ANTECEDENTS OF CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP:
A SOCIO-RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF 1 TIMOTHY 3:1-7

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Whereas spiritual leadership has been closely associated with transformational leadership, some have questioned the morality of both. But are moral virtues legitimate antecedents of successful leadership? This question is addressed through a socio-rhetorical analysis of 1 Timothy 3:1-7 by identifying the antecedents of Christian leadership as required of the overseer, the highest level of leadership in the first-century church. These are compared with various leadership theories—transformational, authentic, legacy, and spiritual leadership—found in extant literature. Christian leadership is identified with a commitment to self-control and mastery of passions; and a proven track record both at home and in the public arena. According to Paul, these are antecedents—irreducible minimums—for successful Christian leadership.

Benefiel observes that a growing chorus of scholarly voices is arguing that spirituality is necessary in organizations—for ethical behavior, for job satisfaction and employee commitment, and for productivity and competitive advantage.[1] She reasons that increasingly this point is being demonstrated and empirical studies designed to test this hypothesis further are continually being conceived and implemented. Interestingly though, Garcia-Zamor observes that in the first four months of his presidency, few of George W. Bush's proposals generated as much controversy as his decision to establish the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives.[2] Critics complained that

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[1] Margaret Benefiel, "The Second Half of the Journey: Spiritual Leadership for Organizational Transformation," *The Leadership Quarterly* 6 (2005): 723-747.

[2] Jean Claude Garcia-Zamor, "Workplace Spirituality and Organizational Performance," *Public Administration Review* 63, no.3 (May–June 2003): 355-363.

the move blurred—if not completely erased—the line between church and state and injected religion into areas where it should remain distinct. Garcia-Zamor argues that such criticisms ignore the fact that spiritual and religious beliefs are not easily compartmentalized; they shape attitudes toward and actions in all aspects and spheres of daily life.[3] She points out that there has been ample empirical evidence that spirituality in the workplace creates a new organizational culture in which employees feel happier and perform better, since bringing together the motivation for work and the meaning in work increase retention. She thus gives several examples of companies that have increased their organizational performance after deliberately adopting workplace spirituality. Mitroff and Denton similarly report that companies as diverse as Taco Bell, Pizza Hut, Bio Genenex, Aetna International, Big Six accounting's Deloitte and Touche, and law firms such as New York's Kaye, Scholer, Fierman, Hays, & Haroller are extolling lessons usually associated with churches, temples, and mosques.[4]

I. THE PROBLEM

In spite of the strong arguments for workplace spirituality and spiritual leadership, scientific models that situate spiritual leadership within a Judeo-Christian paradigm are few. In fact, many have decried the scarcity of work in this area, which links Biblically-based leadership ideas with the social scientific approach to leadership, despite the growing interest in spiritual and Biblically-based approaches to leadership.[5] Of particular concern is that, whereas spiritual leadership has been closely associated with transformational leadership, some have questioned the morality of both, "particularly by libertarians, grass roots theorists, and organizational development consultants."[6] Walker gives the example of leaders in international politics who make the argument that morality need not be based in absolutist terms but informed by prudence, flexibility, and a common good defined by the fulfillment of interests over the long term. [7] In this perspective, the only universalities are the facts that interests exist, on a state or even individual basis, and are best fulfilled with the broadest view of the common good possible. In fact, Bass and Steidlmeier observe that for many moral analysts, leadership is a many-headed hydra that alternately shows the faces of Saddam Hussein and Pol Pot as well as those of Nelson Mandela and Mother Theresa.[8] The stories that recount the accomplishments of such leaders raise moral questions concerning both the character of the leaders as well as the legitimacy of their programs. But according to Walker, realists believe that human nature is selfish and that people will behave

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[3] Ibid.

[4] Ian I. Mitroff and Elizabeth A. Denton, *A Spiritual Audit of Corporate America: A Hard Look at Spirituality, Religion, and Values in the Workplace* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1999).

[5] J. Lee Whittington, Tricia M. Pitts, Woody V. Kageler, and Vicki L. Goodwin, "Legacy Leadership: The Leadership Wisdom of the Apostle Paul," *The Leadership Quarterly 16*, no.5 (October 2005):749-770.

[6] Bernard M. Bass and Paul Steidlmeier, "Ethics, Character, and Authentic Transformational Leadership Behavior," *The Leadership Quarterly 10*, no. 2 (1999): 181-217.

[7] Mark Clarence Walker, "Morality, Self-Interest, and Leaders in International Affairs," *The Leadership Quarterly 17* (2006): 138-145.

[8] Bass and Steidlmeier, "Ethics, Character, and Authentic Transformational Leadership Behavior."

according to the rational pursuit of self-interest over the short-term. This raises the question: Are moral virtues legitimate antecedents of successful leadership?

This paper seeks to answer this question through a socio-rhetorical analysis of 1 Timothy 3:1-7 by identifying the antecedents of Christian leadership as required of the overseer, the highest level of leadership in the first-century church.

II. MORALITY AND LEADERSHIP

The connection between morality and leadership has been best presented by Burns who established genuine leadership as a morally charged conception that systematically refuses to include, for example, Hitler and other despots on its list of leaders.[9] According to Burns, transformational leadership occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality.[10] Thus, transformational leadership, though also goal-oriented, establishes the preeminent role of morality at its core. It is a process through which leaders and followers help each other acquire higher levels of morality. Walker reasons that further refinement of this concept makes it clear that it is not only the ends of the process that must be moral but also the means.[11] In Walker's view, this is a crucial distinction from the type of leadership that someone like Machiavelli, for example, writes about. Machiavelli would argue that true virtue is accomplishing one's goals or ends on behalf of one's constituents no matter the means. [12] In fact, according to Mansfield, Machiavelli did not believe that leaders could actually be that good and that goodness and virtue could only be defined and established in a social, political context.[13] Thus for Machiavelli, virtue ethics focuses upon what makes a good person as opposed to a good action. The implication of this argument is that morality and leadership are distinct constructs that do not have to exist concurrently in the person of a leader.

However, though no direct links between leadership and morality are reported, Palanski and Yammarino report that some empirical research has linked aspects of morality and integrity to leadership.[14] For example, Peterson noted that a leader's integrity (defined as the absence of unethical behavior) has a positive effect on the moral intentions of his or her followers.[15] In qualitative research about employees' psychological expectations about their managers, Baccili found that integrity was often cited as a key expectation. She determined that employees expect integrity from their

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[9] James M. Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978).

[10] James M. Burns, "Transactional and Transforming Leadership," in *The Leader's Companion: Insights in Leadership Through the Ages,* ed. T. J. Wren (New York: Free Press, 1995).

[11] Walker, "Morality, Self-Interest, and Leaders."

[12] Ibid.

[13] H. C. Mansfield, *Machiavelli's Virtue* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

[14] Michael E. Palanski and Francis J. Yammarino, "Integrity and Leadership: Clearing the Conceptual Confusion," *European Management Journal* 25, no. 3 (June 2007): 171-184.

[15] D. Peterson, "Perceived Leader Integrity and Ethical Intentions of Subordinates," *Leadership & Organization Development Journal 25* (2004): 7-23.

immediate supervisors, even if the overall organization is not perceived as encouraging integrity.[16]

At a different level, Avolio, Luthans, and Walumbwa in their definition of authentic leaders, reckon them to be "those who are deeply aware of how they think and behave and are perceived by others as being aware of their own and others' values/moral perspectives, knowledge, and strengths; aware of the context in which they operate; and who are confident, hopeful, optimistic, resilient, and of high moral character."[17] Thus, according to them, authentic leadership carries with it that component of high moral character. Moreover, authentic leaders demonstrate the moral consciousness of how they think and behave and are perceived by others. Similarly, Fairholm claims that "the leader's task is to integrate behavior with values,"[18] and Heifetz encourages "adaptive work . . . to diminish the gap between the values people stand for and the reality they face."[19]

Fry has provided a useful guide for the development of theories of spiritual leadership.[20] According to him, "Spiritual leadership comprises the values, attitudes, and behaviors that are necessary to intrinsically motivate one's self and others so that they have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership."[21] Whittington, Pitts, Kageler, and Goodwin venture into this arena and identify ten leadership qualities of the Apostle Paul based on Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, from which they develop the concept of legacy leadership.[22] They present a causal model of spiritual leadership, arguing that the legacy of the leader's influence is perpetuated through the followers' incorporation of legacy principles into their lives as they become leaders. They argue that in 1 Thessalonians Paul sets an example in the morality of his leadership and refutes false accusations that are meant to undermine his integrity. Paul states that his message could not have come from error because God entrusted him with the Gospel message. He was not impure because he had been selected, tested, and approved by God, and he was not a trickster because he sought to please God, not men. Paul is claiming that the purity of his motive is not a superficial effort at impression management because he points out that God examines the heart, not merely external appearances. It is in the same breath that he writes to Timothy instructing the young leader on how to identify leaders and who qualifies for leadership.

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[16] P. A. Baccili, "Organization and Manager Obligations in a Framework of Psychological Contract Development and Violation" (dissertation, Claremont Graduate University, 2001).

[17] Bruce J. Avolio, William L. Gardner, Fred O. Walumbwa, Fred Luthans, and Douglas R. May, "Unlocking the Mask: A Look at the Process by Which Authentic Leaders Impact Follower Attitudes and Behaviors," *The Leadership Quarterly 15* (2004): 801-823.

[18] Gilbert W. Fairholm, *Perspectives on Leadership: From the Science of Management to Its Spiritual Heart* (Westport, CT: Quorum Books, 1998), 57.

[19] R. A.

[20] Louis W. Fry, "Toward a Theory of Spiritual Leadership," *The Leadership Quarterly 14* (2003): 693-727.

[21] Ibid., 711.

[22] J. Lee Whittington, Tricia M. Pitts, Woody V. Kageler, and Vicki L. Goodwin, "Legacy Leadership: The Leadership Wisdom of the Apostle Paul," *The Leadership Quarterly 16*, no. 5 (October 2005):749-770.

III.   FIRST LETTER TO TIMOTHY

Together with Titus, the letters to Timothy are collectively referred to as Paul's Pastoral Epistles because they are written to individuals entrusted with the oversight of specific congregations, and they directly concern the role and responsibilities of the pastor.[23] Whereas the authorship of these letters has been a subject of discussion and debate, this paper proceeds from the position of Pauline authorship, which is well accepted by many.[24] It is generally believed that Paul encountered Timothy after the young man had already come to faith in Christ[25] and, Paul took him along as an assistant in the ministry. Whereas Timothy is seen with Paul in various sections of Paul's missionary journeys, he is last seen with Paul after Paul's return to encourage the churches in Macedonia and Greece, and finally staying with Paul in Troas (Acts 20:1-6).

First Timothy presupposes that Timothy was in Ephesus when the apostle wrote his first letter to him having been left there by the apostle for the purpose of charging some teachers in that church not to teach differently from the apostles (1 Tim 1:3). DeSilva identifies several reasons for which Timothy may have been sent to Ephesus including: (1) to address issues of doctrine and false teachers, (2) establish local leadership through proper Biblical guidelines, (3) attend to social issues such as the community support of widows, and (4) serve as a model leader for the Christians in Ephesus.[26] Thus, Paul's advice to Timothy is to comport himself such as to demonstrate that "Christianity is far from socially subversive."[27]

IV. SOCIO-RHETORICAL CRITICISM

Robbins defines *socio-rhetorical criticism* as an interpretive analytical approach to understanding Scripture that integrates strategies and techniques used among various literary, social, cultural, and ideological interpreters in an integrated, rhetorical system of analysis and interpretation.[28] The method involves observing:

- *Inner texture*: What are the repetitions, patterns, structures, devices used?
- *Intertexture*: How does the tapestry interact with the world outside?
- *Social and cultural texture*: How does the text support social change?
- *Ideological texture*: How does the text position itself in relation to others?
- *Sacred texture*: How are God's nature, character, and providence portrayed?

Whereas all these branches of socio-rhetorical criticism would provide for an in-depth study of the subject and text at hand, because of its comparative objective, this

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[23] David A. deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods, and Ministry Formation* (Downers Grove: Inter Varsity Press, 2004).

[24] Ibid.

[25] Acts 16:1-2; deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament;* Craig S. Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 1993).

[26] deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament.*

[27] Ibid., 734.

[28] Vernon K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society, and Ideology* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

study is limited to intertexture, which concerns the relation of data in the text to various kinds of phenomena outside the text. According to Robbins, intertexture covers a spectrum that includes: (1) oral–scribal intertexture, (2) historical intertexture, (3) social intertexture, and (4) cultural intertexture.[29] The analysis of oral–scribal intertexture includes recitation, recontextualization, and reconfiguration of other texts, both oral and scribal, in the foreground of the text. Historical intertexture is concerned with the analysis of a particular *event* or a particular *period* of time as past experiences. On the other hand, social intertexture is a phenomenon that concerns a social manifestation in which the text points toward a particular social activity that occurred regularly amid a people. Cultural intertexture concerns symbolic words that particular communities of discourse nurture with special nuances and emphases. In socio-rhetorical criticism it includes: *reference*—the occurrence of a word, phrase, or clause that refers to a personage or tradition known to people or culture; and *echo*—when a word or phrase evokes, or potentially evokes, a cultural tradition.

V. INTERTEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF 1 TIMOTHY 3:1-7

The Desire to Lead—1 Timothy 3:1

The chapter opens with a saying which Paul considers trustworthy,[30] faithful,[31] true,[32] true and irrefutable,[33] or sure,[34] thus: "The saying is sure: If any one aspires to the office of bishop, he desires a noble task."[35]

Some reckon this to have been a common saying, especially among the Greeks.[36] Certain officials in the Greek world, in both cities and associations, were naturally called *overseers* (*episkopes*). The Dead Sea Scrolls likewise use the Hebrew equivalent of the term for an office of leadership at Qumran. Hence, the term overseer denoted a privileged office and therefore many developed the earnest, eager, passionate desire to become overseers of the land. Indeed, according to Keener, many moralists urged any worthy men to become statesmen. And so, it would appear, it became a saying, "If any one aspires to the office of bishop, he desires a noble task." It is well conceivable that such offices came with desirable emoluments and hence the intense aspiration of many for positions. But, with a careful use of cultural intertexture, Paul borrows this saying and points the believers to the nobility of taking on leadership responsibility within the Church. His message is that: just as it is great to desire to be a state overseer, so it is noble to aspire to be a statesman in God's new kingdom—the Church.

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[29] Ibid.
[30] NIV, NASU, ESV.
[31] NKJV.
[32] KJV.
[33] AMP.
[34] RSV.
[35] 1 Tim 3:1 (RSV).
[36] Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary*.

Clarke finds it strange that the episcopacy, in those times, should have been an object of intense desire to any man when it was a place of danger, and exposure to severe labor, want, persecution, and death, without any secular emolument whatsoever.[37] And yet it should not be strange at all, for this was Paul's perspective of Christian leadership (e.g., 2 Cor 6:4-10). Jesus similarly spoke of Himself as the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep and contrasts it with the hireling who flees in the face of danger because he is a hireling and cares nothing for the sheep (Jn 10:11-13). It can be argued that both Jesus and Paul conceive of the desire to Christian leadership as being noble, not because of the trappings that come with positions of leadership, but due to the selfless and sacrificial calling to serve others. In that sense then, if any one aspires to the office of bishop, he indeed desires a noble task.

The Discipline of Leadership—1 Timothy 3:2-3

While the office of overseer was open to all, certain qualities were to be the hallmark of true Christian leadership. Keener argues that these qualifications needed to be observed, especially in view of the heresy in Ephesus.[38] It is noteworthy that between verse 2 and verse 7, the word *must* is repeated four times, and is found at the opening of each verse, except for verse 3. The first imperative requires the bishop to be above reproach: "Now a bishop must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, sensible, dignified, hospitable, an apt teacher, no drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and no lover of money."[39]

This appears to be a list of character qualities that point to self-discipline. Clarke points out that the word, *anepileepton*, translated as *above reproach* is used for a person against whom no evil can be proved; one who is everywhere invulnerable.[40] Clarke posits the word is a metaphor, taken from the case of an expert and skillful warrior, who so defends every part of his body that it is impossible for his antagonist to give one hit. Likewise, the Christian bishop is one that has so disciplined himself in the manner of his life as to be irreprehensible. Thus, the leader must refuse to follow the path of polygamy, which was a common practice in Palestine,[41] but be disciplined enough to be a husband of only one wife. He must equally take charge of his emotions and appetites, and be willing to take in trustworthy travelers as guests, a practice that was a universal virtue at the time. Thus, the overseers are to be masters of themselves, showing self-control and mastery of passions; and have restraint where money, wine, or violent temper is concerned.[42]

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[37] Adams Clarke, *Adam Clarke's Commentary* (PC Study Bible, Version 5.0, Biblesoft, Inc., 2006).
[38] Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary.*
[39] 1 Tim 3:2-3 (RSV).
[40] Clarke, *Adam Clarke's Commentary.*
[41] Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary.*
[42] deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament.*

The Demonstration of Leadership—1 Timothy 3:4-7

The next list of imperatives in verses 4-7 seems to point to the need for one aspiring to the office of a bishop to have demonstrable leadership abilities:

> He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way; for if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how can he care for God's church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil; moreover he must be well thought of by outsiders, or he may fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.[43]

The Christian bishop must demonstrate successful leadership in his home (vv.4-5), spiritual maturity in his faith (v. 6), and independent external approval in the society (v. 7). Using argumentative texture, Paul places each of these requirements against terrible outcomes that would otherwise bedevil the leader in their absence. Without a demonstrated successful leadership at home, a leader cannot successfully care for God's Church; without spiritual maturity, the leader could be puffed up; and without a good reputation in society, the leader may fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. Hence, deSilva points out that the Christian leader, as given in this text and the rest of the Pastoral Epistles, must take seriously the need for personal integrity and to make his or her life congruent with all of discipleship.[44]

VI. CONCLUSION

It is clear from Paul's instructions to Timothy that Christian leadership, though a desirable occupation, must be seen as a selfless and sacrificial calling to serve others. Furthermore, it demands of the leader to be disciplined in character, maintaining high moral standards. This leadership is identified with a commitment to self-control and mastery of passions; and practicing restraint where money, wine, or violent temper is concerned. The Christian leader must also be of proven track record both at home and in public arena. According to Paul, these are antecedents—irreducible minimums—for successful Christian leadership. Of course there is need for testing of these assertions to determine their empirical veracity, lest we fall into the abyss of the realists who believe that human nature is selfish and that people will behave according to the rational pursuit of self-interest over the short-term.[45]

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[43] 1 Tim 3:4-7 (RSV).
[44] deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament*.
[45] Walker, "Morality, Self-Interest, and Leaders."

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