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THE SEASONS OF ECCLESIAL LEADERSHIP: A NEW PARADIGM

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The contemporary model of spiritual realization (completing or accomplishing specific experiences as a sign of spiritual maturity) is an insufficient model of spiritual growth. Rather, researchers and theologians should adopt a seasonal paradigm. This work applies this model to ecclesial leadership, recommending the seasons of calling, formation, role identification, and praxis. This model suggests that these four seasons are recurring in the life of the ecclesial leader with perennial growth as the outcome. Additional research is recommended to confirm that these seasons are the best descriptions of an ecclesial leader's development and whether other seasons exist.

All too often, American Christians think of their spiritual lives as “plug and play components.” The plug and play terminology comes from the computer field where the user can add supplementary components to a computer system simply by plugging them in. The component is equipped such that once the user plugs it in, whatever software is needed is automatically added to the computer and the component is immediately ready for use on the system. In the contemporary spiritual realm, the reigning paradigm seems to be one suggesting that so long as one has added the right components to their spiritual system, everything should be ready to move forward and onward from whatever has been holding the individual back spiritually. This is perhaps no more true than in the role of ecclesial leader. Those leaders who, over some

arbitrarily chosen timeframe, have shown competence in leading a small group, prayer meeting, corporate gathering, fellowship meal, communion, visitation, baptism, wedding, and funeral are likely ready to be considered pastoral material. When limitations arise in an individual's skills in any of these areas, there is a seminar and/or book—an “upgrade” of sorts—available to fix the problem. Yet, are these the measures that researchers should use when identifying ecclesial leadership? Is this mindset—one where components of skills and experiences are added to the individual's life—the type of paradigm that should drive the pursuit of ecclesial leadership? Perhaps a different paradigm for thinking of ecclesial leadership is needed.

I. FOUR SEASONS

Rather than particular skills and experiences that a leader can pick and choose from, maybe a better way of thinking of ecclesial leadership is as a seasonal activity. Typically, our years are broken up into four seasons—winter, spring, summer, and fall. Once we have gone through winter once, it would be foolish to think that we know everything there is to know about winter. It would be even more foolish to think that we need not—nor will not—go through it again. It is part of the cyclical nature of this world we live in that every year winter will come around. Some years will certainly be worse than others will be. Some years will be highlighted by activities that are memorable and others that cause lasting scars. Still, every year winter will come around and the hope of winter is that spring is on its way. So it goes with all the seasons. What are the seasons that an ecclesial leader can anticipate going through as he or she grows in their effectiveness as a spiritual leader?

The Call

As with every other aspect of our relationship with God, the genesis begins with Him. It is no different for the ecclesial leader. The leader's seasons begins with a call from God to the role of leadership. Though believers should see any vocational calling by God within the framework of revealing His glory in all corners of creation, the calling to nurture the bride of Christ has high stakes. Chrysostom states, “It is not the management of corn and barley, oxen or sheep, that is now under our consideration, nor any such like matters, but the very Body of Jesus. For the Church of Christ, according to St Paul, is Christ's Body, and he who is entrusted with its care ought to train it up to a state of healthiness, and beauty unspeakable, and to look everywhere, lest any spot or wrinkle, or other like blemish should mar its vigor and comeliness.”¹

Chrysostom also notes that this calling is not only a spiritual responsibility, but also a public and community responsibility. Due to the conspicuous nature of ecclesial leadership, the one called to this position is likely to have all the faults and strongholds of their heart publicized across the experience of their vocation.² Those who remain steadfast and firm throughout their vocational ministry are to be admired by all,

1. David A. Davis, “St. John Chrysostom on Ministry, Discernment, and Call,” *Theology Today* 62, no. 3 (2005): 410.

2. *Ibid.*, 412.

according to Chrysostom.³ In this way, the call to ecclesial leadership is a calling that may put the respondent's spiritual life under great pressure, even in some cases to the point of breaking. One might think past experiences that develop physical, intellectual, emotional, or spiritual maturity would shelter the ecclesial leader from such pressures. However, Hicks found that there was no significant relationship between second-career ecclesial leaders and satisfaction, maturity, or morale.⁴ Thus, whether called by God early in life or later in life, God has called the ecclesial leader to a particularly difficult role within His family.

When one considers the role that God calls the ecclesial leader to, these difficulties are put into proper context. Although God calls all of His people to imitate Christ within their own vocation, the ecclesial leader is the role model of this imitation to the rest of the ecclesial community (1 Cor 11:1). Maliti listed seven ways in which leaders are visible and living imitations of Christ: (1) as a priest interceding for others, (2) as a life sacrificed, (3) as an image of communion together with God and His family, (4) as a limitless witness of God's love, (5) as a model of becoming one with the mind and attitude of God, (6) as a practical demonstration of the characteristics of God, and (7) as an example of enablement to holiness.⁵ If the ecclesial leader is called to be the primary representation of a deepening knowledge of Christ, an expression of the supernatural power of Christ's resurrection, a public example of the fellowship of sharing in Christ's suffering, and as one constantly becoming like Christ in His death, then it is no wonder that the calling is a difficult one (cf. Phil 3:10). No one lives up to it completely and perhaps this is where the calling is most fraught with danger. God calls the ecclesial leader to live a life that is impossible to accomplish fully while at the same time reminded and burdened by even the faintest hint of sinfulness. "Saints are needed. Therefore the church calls persons to be pastors to help the rest of us be more than the persons we would be if we had been left to our own devices."⁶

However, as changes occurred to the way that ecclesial leaders obtained their positions, so also changes occurred to the way that congregations began to think of their pastors. The Reformation broadened the idea of vocation to extend out to every form of employment that benefited humanity.⁷ However, for much of Protestant Christianity, this meant the pastor's vocation had a virtual equality with the farmer's vocation and the machinist's vocation and the academic's vocation. Rather than a hierarchal ecclesial organization deciding on the placement of pastors, for many Protestants, the local church was the primary arbiter on the pastor's placement as leader.⁸ In addition, after the Reformation, a pastor's method of support often shifted away from denominational or governmental support to the local church body supporting

3. Ibid., 412.

4. Thomas H. Hicks, "A Study of the Background, Level of Job Satisfaction, Maturity, and Morale of 'Delayed Vocation' Catholic Priests," *Review of Religious Research* 22, no. 4 (1981).

5. Patrick M. Maliti, "Priesthood: A Call to Imitate Christ, the Good Shepherd," *African Ecclesial Review* 39, no. 2 (1997): 90.

6. William H. Willimon, "Why a Pastor Should Not Be a 'Person,'" *Theology Today* 50, no. 4 (1994): 585.

7. Willimon, "Why a Pastor," 585.

8. For example, Waldemar W. Wehmeier, "Calling a Pastor: How It Evolved in the Missouri Synod," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 4, no. 5 (1977).

the pastor. In many people's eyes—including pastors—this amounted to the church hiring the pastor just as any non-ecclesial organization would hire a blue or white-collar worker. Today, nineteen percent of pastors are forced from ministry at least once during their pastoral life.⁹ Another six percent are fired from their churches.¹⁰ Although the most effective pastoral years are in years five through fourteen, the average tenure of a pastor in one location is five years.¹¹

Willimon provided a helpful resource through the liturgy of ordination for a bishop in the *Apostolic Tradition* in Hippolytus. This resource reminds the Church of the importance of seeking the called rather than seeking to fill a position.¹² First, the ordinate would be one chosen by the community of believers. Though this seems to be more congregational than is typically thought of for third-century churches, and may refer to a council, the language throughout the liturgy suggested an affirmation from the local congregation as a whole. Only after this acceptance by all in the congregation, would the formal service of ordaining the individual occur as an act of worship (on the Lord's Day) with both the leadership of the local church body as well as leadership from the larger church community. Once the agreement of the church was affirmed by the other ecclesial leadership present, those who had prior ordination would pass on the blessing of ordination through the laying on of hands. Then everything was silent as all asked for the Spirit's presence. Only after the descent of the Spirit were the bishops to intercede vocally for this new ordinate. Rather than siding with a purely episcopal or congregational approach, the liturgy wisely sought affirmation from both the local gathering of believers as well as the broader body of Christ in recognizing the calling on an individual's life. Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, the liturgy directed further substantiation through the presence of the Holy Spirit on the gathering of believers. Though the liturgy is not explicit on how such a visitation of the Holy Spirit is identified, that believers were dependent on the presence of the Holy Spirit in affirming the calling of the individual is a step perhaps overlooked in today's ordination process.

The calling, then, of an ecclesial leader is no small thing. It is a high and honorable calling for a sinful and broken human to imitate the life of Christ in such a way that it highlights both the leader's own incapacity (and, thus, the greater perfection of Jesus) and reflects the glory of the Savior. All this is done in such a way as to encourage others in their own calling from God to shine His glory throughout all of creation. The ecclesial leader is truly not a professional, but rather an incarnation of the ministry of Jesus in the life of the community of God who can only have a truly effective ministry through the calling of God.

9. H. B. London, Jr. and Neil B. Wiseman, *Pastors at Greater Risk* (Ventura, CA: Gospel Light, 2003), 34.

10. *Ibid.*, 34.

11. *Ibid.*, 34.

12. William H. Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 31-32.

The Formation

Even a cursory study of the men and women of faith illustrated in Scripture shows that simply because God has called a particular person to ministry in no way suggests that the person is ready for that ministry. Even Abraham, the father of faith, was sidetracked in his travels to the Promised Land, lied along the way about his relationship to Sarah, and generally tried to fulfill God's promises in his own way. Yet, over the years, his faith was formed in such a way that when called to sacrifice his son, he obediently got up early the next morning and proceeded to trust God, as exhibited by his actions. In the same way, an ecclesial leader should not expect that when God has called that they are already spiritually formed. Instead, they may simply be at the beginning of a great journey of deepening faith. In fact, in keeping with the promises of God that He is restoring our whole being, spiritual formation is only part of what God is accomplishing in our lives, which also includes vocational and personal formation.¹³ Nevertheless, the importance of the leader growing in their spiritual formation is integral to effective pastoral ministry, not the least reason being that the spiritual formation of the leader will deeply affect the spiritual formation of the people that the leader leads.¹⁴ Nor should one allow the paradigm of "plug and play" to obfuscate the image of spiritual formation. A seasonal paradigm recognizes every phase of human life and development as an opportunity for spiritual development. One is never too old to be developing spiritually.¹⁵

Most expect spiritual formation for the ecclesial leader to occur during some level of Christian education. Certainly, spiritual formation cannot be divorced from Christian education without divorcing the very means through which much of Scripture seeks to form spirituality.¹⁶ From the teaching of the Law, to wisdom literature, to the teachings of Jesus, and through the directives of the epistles, Scripture is filled with the idea of education being one way, if not one of the primary ways, through which spiritual formation must occur. However, the pursuit of service, holiness, mission, practical organizational skills, internship, prayer, preaching, sacrament, community-mindedness, justice, sincerity, and leadership cannot be taught solely within the classroom environment.¹⁷ Some other means is necessary in addition to Christian education. The search of this other means led Hess and Kariuki wa Karega to suggest that the spiritual formation of the ecclesial leader begins with an understanding of who the leader has

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13. Cosmas A. R. K'Otienoh, "Formation of Priests as Agents of Evangelization for the Church-as-Family of God (I)," *African Ecclesial Review* 41, no. 4-6 (1999): 248-257.
 14. Ruth Haley Barton, "It Begins With You! How the Spiritual Formation of the Pastor Effects the Spiritual Formation of the Congregation," *Common Ground Journal* 7, no. 1(2009): 26-36.
 15. William J. Bryan, "Lessons From the Exodus Elders," *Journal of Religion, Spirituality & Aging* 21, no. 1/2 (2009): 17-35.
 16. Sophia R. G. Steibel, "Christian Education and Spiritual Formation: One and the Same?" *Christian Education Journal* 7, no. 2 (2010): 340-355.
 17. Raphael S. Ndingi Mwana 'a Nzeki, "Vocation and Formation of Priests," *African Ecclesial Review* 32, no. 1 (1990): 16-28; Ojil C. Bernard, "Formation of Priests as Agents of Evangelization for the Church-as-Family of God (II)," *African Ecclesial Review* 41, no. 4-6 (1999): 264-265; A. N. O. Ekwunife, "Integration of Traditional African Values in Priestly Formation," *African Ecclesial Review* 39, no. 4 (1997): 201-207.

been created by God to be.¹⁸ As Kariuki wa Karega notes, this spiritual identity must correspond to the intimacy, transcendence, integrity, and priesthood promulgated throughout Scripture.¹⁹ Yet, as Hess notes, this must be in the context of the skills and abilities placed in the individual by God as well as within the context and environment of ministry.²⁰ It is here that Hess points out the inherent inadequacy of Christian education being the only means of spiritual formation. Christian education will “necessarily displace, disorient, and redevelop participants from where they are (where they have lived before, whom they have been personally)” and thus becomes an obstacle to true spiritual development if used in exclusion of other spiritual formation practices.²¹

Therefore, spiritual formation will necessarily include certain characteristics that are nurtured over the course of time. Stewart highlighted this by adapting non-ecclesial leadership theory on complex social organizations for the church environment.²² In Stewart’s model, an effective leader is accomplished in three proficiencies: (1) the leader must be able to identify “ill-defined, non-routine problems,” (2) the leader must be able to develop the skills necessary to address the identified problems, and (3) the leader must be able to develop the skills necessary for followers to address the identified problems.²³ Leadership styles used to address these problems can vary in at least seven distinct ways depending on the spiritual maturity and formation of the leader.²⁴ Added to this, McKenna, Yost, and Boyd found five primary events in ecclesial leadership development: (1) prevocational ministry events, (2) ministry transition events, (3) leadership experiences, (4) interpersonal events, and (5) educational and training events.²⁵ Finally, there is a developmental process in the ecclesial leader’s own faith, which includes six stages.²⁶ As might be expected, the formation of an ecclesial leader is a complex process. Based on the research cited, however, an ecclesial leader must be able to show effectiveness in their ability, leadership style, experience, and faithfulness.

What is not recommended is to quantify this all in such a way to identify a “recipe”—a final, completed product—for the perfect ecclesial leader. The formation of an ecclesial leader is not as simple as combining certain ingredients with the unique pinch of this or that element. Instead, the formation of an ecclesial leader is more like the nurturing of a fruit tree. It has certain characteristics that suggest seasons of

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18. Lisa M. Hess, “Formation in the Worlds of Theological Education: Moving From ‘What’ to ‘How,’” *Teaching Theology & Religion* 11, no. 1 (2008): 14-23; John B. Kariuki wa Karega, “Priestly Formation: Challenges, Problems and Prospects,” *African Ecclesial Review* 48, no. 4 (2006): 242-266.
 19. Kariuki wa Karega, “Priestly Formation,” 247.
 20. Hess, “Formation in the Worlds,” 17-18.
 21. *Ibid.*, 19.
 22. Alice C. Stewart, “The Workplace of the Organised Church: Theories of Leadership and the Christian Leader,” *Culture & Religion* 9, no. 3 (2008): 301-318.
 23. *Ibid.*, 308.
 24. Brian Hall, “Leadership Development and Spiritual Growth,” *Anglican Theological Review* 9, (1984): 100-121.
 25. Robert B. McKenna, Paul R. Yost, and Tanya N. Boyd, “Leadership Development and Clergy: Understanding the Events and Lessons that Shape Pastoral Leaders,” *Journal of Psychology & Theology* 35, no. 3 (2007): 186.
 26. Janet O. Hagberg and Robert A. Guelich, *The Critical Journey: Stages in the Life of Faith*, 2nd ed. (Salem, WI: Sheffield, 2005), 7.

fruitfulness—healthy limbs, strong roots, blooming flowers, and green leaves. The fruit from this tree is pleasing to the eye, good to the taste, and healthy to the body. Such is the outcome of spiritual formation. As Quevedo so aptly described, the formation of an ecclesial leader is one who is growing closer and closer to a person reflecting the leadership of Christ including mature, God-experiencing, God-submitting, catholicity on a loving mission to the poor in spirit through community, dialogue, peace, humility, and with a compassion to invite others to adoption into the family of God.²⁷

The Role

Even a cursory review of ecclesiology over the past 100 years shows the tectonic changes that have shifted ecclesial leadership responsibilities far beyond anything imagined by a vast majority of pastors in times past. IDAK Group listed the top ten typical contemporary ecclesial leadership responsibilities: (1) providing vision, (2) communicating God's word, (3) directing evangelism, (4) counseling, (5) studying and research, (6) overseeing ministry programs, (7) mentoring and developing leaders, (8) supervising volunteers and staff, (9) directing finances and budgets, and (10) performing other pastoral duties including visitation, baptism, weddings, funerals, and other community events.²⁸ Sometimes, it is easier to grasp the function of pastoral roles by using images to describe the vocation. Trulear described the ecclesial leader as an interpreter and organizer who through word and deed makes sense of followers' spiritual journeys.²⁹ He also used the image of the ecclesial leader as a parent who nurtures, mentors, and assists in the maturation of the rest of the church family.³⁰ Looking at the role of ecclesial leaders from the leader's perspective, Forward qualitatively collected over twenty different images from pastors who were asked for appropriate metaphors for their ecclesial roles.³¹ He was able to categorize these images into three primary groups: (1) dominant leadership roles, (2) submissive leadership roles, and (3) affiliative leadership roles.³² What Forward's research suggested is that there are situational cues as to the role that a leader is expected and needs to take in order to be effective.³³ McKenna et. al's identification of key events in ecclesial leadership development also tended to support the situational approach to leadership role.³⁴ As might be expected, perhaps the best images for the role that an ecclesial leader is to fulfill comes from Christ Himself. Willimon described the ecclesial leader's role as priest, pastor, interpreter of Scripture, preacher, servant, counselor, teacher, evangelist, and prophet.³⁵ Willimon noted how each of these images has their

27. Orlando B. Quevedo, "Notes on the Formation of Priests," *Philippine Canonical Forum* 9 (2007): 257.

28. IDAK Group, Inc., "Your Church's Leadership Needs," *Maximizing Team*, March 27, 2008.

29. Harold Dean Trulear, "Standing in the Gap: Pastoral Theology in the African-American Church," *Journal of Religious Thought* 57/58, no. 2/1-2 (2005): 32.

30. *Ibid.*, 29-32.

31. G. L. Forward, "Clergy Stress and Role Metaphors: An Exploratory Study," *Journal of Communication & Religion* 23, no. 2 (2000): 158-184.

32. *Ibid.*, 181.

33. *Ibid.*, 178.

34. McKenna et al., "Leadership Development," 182.

35. Willimon, "Why a Pastor."

initiation in Christ. Thus, it only makes sense that if the calling of the ecclesial leader comes from God and the individual is being formed into the image of Christ, then the role that the ecclesial leader must fulfill will have its roots in Christ as well. Seeing Christ's relationships with His disciples and other followers as the image of what pastors are called to accomplish provides a rich tapestry of images for the pastor to imitate.

Much of contemporary non-ecclesial leadership theory focuses on the question: What do we do to attain certain outcomes? On the other hand, one of the primary driving questions that Britton suggested must drive a theology of leadership is: Why do we do what we do to conform to Jesus?³⁶ This shift in question has significant effects on the images used to describe the role of the ecclesial leader. If one starts with the question of outcome attainment, then images of a CEO, coach, or visionary are likely to surface.³⁷ Though ecclesial leaders can learn lessons and skills for leadership from these images, they do not seem to connect with the same images that Scripture uses to describe leadership. However, if the framing question of ecclesial leadership seeks to pursue practices that conform us to the image of Christ, then very different images surface, such as shepherd, gardener, and learner.³⁸

Ultimately, the role of the ecclesial leader is to conform increasingly to the image of Christ. Though the ecclesial leader's contemporary role within the church necessarily has more logistical aspects, the leader must never allow these logistical concerns to smudge the developing image of Christ Himself in his or her life. Following the example of the apostles in the early church, an ecclesial leader must not leave the ministry that he or she has been called by God to fulfill for the sake of waiting on tables. Though there are, no doubt, organizational aspects to the church, it is something more—an organism that is living, growing, and maturing. Though organizational skills need to be present in order to lead the organizational aspects of the church effectively, one must never forget the far greater calling of assisting Christ in showing the beauty of His bride by ironing out the wrinkles and wiping away the blemishes. Any image(s) selected to represent the role of the ecclesial leader must have this organic responsibility in the forefront.

The Praxis

It is in the area of praxis that the philosophy of ecclesial leadership becomes most imprecise because each distinctive expression of a calling, formation, and role identification is going to be expressed uniquely by each ecclesial leader. Still, several general practices, expressed in a myriad of unique ways, tend to give form to the leader's practice. Since the leadership in question is specifically ecclesial leadership, worship must be a practice expressed in any ecclesial leadership role.³⁹ To be properly ecclesial leadership, rather than simply organizational leadership, the ecclesial leader

36. Joseph H. Britton, "Something to Say: Pastoral Leadership and the Word," *Anglican Theological Review* 91, no. 1 (2009): 93-105.

37. Forward, "Clergy Stress and Role Metaphors," 171-172.

38. *Ibid.*, 172-173.

39. Willimon, "Why a Pastor," 91-109.

must create a sacred environment focused upon the glorification of God.⁴⁰ Any other focus of the Church distracts it from its primary purpose—to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. Thus, the praxis of the ecclesial leader will be wholly concerned with extending the glorification and enjoyment of God both in the leader's life and in the life of those who follow the leader. This practice of whole-life worship is within the context of God's Word.⁴¹ To be sure, this contextualization of God's Word results in teaching but not as the first effect of God's Word on the leader. Instead, the leader must submit his or her own life to be molded by the power of God through His Word, allowing God to transform and recreate the individual in His own image.⁴² Such a transformation does not happen quickly and requires patient prayer on the part of the leader.⁴³ However, as the leader submits their own life to God's Word and approaches Him in faith through prayer, they will see not only their own lives transformed but also the lives of the people that they lead. This will provide the leader with opportunities to be used by God to further mature and nurture the spiritual lives of others who grow as disciples of Christ.⁴⁴ Thus, the ecclesial leader, regardless of calling, formation, or role, will have the characteristics of whole-life worship, a Scripture-transformed life, prayer-expectant faith, and disciple-making transformation. Obviously, how a senior pastor, parish priest, church elder, or diocese bishop work these characteristics out in their life is going to be as unique as the individual and the ministry context. However, such praxis will accomplish both the Great Commandment and the Great Commission and in doing so reflect Jesus in His own fulfillment of these commands and promises.

II. CONCLUSION

As can be seen, following the paradigm recommended in this work will require a far longer term outlook on ecclesial leadership development. This does not suggest that leaders must be older—Paul seemed quite content on putting younger people who exhibited conformity to the image of Christ into important ecclesial leadership positions (1 Tim 4:12). However, it does suggest that simply obtaining a degree or having certain prerequisite experiences is insufficient in determining the suitability and effectiveness of an ecclesial leader. To follow the paradigm suggested is to follow a life-long learning experience. The four seasons identified in this work are not intended to be a one-time experience or event, but rather a series of events that the ecclesial leader will continually come around to as God sows, cultivates, harvests, and allows the leader's life to lie fallow. As God calls an ecclesial leader to a particular expression of vocation, He will prepare that leader through spiritual formation. As God forms the leader spiritually, the purpose, strengths, and weaknesses of the leader's role will begin to be defined, which in turn will define the praxis of the leader. However, as time goes on and the good works that God has prepared ahead of time for the leader (Eph 2:10) come to

40. Ibid., 91.

41. Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis and Roth, 1986), 115-117; Willimon, "Why a Pastor," 93.

42. Willimon, "Why a Pastor," 91.

43. Strauch, 120.

44. Strauch, 107.

a conclusion, it can be expected that a new calling will be extended by God and thus a new “year” of seasons will begin. Peter provides an exemplar of this seasonal aspect of ecclesial leadership. At the beginning of Peter’s experience with Jesus, he is called by Jesus to be a fisher of people (Mt 4:19). Peter’s spiritual formation culminates in his willingness to follow Jesus, even when walking on water (Mt 14:28), immediately followed by his declaration of Jesus as the Messiah (Mt 16:16). This declaration of Jesus as Messiah by Peter cements his role within the future of the Church (v. 17-20). Peter would attempt to practice this role to the best of his ability at that time (Mt 17:4, 26:33). Though Peter fails in completely practicing the role that Jesus had called him and formed him for, this should not be seen as a total loss. It is specifically in the context of these failures, that Jesus can usher in the next calling in Peter’s life (Jn 21:15-19) as a shepherd of His sheep.

Several areas of further study will assist in building on the foundation of this paradigm. The most obvious question is whether the four seasons identified are the only seasons that an ecclesial leader goes through. Although four seasons nicely fit into our common concept of seasons, there is no specific reason to believe that there need only be four seasons. Nor is it even necessary that the ones identified are the most descriptive of the seasons that an ecclesial leader goes through. Additional research into the seasons of an ecclesial leader will assist in clearing up this ambiguity. In addition, research determining the means of assisting the ecclesial leader to understand their current season would be helpful. In the meteorological context, it is possible to know technically which particular season one is in based on solstices or informally by weather conditions. In the same way, there are probably both formal and informal means of identifying the seasons of a leader. Identifying such seasons can assist the leader to know what is ahead, prepare for the anticipated difficulties in the next season, and rejoice in the blessings associated with the upcoming season. Finally, an outcome of this work is the drawing together of the research by Hagberg and Guelich, McKenna et al., and Stewart. Finding a means of combining their research into a multi-dimensional assessment would be of incalculable worth not only in ecclesial leadership but also more generally in the spiritual formation of all followers of Christ.

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