Until recently, the fields of leadership and theology did not attempt to seek to inform one another. The *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* (JBPL) has been a primary venue for an initial movement toward an increased dialogue between Biblical studies and leadership studies. This literature review examines the various approaches to research found in *JBPL* that have attempted to synthesize these fields to create new constructs and perspectives on leadership that are inherently Biblical in nature. Sections include: (1) scriptural treatment of established leadership theory, (2) Biblical perspectives on leadership praxis, (3) Biblical approaches to leadership assessment, (4) Biblical approaches to ecclesial leadership, (5) contemporary leadership applications to Biblical texts, (6) Christological approaches to leadership studies, and (7) proposed directions and trends for future research.

The *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* (JBPL) has been a pioneer in the area of research for organizational leadership within the ecclesial context, as well as for leaders in other realms of society who desire to approach leadership with a Biblical, Christocentric worldview. This literature review examines the progress that the journal has made in researching specific areas, and proposes future methodological steps and foci of research and strategies for coming issues. The sections of the review include: (1) attempts to allow scripture to inform established general leadership theory, (2) Biblical perspectives on leadership praxis, (3) Biblical approaches to organizational leadership assessment, (4) Biblical approaches to ecclesial leadership, (5) contemporary organizational leadership application to Biblical texts, (6) Christological approaches to leadership studies, and (7) proposed future research.
I. ATTEMPTS TO ALLOW SCRIPTURE TO INFORM ESTABLISHED/GENERAL LEADERSHIP THEORY

Perhaps the most widely used approach to gaining insight in Biblical perspectives on leadership is the examination of established leadership theories in the light of scripture and other sacred texts. JBPL therefore has published an abundant representation of articles that utilized this research style. Gangel suggested that excellence begins with understanding and applying theory, not simply performing a set of prescribed behaviors.¹ Some theories more naturally translate into theological dialogue than others, which stretch the boundaries of the integrative discussion. Gary responded to the question whether or not the historical Jesus would embrace the contemporary paradigm of industrial growth, by exploring numerous leadership typologies used to study Christ.² Utilizing Daft’s four-cell evolutionary theory of the field of leadership, Gary presented leadership scholars with an open systems, post-industrial research agenda, to enable leadership researchers to have some semblance of first-century contextual framework as they consider or propose the actions or intentions of Jesus.

Longbotham and Gutierrez looked at the leadership that Paul and Timothy exercised within the Ephesian church and related it to Proposition 21 of Hambrick and Mason’s upper echelons theory, which states, “In turbulent environments, team heterogeneity will be positively associated with profitability.”³ The study attempted to demonstrate the validity of the proposition by comparing the descriptions of Paul and Timothy’s leadership team found in the texts of Acts, Ephesians, and 1 and 2 Timothy. Based upon this conceptual framework, Longotham and Gutierrez converted their findings into the context of contemporary ministry.

Grundhoefer examined how dysfunctional leadership fails to contribute to supportive learning organizations.⁴ For example, narcissistic leaders stagnate the learning environment by despising autonomous learning, collaboration, shared communication, collective values, empowerment, and creativity. Where these variables are absent, according to Grundhoefer, the learning organization cannot be sustainable.

Servant leadership theory has been a recurring theme. Gyertson applied Greenleaf’s basic servant leadership principles to his own personal journey as a leader.⁵ In so doing, Gyertson found that a commitment to take one’s walk with Christ seriously and examination of Philippians 2: 1-11 compelled one to integrate the practice of servant leadership into a personal lifestyle. Niewold, however, argued that Greenleaf’s construct of servant leadership is an amalgamation of both secular and religious concepts, and even in its “Christianized” form, it presents a distorted

Christology. In an attempt to address these areas of lack, Niewold developed a new leadership model that restores neglected leadership components introducing the concept of *martyria*, proposing that this model truly encompasses all the necessary aspects of Biblical servant leadership. Martyrological (witness-based) leadership includes servanthood but encompasses a more holistic approach that is more critically adaptable. This approach to Biblical perspectives on leadership has the benefit of broad generalizability and has enabled a wide audience to begin to recognize the contribution that sacred texts can make in the field of leadership, but it limits scripture to constructs that were developed outside of the sacred corpus. Thus, additional approaches are needed to expand the opportunities for scripture to inform leadership in ways not so theoretically predetermined.

II. BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES ON LEADERSHIP PRAXIS

*JBPL* also accommodated the research of leadership praxis in the light of scripture. Similar to the previous approach, this approach attempts to allow Biblical principles to inform strategic and praxis-based constructs. For example, Palmer presented praxes for credible leaders. The list, largely phenomenologically based, included: (1) building of trust, (2) modeling their expectations of others, (3) empowering others, (4) celebrating the accomplishments of others, (5) exploring the right questions, (6) articulating and inspiring future vision, and (7) practicing a Sabbath lifestyle. The list was not meant to be exhaustive, but instead a faithful list that has demonstrated itself to be sustainable over many years in the author’s own life.

Buford provided specific strategy regarding leader–follower communication in times of conflict through the analysis of the prophet Nathan’s life, as recorded in 2 Samuel. Buford contextually examined five pivotal moments described within the text. Based on the findings, Buford developed a contemporary methodology for reverently but truthfully speaking to power.

Vondey’s approach to leadership praxis was based on the need for creativity and imagination in both leaders and members of the organization. Vondey explored a Biblical–theological aesthetic of creativity and imagination, demonstrating that God has gifted human beings with the capacity to evoke values of beauty, goodness, and truth. Using the parables of Jesus as an example of aesthetic communication of vision, Vondey demonstrated how aesthetic leaders can foster these values through the use of vivid narratives that conjure both emotive and cognitive stimulation. In a similar fashion, Tangen demonstrated how Biblical perspectives can inform the practice of life coaching. After loosely defining the coaching practice, Tangen provided theologically-
based questions that are critical for the integration of evangelical theology, Pentecostal spirituality, and contemporary coaching praxis. Biblical perspectives illuminate the development and analysis of the coaching construct.

Tucker conducted a socio-rhetorical analysis of Christian leadership and prudence within the global organization, based upon Philippians 1:1-17.11 After drawing a literary connection between Christian leadership and prudence, Tucker proposed a qualitative case study to inform the issue of prudence in Christian leadership within the local church. The paper explored prudence and Christian leadership specifically in times of crisis and proposed future quantitative research based on the data from the findings of the qualitative study. In a related study, Hartsfield attempted to ascertain how leaders deal with the question of right and wrong in everyday decisions, challenging the statement: “Leaders are people who do the right thing; managers are people who do things right.”12 The statement implies a high ethical standard embedded within all leaders, but Hartsfield challenged the idea of a universal, natural high standard for right, who is qualified to determine what is right, and the higher standard for “right,” based on Matthew 15. As these articles show, this research approach demonstrates the practical nature of Biblical wisdom as it relates to leadership. Still, due to its highly phenomenological leanings, researchers who utilize this approach must be cautioned not to assume the same broad generalizability in their results as the first approach may enjoy.

III. BIBLICAL APPROACHES TO ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP ASSESSMENT

The Bible is also increasingly being viewed by researchers as a potential tool for diagnosing health and dysfunction in groups, leaders, and followers. Thus, leadership assessment from a Biblical perspective is attempted in several JBPL articles. Green and others analyzed the Apostle Paul’s leadership style and Corinth’s cultural dimensions based on the leadership and culture dimensions of the Project GLOBE study.13 Referring to the GLOBE study’s findings of which leadership forms are most fitting based on cultural preferences, Green and others matched 30 out of 36 pairs of leader–culture agreement between Paul and the Corinthians.

Middleton examined Paul’s epistle to the Ephesians in order to explore Paul’s use of the basic tenets found in Hersey and Blanchard’s situational leadership principles to assess his audience. Middleton proposed that Paul adjusted his leadership based his assessment of the needs and capacity of his audience.14 Once Paul had determined what values he needed to instill in the Ephesians, he adapted his communication and leadership styles to mesh with the characteristics of the congregation he was

influencing. Middleton used this example to encourage leaders in both sacred and secular context to follow Paul’s approach to audience assessment and adjust accordingly if they want to be optimally effective. Winston also used the seven motivational gifts of Romans 12 (perceiving, service, instructing, encouraging, generosity, ruling/administration, and mercy) to form a profile baseline for assessing person–job fit for all organizational situations.  

While not exhaustive, these articles provide a solid representation of how scripture can be used to develop measures that can assist researchers and practitioners in diagnosing or assessing the nature, dynamics, and traits of leaders, followers, and groups.  

IV. BIBLICAL APPROACHES TO ECCLESIAL LEADERSHIP  

In addition to examining general Christian leadership principles, some articles specifically target leadership theory and research within the ecclesial context. Niewold postulated the importance of set theory within the realm of ecclesial leadership. The study attempted to introduce the utilization of set theory as a way to understand churches, to frame the Ephesians 4:11 five-fold leadership model within the set theory model, contextualize a definition of Biblical leadership in the centered-set theory, and articulate how a martyriological concept of leadership can aid in deciphering Biblical leadership, pseudo-Biblical ideas, and secular ideas.  

Bayes conducted a socio-rhetorical analysis of Ephesians 4:11 to determine which gifts in Paul’s list refer to ministry offices or functions. Textual analysis found some support for prophet and teacher as office ministries, but Bayes found little support for apostle, evangelist, or pastor as office gifts. Still, textual evidence suggested that the five gifts mentioned in the pericope were functions of specific individuals in the New Testament as well as throughout the first century of the church. Cenac conducted a similar study and produced nearly identical conclusions.  

Oney reviewed Williams’s *The Potter’s Rib* in an effort to examine whether or not ancient mentoring models may provide hope for developing contemporary clergy as well. The article concurred with Williams’s assertion that the Biblical dyadic mentoring dynamics as seen with Paul and Timothy and Titus demonstrate a focus on developing the clergy, whereas this emphasis has been largely lost in the contemporary ecclesial setting. Oney promotes Williams’s contention that experiential ministry is able to develop ministers internally as well as practically through shared reflection with

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mentors, and proposes the need for such mentoring relationships to be pursued today for the purpose of developing clergy.

Story examined how Luke guided his community in conflict resolution in a way that facilitated the gospel’s expansion, as seen in Acts 15:1-16.5.20 This narrative depicting pivotal moment in the church regarding the relationship between Jewish and Gentile Christians provides Luke’s audience with a case study to demonstrate how to find God’s will in the midst of upheaval and assists the early church to adopt this approach to conflict resolution in a landscape that was in constant flux. Contemporary applications to church conflict resolutions were drawn as well.

Huizing asserted that the contemporary model of spiritual development is incomplete.21 Rather than marking spiritual development merely by tracking a progressive series of experiences, Huizing suggests that a seasonal paradigm of spiritual development is more fitting. According to Huizing, ecclesial leaders experience various seasons of calling, formation, identification of roles, and practices. Instead of being linear, these seasons are repetitive and cyclical, yielding perennial growth at the end of each cycle. This particular arena is a burgeoning field of research within the broader scope of leadership studies, and the capacity for scripture to shape and define the scope of new constructs specifically designed for this context is virtually limitless.

V. CONTEMPORARY ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP APPLICATION TO BIBLICAL TEXTS

Many articles used Biblical narratives and characters themselves to inform contemporary principles in organizational leadership. Rogers explored the variables that facilitated Moses’s development as a leader by faith by conducting an inner-textural analysis of Hebrews 11:23-29, using a socio-rhetorical approach.22 After examining the process that Moses experienced as described in this pericope, Rogers compared findings with other passages within Hebrews, and pointed out the global leadership implications, especially relating to the relational components of how leaders develop, both as individuals and within the context of organizations. Findings were then compared with Winston and Patterson’s definition of servant leadership, and culminated in recommendations to assist leaders in understanding how they can still experience safety in the midst of uncertainty.

Faulhaber found a similar message when employing a socio-rhetorical textual analysis of 1 Peter: that tribulation and trials are divine instruments designed to shape the transformation of both individuals and groups.23 Faulhaber discovered that the process of transformation began with a believer’s gratitude for grace, and caused behaviors and attitudes that demonstrated cooperation, forgiveness, and harmony. All

of these variables are crucial for attaining moral excellence and the necessary relational dynamics for innovative organizations.

A number of articles look to Old Testament narratives for insight into leadership theories. Story examined Jotham’s fable and the politics surrounding Gideon and Abimelech, including their distinct variation in their views of the monarchy (Jgs 8:22-9:57). The fable’s imagery provides a stark contrast between the selfish, usurping bramble with the selfless service of the olive and fig trees and the vine and represents God’s people and their leaders. Akinyele examined the leadership of Esther. Using cultural intertextual analysis, Akinyele found that sufficient dynamics were present to place Esther within Patterson’s servant leadership model domain, and extends beyond it. Akinyele suggests further research to ascertain the ways Esther’s leadership characteristics could be used as a model based upon Bekker’s kenotic leadership construct, and applied to various socio-economic or multicultural contexts.

Sungerland reviewed Nathan Laufer’s book, *The Genesis of Leadership: What the Bible Teaches Us About Vision, Values, and Leading Change,* and agreed with Laufer’s argument that successful leadership is a discipline that is developed and an art that is learned, and contemporary leaders are able to learn from the steps and missteps of Biblical leaders who have gone before them.

Great potential still exists for research in this arena; Biblical principles are most vividly illustrated through the observed and recorded human interactions, and the sacred texts provide numerous profound demonstrations of this reality.

VI. CHRISTOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO LEADERSHIP STUDIES

If Christ is at the center of all scripture (Lk 24:27, 45-47), then Christological approaches to Biblical research present great potential for informing leadership studies. For example, Poon examined Christ as a leader by utilizing a socio-rhetorical inner textural analysis of John 21:1-25, specifically paying attention to Christ as a guide through change, as seen in his interaction with Peter. Poon then compared the insights gleaned through this exegesis with contemporary models of leadership and social theories, including the relational and cultural undercurrents present within leadership. McCabe used the socio-rhetorical inner-textual analysis of John 21 to examine Jesus as an agent of change, comparing the data compiled with two change models: Gestalt’s cycle of experience model and Lewin’s force field model. Findings support the idea that Christ as a change agent exhibited the characteristics that would

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now be described as components of both transformational and authentic leadership styles. Similarly, Massey identified three leadership characteristics that seem to be implied by Jesus based on Mark 8:22-10:52: selflessness, hospitality, and empowerment. Massey then compared these forms to contemporary leadership theory, concluding that Christ’s instruction in Mark regarding the realm of God leads to pastoral vision casting that is not unilateral in nature.

The Christological hymn found in Philippians 2:5-11 was used by Ayers to offer a theological examination of leadership by providing an exegetical, socio-rhetorical critical analysis of the pericope, converting the theological treatment into common language, and applying transformational leadership theory. Gray also used a cross-disciplinary approach to this text to integrate leadership theory and contemporary social definitions with the Pauline model for leadership to demonstrate that Paul’s leadership model still works for contemporary leaders. Hardgrove used socio-rhetorical criticism of the passage to propose a rubric for Christian leadership, which included components of humility, selflessness, and servanthood, and compared the implications of this construct for the first-century Philippian culture with contemporary implications.

Faulhaber sought to glean insight from Pilate’s ethical failure, while still recognizing that God used this failure to usher in mankind’s salvation. The paper examined Pilate’s decision in light of definitions of justice by Pilate’s contemporaries, the social–cultural context, Pilate’s own weaknesses and vices, the role of religion and his own wife; God’s standard of justice seen in Christ’s condemnation and death; and questions for contemporary leaders to determine if they reflect Christ’s character or the characteristics of worldly leaders.

These articles introduce the Christological research approach into the discussion of leadership studies and demonstrate the potential for Christological research to inform a myriad of issues in the field.

VII. PROPOSED DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While work has been done to address (1) attempts to allow scripture to inform established general leadership theory, (2) Biblical perspectives on leadership praxis, (3) Biblical approaches to organizational leadership assessment, (4) Biblical approaches to ecclesial leadership, (5) contemporary organizational leadership application to Biblical texts, and (6) Christological approaches to leadership studies, a still under-examined area of leadership perspectives is the arena of religious leadership. Thus, Bekker set out to begin to develop a theoretical model of religious leadership, specifically focusing upon Christian leadership, examining the primary trends and developments in

researchers’ attempts to define and measure Christian leadership using both descriptive and theoretical approaches developed over the last three decades. This brings up a very critical point: the majority of the works produced even in the JBPL seem to trend toward applying leadership constructs that have been developed outside the ecclesial context. The greatest room for research appears to be in the area of developing new conceptual frameworks and theories designed for ecclesial leadership, based upon the ecclesial setting itself. This includes constructs that begin with hermeneutical research, as well as qualitative and quantitative studies of what is currently being encountered within the various streams of the church: internal issues of leaders and their families (psychological, spiritual, emotional), relational issues, leadership dynamics, implicit theology, contributors to church climate and culture, behavior, etc.

About the Author

MaryJo Burchard has been serving in leadership within the local church for more than 20 years. She earned her M.A. in Leadership and Organizational Studies from Fresno Pacific University, and is currently a Ph.D. candidate in organizational leadership with an emphasis in ecclesial leadership at Regent University. She and her husband, Kenny, planted the Oasis Church in Hanford, California, 11 years ago, where they continue to serve in pastoral ministry. MaryJo also teaches organizational leadership undergraduate coursework at Fresno Pacific University. Their son, Victor, is 11 years old. Email: marybu2@regent.edu