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Book Review: Wisdom from Lyle E. Schaller: The Elder Statesman of Church Leadership by Warren Bird, ed.

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Farrer; Book Review: *Wisdom from Lyle E. Schaller: The Elder Statesman of Organized in five sections—“A Man with a Large Map,”* the most personal; “Breaking Boundaries, Building New Ways of Scholarship”; “Themes in the Transmission of Christian Faith”; “Transformations in Understanding Christian History”; and “Africa’s Place in Christian History”—the book consists of sixteen chapters by seventeen authors plus a concluding essay by Kwame Bediako. The contributors include peers and colleagues who have known Walls well and who have worked with him or followed his work closely. It is rich, filled with insight, thought-provoking, and suggestive of new steps to take in the road ahead. The book concludes with a twenty-one-page bibliography (compiled by Mark Gornik and limited to Walls’s publications in English) and a helpful index.

Reflecting on and extending the thought and life engagement of a singularly gifted and equipped individual as it does, *Understanding World Christianity* is remarkably highly integrated despite being a multi-author work. Due to its cohesive focus, attentive readers will find that it yields rewarding dividends.

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Bird, Warren., ed. *Wisdom from Lyle E. Schaller: The Elder Statesman of Church Leadership*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2012, pp. 200, \$12.98.

Reviewed by James R. Farrer. James is the founder of Vital Signs Church Consulting and has worked with 17 different denominations leading seminars coast to coast.

Hallelujah! Finally a newer generation can become quickly acquainted with insights gathered by Lyle E. Schaller, the Peter Drucker of the church (4). The church of Jesus Christ can be grateful to Abingdon Press and to the editor, Warren Bird. Bird’s wide background includes teaching at Alliance and Asbury Seminaries, directing the research department of Leadership Network, and co-authoring more than twenty-five books for church leaders. Bird’s connections with so many people who were influenced by Schaller make this a superbly informative book. It is a combination mini-biography, informal *festschrift*, and collection of quotes from Schaller’s vast writings.

Schaller, who wrote in longhand, and Agnes (his wife, typist, and advisor) proved to be a two-person cottage industry, producing 96 books, more than 500 magazine articles, and 300 issues of *The Parish Paper*, as well as reports to the congregations for which he did in-depth consultations. His books have sold over two million copies. Schaller interviewed and listened to more adults and teens in more congregations than anyone in history. While the most seasoned, currently active church consultants have visited as many as 1,200 congregations, Schaller’s

Great Commission Research Journal, Vol. 4, Iss. 2 [2013], Art. 12 tally was 6,000! *Leadership Journal* calls him “America’s foremost authority on the dynamics of church life.”

The book is divided into two sections. Part one covers Schaller’s life, influence, and impact. The second section includes more than twenty chapters on various topics. They include: the beginning of a pastorate, staff, the importance of church size, expansion of the teaching ministry, strategies for change, church turnaround, the decision-making process, relocation, multisite church, small groups, volunteers, and leadership style. Here each chapter features a short vignette of an issue by someone who was influenced by or helped by Schaller. Next comes two or three pages of quotes from various books Schaller wrote on that subject. This is followed by a brief summary statement or quote. Each chapter ends with a list of sources from Schaller’s books where one may find deeper information. The appendices cover yearly highlights of Schaller’s career and then provide a comprehensive list of the ninety-six books he authored or edited. A fine index completes the volume.

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Bird points out that Schaller based much of his writing on the assumption that individuals can learn from the experiences of other people in similar situations. One of Schaller’s most helpful devices was creating the fictional composite pastor Don Johnson. In *The Pastor and the People*, 1986, the reader follows the minister entering into a discussion with a new congregation, experiencing the honeymoon period, handling changes, interacting with visitors and ex-leaders, and dealing with staff issues until Johnson announces that he has accepted another call/position. That book ends with how to say good-bye. Johnson’s career is then followed in the book *The Senior Minister*, and the reader discovers the difference in moving from chaplain to intentional and initiating leader in a large congregation.

Over the years Schaller has received criticism. He was linked with the idea that “how-to research” was trying to find what pleased people, when the church should be about pleasing God. Bird includes a quote about the way Schaller might respond. Without a commitment to Christ as Savior and Lord, “the church is only another institution, and the members are more likely to be concerned with preserving the institution than serving Christ” (22).

Second, Schaller never claimed to be a part of any branch of various church growth movements, which have been badly misunderstood. He sought to remain independent but cooperative with all denominations and congregations that gave him a sincere invitation to consult or speak. Bird includes Schaller’s opinion that the issue is not just growth but really how to bring about change. Schaller knew that there are many chapters in a pastorate, and the congregational life cycle is

Farrer: Book Review: Wisdom from Lyle E. Schaller: The Elder Statesman of never a smooth bell curve. Many plateaus and crossroads for decision making and the possibility for change are experienced.

Third, Schaller has also been criticized for emphasizing the sociological nature of church life. Perhaps this critique is valid. However, his expertise in group dynamics may be one of Schaller's lasting contributions. For example, he shares research on the ideal size for church groups to accomplish different functions successfully. Bird's book lists more of Schaller's unique background. Schaller has a seminary degree plus three master's degrees in history, political science, and city/regional planning. He spent seven years as a city planner for Madison, Wisconsin, including time as chief fiscal officer. He learned much about denominational structures while serving eight and one-half years as director of the Cleveland/Akron Regional Church Planning Office which was owned by fourteen denominations. Schaller claimed to have had twelve distinct careers.

Bird's investigation into Schaller's life gives us a handle into what made Schaller so insightful. Schaller credited his mother for his curiosity and joy of learning. In addition, he could distill trends from the bowels of census data. Most importantly, Schaller listened to people who were "inventing tomorrow" in upwards of three dozen denominations in forty-nine states and parts of Canada. Schaller would ask pastors, "Who are your best friends?" He would be surprised to hear, "You are one of my few friends. Your suggestion over lunch at a conference saved my ministry."

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This writer comes to this review having studied with Schaller twelve times. Schaller regularly conducted training events lasting five full days for denominational executives and equally long seminars for "pastors as professional leaders." He rarely trained consultants as such, but was intrigued by the chance to do so for the "rust belt" region of Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and the Upper Ohio Valley. He allowed this reviewer to have input on the design and to lead parts of the novice consultants' training. It became clear that the most difficult task was placement of the consultants for on-the-job experience, even though their service was free. Many pastors and congregations do not want a mirror held up to them! This experience gave Schaller more fodder for his 1997 manual *The Interventionist*, where he shares in detail almost everything he does as a consultant!

What else might have been included in this fine book?

1. Several more of Schaller's oft-used quips such as:

"This is the second most exciting era in American Protestantism."

"The normal size for a Protestant congregation is less than 40 at worship.

To be larger means opposing the forces of nature and persistent effort."

“Do you want me to be polite or honest?”

“Diagnosis is more constructive than surprise.”

“Never overlook the power of the Holy Spirit, and do not neglect the doctrine of original sin.” “Normal and predictable behavior.”

“Mergers should rank no higher than twenty-eighth on any list of twenty-five options open to contemporary small congregations.”

“What is God calling you to do today that twenty years from now folks will say was smart and Holy Spirit led?”

2. A sample of a two-page monthly *The Parish Paper*.
3. An example of a Friar Tuck cartoon which was featured in many of his books and in *The Parish Paper*.
4. An illustrated chart from *Looking in the Mirror* of Schaller’s classification by church size and type. For example, a small fellowship tends to act like a cat (and thus may have nine lives).

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Who should read this book? Seminary students, pastors, and church leaders who do not want to spend hundreds of hours on unproductive tasks should read it. Schaller would concur that Jesus is still in the business of resurrecting persons and congregations. Jesus still creates new ventures out of “nothing.”

Hunter, George G., III. *Christian, Evangelical & . . . Democrat?* Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006. 108 pp. \$13.00

Reviewed by William Ingram, Executive and Outreach Pastor at Journey of Faith Church in Manhattan Beach, California

George G. Hunter III is a well-known author in the area of evangelism and church growth. He has written ten books on this subject including *Christian, Evangelical & . . . Democrat?* He is the founding dean of the E. Stanley Jones School of World Mission and Evangelism at Asbury Theological Seminary where he serves as Distinguished Professor of Evangelism and Church Growth, a title that was given to him in 2001 after eighteen years of faithful service.

At first glance this book seems outside the expertise of Hunter, as he is a scholar in the areas of church growth and evangelism, but as one reads this book, the goal of the book becomes clear. The purpose of this book is to encourage Christians to be engaged in all aspects of culture including the main two opposing political parties in order that believers may reach “pre-Christians” in both of these political parties with the good news of Jesus Christ. This is an important issue for Hunter, and his passion to reach the lost for Christ comes through in the book.