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TOWARDS A THEORETICAL MODEL OF CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP¹

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It is surprising, that with the relative increase in scholarly focus on the phenomena of leadership, to see how leadership scholars in modernity have largely ignored the topic of religious leadership (McClymond, 2001). There has been little advance in theoretical perspectives in the processes of religious leadership in the twentieth century (Lindt, 1986) beyond the pioneering sociological studies of Weber (1968) and Wach (1944). But, the turn of the century and the accompanied turn to spirituality (Bekker, 2008a) have produced a focused return to the scholarly study of religious leadership (Freedman & McClymond, 2001) and in particular a focus on Christian leadership (Whittington, Pitts, Kageler, & Goodwin, 2005). The advent of academic journals in the new century devoted to the study of Christian leadership, such as the *Journal for Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* (JBPL) and the *Journal for Applied Christian Leadership*, serve to mark the emerging nature of this scholarly focus. This brief reflection serves to highlight some of the recent developments in the scholarly efforts to define Christian Leadership.

I. THE TURN TO THE SCHOLARLY STUDY OF CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

¹ The style and reference format for this leadership reflection that of the American Psychological Association (APA).

The recent interests in Christian leadership, popular and scholarly, have been varied in scope and research methodology and have been characterized by (a) studies of leadership approaches of biblical characters (Manz, 1998; Piovanello, 2005; Whittington et al., 2005; Wildavsky, 1984); (b) historical, sociological, and contextual descriptions (Barnes, 1978; Bekker, 2006; Goetting, 2006; Guenther & Heidebrecht, 1999; Liftin, 1982; Nikkel, 1991; Papademetriou, 2003; Polomo, 1997; Sterk, 1998); (c) studies of historical Christian figures (Bekker, 2008b; Clarke, 1998; Krecki, 2008; Patrick, 2008; St. John, 1998); (d) ethical explorations (Karff, 1994; Kretzschmar, 2007; Wheeler, 1993; Willimon, 2002); (e) cross-faith comparative analysis (Freedman & McClymond, 2001); (f) formational process descriptions (Engstrom, 1976; Faulhaber, 2008; Kretzschmar, 2002; Miller, 2005; Robinson, 2005; Thiessen, 2005); (g) comparisons with leadership and management theories (Gary, 2007; Heuser & Klaus, 1998; Lamkin, 2005; Longbotham & Gutierrez, 2007; Middleton, 2006; Prosser, 2007); (h) exegetical studies (Clarke, 1992; Faulhaber, 2007; Hierberts, 1976; Poon, 2006; Rogers, 2006; Still, 2004); and finally (i) attempts at a proto-theory (Ayers, 2006; Bekker, 2006; Koenig, 1993; Niewold, 2007; Sanders, 1967; Stott, 2002).

Although areas of convergence have been noted by most of the above authors, no attempt to date has been made to synthesize these varied approaches into a cohesive whole. The following is an attempt to highlight some of the areas of convergence amongst a few of the prominent and emerging descriptive and theoretical approaches to the study of Christian leadership. The choice of approaches is representative in scope and presented in chronological order, so as to illustrate some of the trends and scholarly developments in the study of Christian leadership.

Each of these descriptive and theoretical approaches to Christian leadership are briefly discussed, areas of convergence explored, and further avenues for research proposed.

Engstrom

Engstrom's (1976) popular-press book on how to develop management and human relation skills as a Christian leader is a good example of the kind of popular ideas that were current in the mid-20th century and beyond. Engstrom, building in the ideas of Tead (1963), Gangel (1974), and Goble (1972), proposed a leadership model that emerged for the leadership trait theory popularized in the 1970s (Stogdill, 1974). Engstrom modified Stogdill's list and presented nine "personal traits" of leaders, interspersed with ethical and biblical injunctions. Engstrom's work did not include any indepth exegetical, historical, sociological, or contextual analyses, but is rather focused on an attempt to integrate a Christian Evangelical worldview with the management principles current in the 1970s.

Table 1. Emerging Descriptive and Theoretical Approaches to Christian Leadership

Engstrom (1976)	Clark (1992, 1998)	Kretzschmar (2002, 2007)	Whittington et al. (2005)	Bekker (2006)	Ayers (2006)	Niewold (2007)
"Personal traits of Christian leaders"	"Paul's model of leadership"	"Moral leadership: A Christian-ethical analysis"	"Legacy leadership of the Apostle Paul"	"Mimetic Christological model of Christian leadership"	"A theology of leadership"	"Martyrological (witness-based) model of Christian leadership"
Desire for achievement	Mimetic	Intellectual conversion	Worthy of imitation	Mimetic	Idealized influence	Expansionist
Acceptance of authority	Christological	Affective conversion	Boldness amid opposition	Kenotic	Inspirational motivation	Self-referential
Self-discipline		Volitional conversion	Pure motive	Servant posturing	Intellectual stimulation	Transformational
Creativity		Relational conversion	Influence without asserting authority	Embracing humanity	Individualized consideration	Public witness
Delegation		Moral action	Affectionate & emotional	Active humility		Vocational habitude
Decisiveness			Vulnerable & transparent	Missional obedience		
Persistence			Authentic and sincere			
Balanced Life			Active, not passive			
Faith & prayer			Follower-centered, not self-centered			
			Changed lives			

Engstrom's (1976) list of "personal traits" for leaders is as follows, with short descriptions of each:

1. *Desire for achievement.* Christian leaders are ambitious, but their ambition is tempered to an allegiance the "honor and glory" of Christ.
2. *Acceptance of authority.* Christian leaders accept their authority and yield it with a degree of competence and moral character.
3. *Self-discipline.* In order to "control others," Christian leaders must demonstrate high levels of personal self-control.
4. *Creativity.* Engstrom identified creativity as the ability to do "original thinking" by taking "imagination and organizing it through self-initiated plans" (p. 114).
5. *Delegation.* Christian leaders lead by allowing followers to "function responsibly in a given task" (pp. 114-115).
6. *Decisiveness.* Christian leaders are sure of the "will of God" and the "right course of action," and therefore act in a decisive and clear manner.
7. *Persistence.* Engstrom described Christian leaders as having a "firmness of conviction" that leads to leadership excellence.
8. *Balanced life.* Christian leaders have clear priorities and place value of family, community, and social relationships. They have the ability to prioritize and promote balance in what they do.
9. *Faith and prayer.* Engstrom added to the popular trait theory of leadership by adding a devotional trait that allows leaders to receive discernment and wisdom in their leading.

Engstrom's (1976) list of the "personal traits" of Christian leaders summarizes the prevalent attempts of the Christian faith communities in the mid- and later-20th century to integrate the demands and tenets of their Scriptures. The attempts are limited in critical analysis and critique on the secular theories and models of management and leadership.

Clark

Clarke's (1992) pioneering doctoral dissertation on the secular and Christian leadership in ancient Corinth announced the advent of scholarly, exegetical and historical studies of Christian leadership. Clark's (1992, 1998) work traced the influence of secular leadership in the Christian communities of 1st-century Corinth and how the Apostle Paul attempted to modify Christian approaches to leadership through his writings. Clark identified two particular aspects of Paul's model of leadership: it is *mimetic* and deeply *Christological*. Through a thorough exegetical analyses of some of the key writings of the Apostle Paul, placing these in their respective historic and social contexts, Clark demonstrated a three-fold Pauline model of leadership. Paul's model of leadership is (a) Christ (ultimately depicted in the servant of the Philippian Christ-hymn), (b) he invites his followers to imitate his own mimesis of the Christ example, and finally (c) that the followers should ultimately direct their own model of leadership back to that

of Christ. Clark's work introduced the important idea of the role of Spiritual formation in the development of Christian leaders. It was a ground-breaking work that opens the door for further historical and exegetical studies.

Kretzschmar

Kretzschmar (2002, 2007) approached the study of Christian leadership from the perspective of a Christian ethicist and philosopher. Set in the context of the moral failures of apartheid leaders in South Africa, Kretzschmar proposes a process description of leadership "conversion" that could produce "moral leadership." Building in the insights of Franciscan spirituality, Kretzschmar invited discussion concerning five distinct elements in the moral formation of Christian leaders:

1. *Intellectual conversion.* Christian leaders "constantly rethink or evaluate" their own and others "moral framework" and this involves the disciplines of "self-awareness and critique" in order to develop the virtue of prudence (correct judgment) (pp. 28-31).
2. *Affective conversion.* Christian leaders have a high regard for *othokardia* (right heartedness towards God). Leaders consider the ultimate location of their affections and adopt ascetic disciplines (such as the traditional Monastic vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience) to guide their hearts back to God.
3. *Volitional conversion.* Christian leaders seek to have a "redeemed human will" that moves from willfulness (identified as arrogant self-sufficiency) to willingness (described as flexible receptivity).
4. *Relational conversion.* A Christian leader's "moral conscience" is formed and challenged in community. Christian leaders engage in "moral relational power" that brings personal and communal transformation to perceptions and applications of leadership.
5. *Moral action.* The intellectual, affective, volitional, and relational conversions of Christian leaders result in "moral action" that facilitates the wider conversion of the world in which these leaders operate.

Kretzschmar's (2002, 2007) work provides an erudite base for the inclusion of moral theology and spiritual formational studies to the ongoing quest to define Christian leadership. It deepens the discussion from mere concern of leadership effectiveness to the moral dimensions of personal and communal leadership.

Whittington, Pitts, Kageler, and Goodwin

The appearance of the work of Whittington et al. on the leadership wisdom of the Apostle Paul in the 2005 edition of *The Leadership Quarterly* brought the field of Christian leadership studies to mainstream organizational leadership research. Whittington et al., building on the earlier attempts of Wildavsky (1984) to combine the disciplines of social science and biblical studies, proposed a model of "legacy leadership" based on an exegetical study of Paul's first letter to the church in

Thessalonica. Whittington et al. proposed ten qualities of effective Christian leadership observed in the “life and ministry” of the Apostle Paul in his first letter to the Thessalonians: (1) worthy of imitation, (2) boldness amid opposition, (3) having a pure motive, (4) influence without asserting authority, (5) affectionate and emotional, (6) vulnerable and transparent, (7) authentic and sincere, (8) active and not passive, (9) follower-centered and not self-centered, and finally (10) evident by changed lives of leaders and followers.

Whittington et al.’s (2005) work is limited in its exegetical analysis, but thorough its comparative analysis of the constructs with that of transformational leadership, servant leadership, leadership motive patterns, emotional intelligence, and ultimately spiritual leadership. The greatest benefit of this study does not lie in the exegetical work, but in the successful multi-disciplinary approach of the study that combines the disciplines of social science with that of biblical studies.

Bekker

Bekker (2006), in an attempt to define a “proto-theory” of Christian leadership, turned to the “proto-text” of the New Testament (considered by scholars to be pre-Pauline and possibly the earliest text of Christianity), the Christ-hymn in the letter of Paul to the Christian communities in ancient Roman Phillipi. Bekker’s work proposed an early mimetic Christological model of Christian leadership in Roman Philippi by exploring the judicial, rhetorical structure, and the social function of the Philippians hymn (2:5-11) as a *cursus pudorum* (course of ignominies) that stands in stark contrast to a *cursus honorum*, the formalized sequence of public offices in 1st-century Roman cities. The Philippians hymn challenged the notions and principles of the prevalent shame/honor social matrix of Roman societies by offering an alternative set of behaviors and values that stood in stark contrast with those of the dominant culture. The hymn makes use of a *cursus pudorum* in which the voluntary abasement, humility, and obedience of Christ becomes an exemplum that offers a critique of the tyrannies of the timocratic leadership style of Roman Philippi and offers an alternative vision of service oriented leadership rooted in humility and common mutuality.

Bekker (2006) proposed a mimetic “proto-model” of Christian leadership that is marked by (1) Christological mimesis, (2) kenosis (self-emptying), (3) servant posturing, (4) humane in its orientation, (5) active humility, and (6) missional obedience. The strength of Bekker’s model is that it provides an “early” historical picture of a counter-cultural, humane, and empowering approach to Christian leadership that was communicated in humility and radical mutuality.

Ayers

Ayers published a paper on a possible theology of leadership in the inaugural edition of the *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* in 2006. Ayers proposed an area of convergence in the “languages of Theology and Leadership Studies” and uses

this area of convergence to explore a sacred texture analysis (a sub-section of socio-rhetorical criticism) of the Christ-hymn in Paul's Letter to the Philippians. Using the socio-rhetorical matrix of Robbins' (1996) sacred texture analysis of (1) deity, (2) divine history, and (3) religious community, Ayers compared the rhetorical injunctions of the Christ-hymn and compared his findings with the construct of transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1990). Ayers' work compares the results of a sacred texture analysis of the Christ-hymn in the Pauline letter to the Philippians with transformation leadership and finds its comparison "patterns" that are consistent with the four traits of this theory, namely (a) idealized influence, (b) inspirational motivation, (c) intellectual stimulation, and (d) individualized consideration. Ayers did however point out that these four traits isolated from the Christ-hymn, and consistent with transformational leadership, are ultimately focused on Christ and mimetic in nature.

Niewold

Niewold (2007) proposed an alternative model of Christian leadership based on the theological motive of *martyria*, or witness-based leadership. Niewold critiqued the easy adoption of the philosophies and tenets of servant leadership within Christian communities and observed that this has happened with little theological or philosophical scrutiny or reflection. Building on the biblical concept of *martyria*, which can be rendered as "witness" or "testimony," Niewold developed a theological model of Christian leadership distinguished by five characteristics. Martyrological leadership is: (a) expansionist, (b) self-referential, (c) transformational, (d) concerned with public witness, and finally expressed in (e) vocational habitude. Niewold's work provided a Reformist theological base for an alternative Christian leaders that desire to base their perceptions and ideas of leadership fully engaged of biblical Christology.

II. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The turn of the century has brought a new era of academic exploration to the quest to define Christian leadership. Research has been varied in scope, methodology, and focus. Little work has been done to synthesize all these approaches and to provide a "mega-theory" of the concept. This might be due to the fact that so much of the exegetical, theological, philosophical, and historical context of Christian forms and approaches of leadership have not been explored yet. Some of areas of convergence have arisen though and these areas of convergence could provide a base for further exploration. Based on the small above review, the current theories and approaches agree that Christian leadership is (a) mimetic (Ayers, 2006; Bekker, 2006; Clark, 1992; Niewold, 2007; Whittington et al., 2005), (b) concerned with a correct understanding of power (Ayers; Bekker; Clark; Engstrom, 1976; Kretzschmar, 2002; Whittington et al.), (c) follower-centered (Ayers; Bekker; Clark; Kretzschmar; Whittington et al.), and ultimately (d) Christological (Ayers; Bekker; Clark, 1992; Engstrom; Kretzschmar; Niewold; Whittington et al.). The areas of convergence suggest that the next steps in

research should be focused on determined historical and sociological reconstruction of the leadership of Jesus, based on rigorous exegetical research, as well as renewed conceptual theory of leadership mimesis as found in both the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures.

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