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## CHRISTOLOGICAL HYMN: THE LEADERSHIP PARADOX OF PHILIPPIANS 2:5-11

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A paradox occurs when a situation or condition challenges popular beliefs or conventions. Philippians 2:5-11 provides an example of a paradox relative to the traditional beliefs of leadership. A cross-disciplinary approach that integrates current social definitions and theories of leadership demonstrates that the Pauline model of leadership as propagated in Paul's letters to the Philippians is a valid model for leadership study and application. Utilization of the principles of sacred textual analysis relative to socio-rhetorical criticism addresses application of organizational behavioral theories and extant leadership theories to Philippians 2:5-11.

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A paradox is a situation or condition that typically arises when conditions challenge popular beliefs or conventions. Philippians 2:5-11 provides an example of a paradox relative to the traditional beliefs of leadership, such as the great man theory or trait theory. Generally, the traditional view of a leader is an individual with power, who has substantial control over others.<sup>1</sup> Early leadership models and theories, prior to the 1970s, concentrated on the behavioral styles associated with great leaders.<sup>2</sup> For example, writers routinely use the characteristics of confident, iron-willed, determined,

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<sup>1</sup> Gary Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 2002), 142.

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Robbins, *Organizational Behavior* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1998), 349.

and decisive to describe Margaret Thatcher, the former prime minister of Great Britain and an acknowledged leader.<sup>3</sup> In addition to the traits of determined and decisive, enthusiasm is another acknowledged leader trait. In some organizational cultures, being overtly expressive in both verbal and non-verbal body language demonstrates leadership ability. In such cultures, a quiet person with less expressive body language is unqualified to lead. For those subscribing to the traits of leadership associated with Margaret Thatcher, or expressiveness, a quiet unassuming individual in a leadership position may appear as a paradox.

Few would probably question the leadership abilities of individuals such as Margaret Thatcher, Ronald Reagan, Sir Winston Churchill, or Theodore Roosevelt. Yet many might question the leadership ability of a mild-mannered waiter, performing menial tasks of servitude. Certainly, many would question a modern day business leader, possessing the power and ability to orchestrate events, folding when faced with stiff competition. However, if the reader agrees with the two latter cases, then the reader would have to question the leadership ability of Jesus Christ. In fact, certain portions of scripture, such as Philippians 2:5-11, when interpreted through the lens of traditional leadership theory, challenge the image of Christ as a role model for leadership. In essence, Philippians 2:5-11 is paradoxical to the traditional view of how to effectively role model leadership behavior.

The purpose of this paper is to apply a cross-disciplinary approach that integrates current social definitions and theories of leadership and to demonstrate that the Pauline model of leadership as propagated in Paul's letters to the Philippians is a valid model for leadership study and application. Utilization of the principles of sacred textual analysis relative to socio-rhetorical criticism addresses the following points:

1. Scriptural analysis of Philippians 2:5-11
2. Historical analysis of Philippians 2:5-11
3. Application of organizational behavioral theories
4. Application of extant leadership theories

The purpose of using both a scriptural and historical lens in textual analysis, through socio-rhetorical analysis, conforms to Robbins' notion that socio-rhetorical criticism should explore a text in a broad, yet systematic manner that provides a meaningful platform of interpretation and dialogue.<sup>4</sup> Further, socio-rhetorical criticism focuses on the values and beliefs in the text as well as the world in which we live.<sup>5</sup> However, the world in which we live relative to our values and beliefs is not the same world of the Apostle Paul. In Philippians, Paul's writings may speak to present day values and beliefs that are not necessarily apropos to Paul's time. For example, in present times the word *rhetoric* encompasses connotations of falsehood or manipulation, while in Paul's time readers would have understood the term rhetoric to

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 347.

<sup>4</sup> Vernon Robbins, *Exploring the Texture of Texts: A Guide to Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 132.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 1.

mainly deal with craft of reasoned persuasion typified by the writings of philosophers such as Aristotle.<sup>6</sup> Ergo, to appreciate a scriptural analysis of Philippians 2:5–11 and its application to modern leadership and organizational theories, it is necessary to view the text in a historical context in order to understand the social factors that influenced both Paul and his audience.

## I. SCRIPTURAL ANALYSIS

Most biblical scholars agree that Apostle Paul authored Philippians, a letter written to the congregation of the church he had founded in Philippi, the first Pauline church of Europe.<sup>7</sup> Philippians is a thank-you letter to the parishioners, who had made considerable sacrifices to establish and maintain the church in Philippi, to bolster the Philippi congregation's faith and their continued commitment to spread of the Gospel.<sup>8</sup>

Paul's letters to the Philippians illustrate the effective use of rhetoric, through a well-crafted letter, to promote a persuasive argument. Aristotle and other philosophers of antiquity were well aware of how the persuasive effect of communication depended on a careful arrangement.<sup>9</sup> Typical of such oration or argument were the use of the *exordium*, *narratio*, *propositio*, *probatio*, and *peroration*.<sup>10</sup> Philippians 2:1–3:21 represent the *probatio* portion of Paul's letters, with 2:1-11 being the centerpiece of Paul's communication.<sup>11</sup> Philippians 2:6-11, the *Carmen Christi*, is a poetic recitation of the story of Christ, and serves as a compelling example of how the Philippians should seek to serve each other as well as others outside the church.<sup>12</sup> Although Paul was not the author of the *Carmen Christi* or Christological Hymn, it was likely a byproduct of Paul's ministry, and used by Paul to make an emotional appeal to members of the church at Philippi.<sup>13</sup> Thompson posits that Paul recognized the complexity of communicative processes through written communication as evident in his use of emotion (*pathos*) and cognitive (*logos*) appeals in 2:6-11.<sup>14</sup> Paul's letters to the church of Philippi, through rhetorical effect, sought to promote a compelling vision that would offer the congregation a model of conduct.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Joseph Marchal, "Expecting a Hymn, Encouraging An Argument: Introducing the Rhetoric of Philippians and Pauline Interpretation," *Interpretation* 61, no. 3 (2007): 245-255.

<sup>7</sup> Jay Gary, "Self-Sacrificial Leadership and Islam," JayGary.com, [http://www.jaygary.com/sacrificial\\_leadership.shtml](http://www.jaygary.com/sacrificial_leadership.shtml); Daniel Wallace, "Philippians: Introduction, Argument, and Outline," Bible.org.

<sup>8</sup> Wallace, *Philippians*; Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul: A Critical Life* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press), 216; James Thompson, "Preaching to Philippians," *Interpretation* 61, no. 3 (2007): 298-309.

<sup>9</sup> Thompson, "Preaching to Philippians," 303.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 305.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*; Ronald Allen, "Between Text & Sermon: Philippians 2:1-11," *Interpretation* 61, no. 1 (2007): 72-74.

<sup>13</sup> Murphy-O'Connor, *Paul*, 226.

<sup>14</sup> Thompson, "Preaching to Philippians," 302.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 306.

In reading Philippians 2:6–11, it is crucial to remember that the hymn is part of a letter, in a series of letters that Paul wrote, which were intended to be read by an orator to the Philippi congregation. Scriptural text, such as Paul's letters, is an intricate tapestry of complex patterns and images, and concentrating on a single image or pattern may limit or distort the meaning of the narrative.<sup>16</sup> Paul's letters provide prayer (1:3-11), examples (2:19-30), the hymn (2:6-11), autobiography (1:12-26; 3:2-21), and exhortation or *paraenesis* (1:27-30, 2:12-18, 4:2-9) to establish a vision and guide for the congregation's behavior.<sup>17</sup>

Philippians 2:1-30 forms three distinct units (a) 1-11, (b) 12-18, and (c) 19-30, with verses 2:1-11 containing two narratological units (a) verses 1 to 4, and (b) verses 5 to 11.<sup>18</sup> Bekker posits that the rhetorical structure of Philippians 1:1-30 serves as the *probatio*, with three *exemplum* or role models presented to support Paul's argument with the first *exempla* being Christ in verses 5-11.<sup>19</sup>

In Philippians 2:5, Paul encourages his audience to "have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus," following 2:4, where Paul explains that Christians should look to the interest of others, as one would seek to attend to one's own self-interest. Thompson posits that Paul's use of *phronein* or mind goes beyond simple cognition and promotes inner reflection to go beyond agreement to a level of shared mental models that promotes group loyalty or cohesiveness.<sup>20</sup> Paul's appeal to the Philippians early on to be like-minded has important implications. According to social cognitive theory, signs of status and power enhance the cueing function of modeled conduct.<sup>21</sup> The congregation of the Philippi church included members from all levels of society. If the upper class members of the church behaved in the manner that Paul desired, then the members of the church from the lower levels of the social strata would be also likely to model the desired behavior. Further, Paul's letters to the Philippi parishioners serves to stimulate the perspective-taking form of cognitive self-arousal. The perspective-taking form of cognitive self-arousal involves an individual experiencing the emotional state of others by adapting the perspective of others.<sup>22</sup> In Philippians 2:5-11, Paul proposes *downward mobility* for the more affluent members of the congregation and encourages communal or shared accountability.<sup>23</sup> It makes sense if the parishioners are motivated to be of like mind, by sharing the same perspectives of

<sup>16</sup> Robbins, *Exploring the Texture*, 2.

<sup>17</sup> Thompson, "Preaching to Philippians," 308.

<sup>18</sup> Corne' Bekker, "The Philippians Hymn (2:5-11) as an Early Mimetic Christological Model of Christian Leadership in Roman Philippi," (paper, Servant Leadership Roundtable, Regent University, August 2006), [http://www.regent.edu/acad/sls/publications/conference\\_proceedings/servant\\_leadership\\_roundtable/2006/pdf/bekker.pdf](http://www.regent.edu/acad/sls/publications/conference_proceedings/servant_leadership_roundtable/2006/pdf/bekker.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Thompson, "Preaching to Philippians," 301.

<sup>21</sup> Albert Bandura, *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1986). 207.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 313.

<sup>23</sup> Katherine Grieb, "The One Who Called You: Vocation and Leadership in Pauline Literature," *Interpretation* 61, no. 1 (2007): 154-164.

Christ, as well as Paul, they are more likely to develop a greater degree of cohesiveness due to shared emotions and mental models.

In verses 2:6-8, Paul presents Christ as a role model for others to imitate, and reinforces his argument by illustrating two extreme measures that Christ took to humble himself. First, in verses 6–7, Paul reminds his audience that Jesus, “though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God as a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant being born in the likeness of God.” A very compelling image given that Jesus was in the form of God, being from God, while men like the Roman emperors were only created in a physical likeness of God. Who other than Jesus would be better qualified to assume the mantle, title, office, or benefits of the throne to which every knee will bow. In stark contrast to the picture that Paul paints, is the reported behavior of the leadership of the Pauline church in Corinth. It was during this time that Paul learned of the church leadership in Corinth taking advantage of their position to improve their living standards and prestige.<sup>24</sup> Further, both Greek and Roman societies promoted competition among society’s elite to compete for civic honors equivalent to those paid to the gods.<sup>25</sup> Clearly, Paul is emphasizing that while entitled to the benefits of his birthright, Jesus willfully chose downward mobility, an action that would capture the attention of a class-conscious society. The re-telling of the hymn, particularly verses 6 and 7, provides a graphic example of the commitment that Paul believes that he and the followers of Christ must undertake. Unlike, servants or slaves living in involuntary conditions and lacking the freedom of choice, Jesus enters servitude by exercising his freedom of choice.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, it is incumbent upon the parishioners to follow Christ’s example since the absence of such behavior eliminates the possibility of incarnation or covenantal community.<sup>27</sup>

Paul’s second example of Jesus’ downward mobility, in verse 8, involves Jesus choice to become “obedient unto death, even death on a cross.” In ancient cultures, obedience to the point of death in the service of one’s king or nation-state was honorable and acceptable. Ancient Greeks viewed Socrates choice of suicide with hemlock as a noble and brave gesture, unlike death on a cross, a form of execution reserved for criminals. In reminding the Philippians that Christ’s behavior modeled the way, Paul uses verses 5 to 8 to emphasize Christ’s act of “emptying” himself to achieve “exaltation” in verses 9 to 11.<sup>28</sup> While this work addresses only a portion of the tapestry, Philippians 2:6-11, the reader should extend these findings to a complete reading of Paul’s letters.

In general, Paul’s writings, which promote a Pauline model of leadership, challenge the reader with numerous paradoxes. For example, Paul’s concept of the church avoided hierarchical and large-scale bureaucracy in favor of a self-organizing

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<sup>24</sup> Grieb, “One Who Called You,” 159.

<sup>25</sup> Marchal, “Expecting a Hymn,” 248.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> James Gilman, *Fidelity of Heart: An Ethic of Christian Virtue* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001), 64.

<sup>28</sup> Wallace, “Philippians.”

and adaptive congregation.<sup>29</sup> In today's world of mega churches and global religious organizations, Paul's model would likely appear unnatural as it may have appeared to those in Paul's time, who followed state religions such as practiced in Rome. Further in light of the recent allegations of greed and avarice among noted televangelists, Paul's words in 2:7 that Christ "emptied himself by taking on the form of a slave, by looking like other men, and by sharing in human nature," stands in stark contrast to the recent revelations of greed and avarice among noted televangelists.

The message of servitude, of humbling oneself, is a message that is consistent with the writings found in other books of the New Testament. In both Matthew and Paul's teachings, we learn through Christ that a relationship with God, as the Father, is not for gaining an advantage (*harpagmos*) and that total submission, or self-emptying (*kenosis*), even to the extreme of death, results in exaltation and great reward.<sup>30</sup>

To present-day Christians, the message may seem simple enough to comprehend and understand, at least from a scriptural perspective. Yet applying the principles in secular pursuits, such as climbing the corporate ladder, may seem incomprehensible to others. To appreciate fully the sociological context of Paul's message, one can look at Philippians 2:5-11 from a historical perspective, relative to the time when Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians.

## II. HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians while a prisoner of Rome, around 60 to 63 C.E.<sup>31</sup> This means that Paul wrote to the Philippi congregation during the reign of the Roman Emperor Nero, who ruled Rome from 54 to 68 C.E.<sup>32</sup> During Paul's lifetime, up to his imprisonment, he lived under the rule of a number of Roman emperors of the Julio-Flavians dynasty: Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero.<sup>33</sup> Both Paul and the Philippians would have been familiar with the excesses of Roman society, particularly the habit of emperor worship.

While Augustus, Tiberius, and Claudius did not actively encourage emperor worship, they did not discourage the imperial cults that worshipped them as gods, a practice initiated during the rule of Julius Caesar.<sup>34</sup> Conversely, the Emperors Caligula and Nero actively sought to have themselves acknowledged and worshipped as living gods.<sup>35</sup> For example, Caligula ordered his likeness placed in synagogues and temples

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Henry Bullock, "Study Helps to the Understanding of the Bible," in *Holy Bible* (RSV) (New, NY: Williams Collins Sons & Co., Ltd., 1952), 1-35.

<sup>32</sup> Richard D. Weigel, *De Imperatoribus Romanis: An Online Encyclopedia of Roman Rulers and Their Families*, <http://www.roman-emperors.org>.

<sup>33</sup> David Seeley, "The Background on the Philippians Hymn (2:6-11)," Institute for Higher Critical Studies, <http://www.dpets.drew.edu./jhcseelyphl.html>; Weigel, *De Imperatoribus Romanis*.

<sup>34</sup> Seeley, "Background on the Philippian Hymn."

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.; Wallace, "Philippians."

throughout the Roman Empire, and only the intervention of Harold prevented Caligula from having his likeness set in the temple in Jerusalem.<sup>36</sup> The excesses of Caligula and Nero were significant enough to insure their assassinations by their own praetorian guard.<sup>37</sup>

In addition to the reaction of Roman citizens and other nationals to the excesses of Roman rulers, Roman scholars such as Dio Cassius Cocceianus and Marcus Annaeus Seneca advocated against the evils of self-promotion. Seneca stated that a good king would not demand the devotion of the state; instead, a good king would devote himself to the state.<sup>38</sup> Dio maintained that a good king

shall plan and study the welfare of his subjects. He will by no means stuff or gorge himself with pleasure and power, but rather be just such a man as to think that he should not sleep at all the whole night through as having no leisure for idleness. So little does he wish for self-aggrandizement that the one pleasure in which he is insatiable, is granting benefits to others.<sup>39</sup>

Dio's writing essentially maintains that a king should see his role as that of a servant, laboring for others.<sup>40</sup>

It is likely that Paul was aware of the dissatisfaction held for the excesses of leaders like Caligula or Nero, and the outright genocide practiced by Nero and others against the early Christians. Further, in addition to the teachings of Christ, it is likely that Paul would have been familiar with the teachings of philosophers like Aristotle, Socrates, or Seneca. Therefore, it makes sense that the *Carmen Christi* highlighted in Philippians 2:5-11 would offer a more appealing message to many Jews and Gentiles than those propagated by the imperial cults.

In Philippians 2:6, the words "though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped," reminds the Philippians that even though Jesus was the Son of God, he did not assume an imperial mantle, or claim any benefit afforded to a deity. Oakes notes that Paul's congregation would have their expectations shaped by the social and cultural perspectives of their time.<sup>41</sup> Subsequently, the image of Jesus in verse 2:7 emptying himself and "taking the form of a servant" and not claiming his rightful title, would stand in strong contrast to the claims of Nero, a mortal being, that he was a god. We see Jesus, a person of privilege, taking a subservient to elevate others, while the Roman emperors used their privilege to elevate themselves at the expenses of others. Further, in verse 2:8, the reader learns that Christ "humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross." Paul utilizes the image of the cross to emphasize the extent to which Christ humbled himself, to the point of humiliation by submitting to crucifixion, a form of execution typically reserved for

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<sup>36</sup> Seeley, "Background on the Philippian Hymn"; Weigel, *De Imperatoribus Romanis*.

<sup>37</sup> Weigel, *De Imperatoribus Romanis*

<sup>38</sup> Seeley, "Background on the Philippian Hymn."

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Peter Oakes, "Re-mapping the Universe: Paul and the Emperor in 1 Thessalonians and Philippians," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 27, no. 3 (2005): 301-302.

slaves and criminals. Unlike Caligula or Nero, in verses 2 through 8, Christ demonstrates that the first step to ascension (to God's salvation) is to engage in the act of self-emptying, becoming a model of humility.<sup>42</sup>

In Philippians 2:9-11, Paul essentially re-maps the political and social order of the time when he reminds his readers that Christ is above all earthly rulers. In verse 9, in recognition of his devotion and service, Christ is exalted and God "bestowed upon him the name which is above every name." Christ's name is above the name of all others who would claim the status of deity, such as Caligula or Nero. Subsequently, verse 9 would captivate the reader's attention, since Roman law and the practice of imperial cults prominently displayed the images and names of the current Roman emperor.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, Paul describes the name of Christ, the humble servant, being above that of Nero. In verse 10, Paul writes that "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth." Here Paul promotes the image of Christ being above the temporal rulers to an even higher level of awareness. First, bowing was not a standard Roman practice, even within the imperial cults.<sup>44</sup> Secondly, attempts by Caligula to institute such practices in deference to his self-proclaimed deification, created a contemptuous response among writers of that era.<sup>45</sup> Certainly, Paul and his readers would have known of the responses to Caligula's efforts at deification, if not outright sharing in the disdain of such hubris. Yet, Christ, the Son of God is worthy of such adulation, and as cited in verse 11, his power is so great that it extends beyond the realm of any earthly ruler.<sup>46</sup> While Rome may have ruled much of the known world, most readers would have understood that not all peoples confessed to Nero being a god, yet the name of a humble servant would be on the tongues of all people.

Paul's writings might promote the image of a Thomas Paine or other early American Revolutionaries that wrote to encourage rebellion against a tyrannical government. After all, Grieb notes Paul's writings were not immune to the political and social conditions at the time, and Paul was a religious zealot prone to violent acts prior to his conversion.<sup>47</sup> However, while Philippians 2:9-11 broadly conflict with Rome's view of the world, Paul is not necessarily arguing against participation in Roman society; rather he is changing the social structure to encourage the parishioners to continue in their service.<sup>48</sup>

However, Paul urging his readers to remember the example of Christ and join him in following Christ's teachings may have a utilitarian motive related to insuring the survival and growth of the church. The church's existence and perpetuation is dependent not only on the good works of its parishioners, it also depends on their monetary donations. The practices and beliefs of the Christian church were counter to

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<sup>42</sup> Gary, "Self-Sacrificial Leadership"; Wallace, "Philippians."

<sup>43</sup> Seeley, "Background on the Philippian Hymn."

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Grieb, "One Who Called You."

<sup>48</sup> Oakes, "Re-mapping the Universe," 301.

existing Greco-Roman social norms.<sup>49</sup> Further, the congregation of the Philippi church cut across gender and social strata.<sup>50</sup> The citizens of Roman cities like Philippi, particularly the wealthy citizens, would be expected to participate in celebrations of the imperial cult such as public contributions to the temple and handouts to the general citizenry.<sup>51</sup> Oakes points out that while Rome was the dominant political power, the population of Philippi was predominated by religions other than those of imperial cult worship.<sup>52</sup> Therefore, Christians, like so many others, could easily blend into the very public celebrations that required generally passive participation of the public.<sup>53</sup> However, Christians from the more affluent levels of society would have a more difficult time maintaining a low profile, particularly when it came to providing monetary gifts to the temple of the imperial cult. Oakes posits that Philippians 2:6-11 places Christ above all earthly rulers in accordance with the Isaianic view of God as sovereign over all nations.<sup>54</sup> Christianity, like many of the earlier religions practiced by Romans and Greeks, place deity above earthly rulers without threat to the offices of earthly sovereigns. After all, in Mark 12:17 Jesus says to the Pharisees, “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s,” clearly indicating that the followers of Christ posed no direct threat to the rule of Rome. Paul is not writing to encourage revolt, separation from participation in society; rather, he is writing to provide the parishioners with a vision and guide that encourages allegiance to Jesus to embrace norms and behaviors that are contrary to the prevailing status-related norms of Greco-Roman society.<sup>55</sup> Simply said, unlike imperial cult worship, Paul recognizes that the survival of the church will need more than passive participation; it will need both commitment and contribution. By advocating mutual accountability, Paul increases the likelihood that all members of the congregation will feel a greater need to commit and contribute, particularly those of means, who might be enticed by pressure of Greco-Roman society to contribute elsewhere. However, to engage members of an organization, particularly those that may feel marginalized by society, the organization will need a highly effective model of leadership. The last three verses, are a stark contrast to verses 5 to 8, and serve to reinforce the significance of the Pauline model of leadership. To appreciate how the Pauline model of leadership compares with current social definitions of leadership, one can utilize a systems perspective in conjunction with the chaos theory, and utilize extant leadership theories such as spiritual leadership.

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 310.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 311.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 320.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

### III. ORGANIZATION BEHAVIORAL THEORIES

#### *Systems Thinking Theory*

The system thinking approach is extremely effective for difficult problems such as those involving complex issues, those depending on the past or future actions of others, and those stemming from ineffective coordination among participants.<sup>56</sup> Examples of situations that would advocate a systems thinking approach would be situations where actors need help in relating their connection to the “big picture” or problems where the solutions are not obvious to the actors.<sup>57</sup>

Philippians 2:5-11 certainly fits the parameters of systems thinking as outlined by Aronson. For example, Paul points out that Christ is of two natures. First, Christ is of divine nature, being in the form of God as God’s only begotten son. Second, while simultaneously being divine, Christ emptied himself to assume human nature.<sup>58</sup> In addition to being of two natures, Christ was also of the estates humiliation and exaltation.<sup>59</sup> The form of humility, taken in the form of man, was that of a servant. Unlike the Roman emperors Caligula or Nero, Christ assumed the lower social status of a servant.

Being of noble stature and choosing to assume a lower social role, for Paul’s audience, presents a paradox. Such behavior is contrary to the convention established by the rulers of the dominant political power of the Mediterranean world, the Roman Empire. Yet, Paul promotes understanding through a systems approach that makes the full pattern clearer, and is more likely to serve as a clear guide for the Philippians. Paul’s message of duality would resonate with his readers for two reasons. First, they were familiar with Christ’s story, and Paul reinforces the message of servitude. Second, the reader would have been familiar with the writings of Greek and Roman philosophers like Seneca and Cicero, who belittled the notion that a ruler could become a deity through greed and excessive behavior.<sup>60</sup>

#### *Chaos Theory*

In addition to the general theory of systems thinking, Philippians 2:5-11 also illustrates the chaos theory as it relates to the Pauline model of leadership. The chaos theory relates to the word chaos, which is “the irregular behavior of non-linear dynamic systems.”<sup>61</sup> The theory, in part, is an attempt by management theorists to reinforce why

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<sup>56</sup> Daniel Aronson, “Overview of Systems Thinking,” *Thinking Net*, <http://www.thinking.net>.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1991), 2323.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Seeley, “Background on the Philippian Hymn.”

<sup>61</sup> Mark Hillon, “What is Chaos and Complexity,” Storytelling Organization, [http://business.nmsu.edu/~dbjoe/teaching/338/leader\\_model\\_boje.html](http://business.nmsu.edu/~dbjoe/teaching/338/leader_model_boje.html).

organizations need to be agile in responding to changes in the external environment.<sup>62</sup> The chaos theory recognizes that organizations face both the negative and positive aspects of chaos, and the conditions of stability and instability.<sup>63</sup> Further, the chaos theory also embraces a paradox in that the instability becomes a source of order, and it is only through the disequilibrium that growth occurs, so that order arises from disorder.<sup>64</sup>

Philippians 2:5-11 does not outright address the chaos faced by the early church. However, Paul wrote to the Philippians while a prisoner of Rome. Additionally, the Philippians would have been very familiar with the persecution of their fellow Christians by the Romans and the turmoil in Judea under the cruelty of Herod and his heirs.<sup>65</sup> Therefore, the Philippians were faced with the chaos of the times or living on the edge of chaos. Chaos theorists believe in such conditions, to survive organizations and individuals require greater flexibility and autonomy in order to adapt to shifts in environmental forces.<sup>66</sup> As such small agile organizations, loosely connected to form a larger system, are more adapt at thriving on the edge of chaos. It is interesting to note that Paul's approach to spreading the gospel capitalized on "allowing the Christian communities to develop locally, without a hierarchical structure of church leadership."<sup>67</sup>

Further, Paul's Christian community mirrors the complex adaptive systems. According to chaos theorists, the complex adaptive system is a "system of individual agents, who are autonomous, yet are interconnected in such a way that the actions of one agent can change the context for other agents."<sup>68</sup> Subsequently, this optimizes system performance by allowing uninhibited interaction between the members of the organization, which helps promote a learning organization.<sup>69</sup> The unique nature of thriving in a chaotic environment or a system that promotes autonomous and uninhibited interaction among the actors requires a leadership that does not need a hierarchical and externally imposed model.

#### IV. EXTANT LEADERSHIP THEORIES

Through the perspective of systems thinking and the chaos theory, to the point of the complex adaptive system, the blueprint for Paul's churches did not conform to the traditional hierarchal structure associated with the Jewish religion or the state religions of Rome. In fact, the early Christian churches offered a glimpse of how Dee Hock, the founder of VISA, envisioned modern day organizations, as "the embodiment of

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Richard Ascough, "Chaos Theory and Paul's Organizational Leadership Style," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 1, no. 2 (2002): 21-43.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.; Seeley, "Background on the Philippian Hymn."

<sup>66</sup> Hillon, "What is Chaos."

<sup>67</sup> Ascough, "Chaos Theory," 30.

<sup>68</sup> Hillon, "What is Chaos."

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

community based on shared purpose calling to the higher aspirations of people.”<sup>70</sup> Subsequently, as pointed out earlier, a non-linear, non-traditional organization, would not flourish under a “top-down” or transactional management approach. Based on this condition, Ascough contends that there is no blueprint for creating Christian leaders, since there is no true model of Pauline leadership. If one tries to apply models of leadership based on transactional properties or relationships, then Ascough is correct. Such models would be more applicable to the socio-political model of the administration of the Roman Empire or leadership as modeled by Moses and the Pharisees.

Therefore, any leadership model or theory that best mirrors Paul’s description of Christ in Philippians 2:5-11 must be compatible with Paul’s design of the early Christian churches that he established. A number of newer models or theories have arisen that are less transactional such as the transformational theory of leadership and the spiritual leadership model.

### *Transformational Leadership Theory*

The transformational leadership theory encompasses four basic tenets: idealized vision, inspirational communication, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration.<sup>71</sup> To implement transformational behaviors, a leader must:

1. Articulate a clear and appealing vision
2. Explain how the vision can be obtained
3. Act confidently and optimistically
4. Express confidence in followers
5. Use dramatic and symbolic actions to emphasize key values
6. Lead by example
7. Empower people to achieve the vision<sup>72</sup>

By contrasting the behaviors already associated with Paul’s establishment and communication with the Philippi church and his description of Christ’s behavior, much of the transformational behaviors identified by Yukl become apparent in the Pauline model of leadership.

First, there is little doubt that in verses 5 through 11 that Paul articulated a clear vision and explained how that vision was obtainable: simply follow Christ’s example. Second, Paul wrote the letter from prison, and at no time did he express concern or personal suffering, instead he communicated a face of confidence and optimism. Third, throughout Philippians 2, Paul clearly indicates confidence in his followers, and uses dramatic imagery to emphasize how Christ set an example for his followers. Finally, the Hymn of Christ also emphasizes the need to follow the example set by Christ, to model the way.

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<sup>70</sup> Ascough, “Chaos Theory,” 25.

<sup>71</sup> Robbins, *Organizational Behavior*, 374.

<sup>72</sup> Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations*, 263.

In addition to the specifics outlined above, the previous review of Philippians 2:5-11 from the historical perspective, as well as from the view of organizational behavior theories, supports the notion that the Pauline model of leadership sought to empower the early Christians to achieve the vision set down by Christ for the disciples. Additionally, transformational leader behaviors appear to be more suited for situations that have high levels of ambiguity, stress, or uncertainty.<sup>73</sup> However, transformational leadership behaviors outlined by Yukl do not appear to endorse the means of empowerment or leadership example modeled by Christ. Simply said, the transformational leadership model does not speak to sacrifice or leadership through subservient behavior. A more appropriate model to address that perspective is the spiritual leadership model.

### *Spiritual Leadership*

According to Fairholm, the greatest problem that leaders face is not challenges associated with the organizational processes; the greatest challenges reside in the spiritual issues of the leader and followers.<sup>74</sup> The spirit concerns all aspects of a person's character, both positive and negative.<sup>75</sup> Further, the challenge for the leader is to address both the positive and negative aspects of spirituality for both the leader and the followers.<sup>76</sup> Once individuals identify both the positive and negative aspects, then they can formulate strategies and interventions to accentuate the positive, while suppressing the negative.<sup>77</sup>

The scriptural and historical analysis of Philippians 2:5-11 illuminates the positive and negative aspects of spiritual leadership. Christ sets the positive example of spiritual leadership by emptying and humbling himself, while the behaviors of the Roman rulers like Caligula and Nero underscore the toxic examples of spiritual leadership.

However, one may question whether Fairholm's application of the model of spiritual leadership to modern day organizations would also be applicable to Paul's ministry. Fairholm contends that historical management practices, and arguably traditional leadership models, are not follower focused, particularly in an era where work is more likely to involve the production of information, facts, and ideas.<sup>78</sup> Today's knowledge workers want involvement, responsibility, challenging work, and the opportunity to contribute.<sup>79</sup> Such dynamics are compatible to the early Christian church and its membership. Paul's ministry sought to establish a loose network of semi-autonomous churches, linked with a common mission of facilitating the spread of the

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<sup>73</sup> Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations*, 255.

<sup>74</sup> Gilbert Fairholm, *Perspectives on Leadership: From the Science of Management to Its Spiritual Heart* (Westport, Conn: Quorum Books, 1998), 125.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

gospel.<sup>80</sup> Additionally, Paul's letter to the Philippians praised them for their good works and encouraged them to continue the ministry.<sup>81</sup> Clearly, the members of the Philippi church accepted challenging work, significant responsibilities, and made significant contributions.

Therefore, spiritual leadership is compatible with the leadership typified in Paul's writings. Further, while most readers may associate the term *spiritual*, with organized religion, it is also applicable to modern day secular organizations. Paul's churches, as evident in the analysis of Philippians 2:5-11, illustrate how modern day organizational theories are relevant to learning how modern day organizations can face the challenges of dealing with chaos. Fairholm's elements of spiritual leadership, while easily associated with biblical scripture, are relevant to the application of spiritual leadership in modern day organizations, as shown in table 1.

Table 1. Elements of Spiritual Leadership

Category	Elements
Community	Ceremony, Culture, Oneness, Wholeness
Continuous Improvement	Capacity, Corporate Health
Competence	Balance, Credibility, Trust, Power
A Higher Moral Standard	Positive Affirmation, Ethics, Heart, Integrity, Love, Presence, Meaning, Morals
Servant-hood	Liberation
Spirituality	Corporate Spirit, Emotions, Truth, Sacred, Non-sectarian Spirit, Relationships
Stewardship	Team, Trustee
Visioning	Values, State of Mind

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In addition to the elements of spiritual leadership, Fairholm also developed a model for spiritual leadership, which is centered on four task competencies of (a) teaching, (b) trusting, (c) inspiring, and (d) acquiring the knowledge needed for the actual work and tasks that the group is challenged with. Figure 1 illustrates the spiritual leadership model.

<sup>80</sup> John MacArthur, "The Exaltation of Christ," *John MacArthur Study Guide Collection*, <http://www.biblebb.com.macsgm.html>.

<sup>81</sup> Seeley, "Background on the Philippian Hymn."



Figure 1. Spiritual leadership model, reproduced by permission from Gilbert Fairholm, *Perspectives on Leadership: From the Science of Management to its Spiritual Heart* (Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc.: Westport, CT, 1998), 139. © 1998 by Gilbert Fairholm.

Given the argument presented, it is concluded that Paul's ministry, as well as Philippians 2:5-11, clearly relates to the spiritual leadership tasks of vision setting, servanthood, and task competence. The examples of the process technologies of spiritual leadership exist in two points. First, Paul's establishment of community-based churches such as the Philippi church speaks to community building and stewardship. Secondly, the Pauline model of leadership as exemplified by Jesus, illustrates a leader setting a higher moral standard that those standards associated with the Emperors of Rome.

## V. CONCLUSION

Writers and philosophers have struggled for centuries to provide a model or guide for effective leadership from Machiavelli to more extant writers such as Robert Greenleaf and Gilbert Fairholm. Yet, the example of leadership provided by Jesus

Christ and expressed in scripture like Philippians 2:5-11, clearly demonstrates that contrary to earlier leadership theories which centered on transactional relationships between the leader and the follower, more modern day theories that promote a transformational approach and recognize the spiritual component of leadership have already withstood the test of time. The Apostle Paul's approach to building community churches offers some insight into how leaders and organizations can establish organizations that are well suited for operating under chaotic conditions. The Pauline model of leadership, when framed in the context of spiritual leadership, offers a model of leadership that will serve organizations that must operate under chaotic conditions. The paradox promoted by the Pauline model of leadership is that under chaotic conditions the charismatic leader may not be as effective as the subservient leader.

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#### About the Author

David R. Gray served as an infantry officer in the U.S. Army and currently works for Pfizer Inc. as a sales consultant. He earned a bachelor's degree in history from the Virginia Military Institute, a master's degree in business administration from Averett University, a master's in human resource development from the George Washington University, and is currently working on completing the requirements for a doctorate focusing on human resource development through Regent University.  
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