward with the hope for a new world—a world marked by human compassion, truth, hope, and love. It is nothing short of a stirring prophetic vision, a vision that will prove to be worth our consideration. "The Prophet... is one who imagines what will later be proved" (Greenleaf, 1996b, p.14).

### About the Author

Dr. Corné Bekker joined Regent University in 2005. He previously served as the associate dean for academics of Rhema Bible College in Johannesburg, South Africa and now as an associate professor for the School of Global Leadership & Entrepreneurship. Dr. Bekker teaches in the doctoral programs of the School of Global Leadership & Entrepreneurship and is actively involved in research on the use of Biblical hermeneutics and spirituality to explore leadership. He is the editor of the *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* (JBPL) and the co-editor of *Inner Resources for Leaders* (IRL). Dr. Bekker is an ordained minister and has traveled in Africa, Europe, the East, and North America to present at churches, ministries, seminars, and academic conferences on the subject of Christian spirituality and leadership formation. He has been an invited speaker to universities, seminaries, and Bible colleges in the U.S. and abroad. He served in South Africa on the board of the South African Council for Theological Education, was nominated to the Standards Generating Body for Theology and Ministry of the South African Qualifications Authority, and served on the Consultative Forum of the South African Council of Churches. Dr. Bekker also serves as the director for the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) of Regent University and was the 2010 recipient of the Chancellor's Award. He resides in Virginia Beach, Virginia with his wife and son. Correspondence regarding this paper should be addressed to the author at 1000 Regent University Drive, Virginia Beach, VA 23464-5037. Email: clbekker@regent.edu.

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