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Shared Leadership Theory in Acts 15:1-35

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According to an innertexture analysis of Acts 15:1-35 shared leadership was essential to the New Testament church. An exhaustive literature review provides an overview of shared leadership theory in the ecclesial environment and includes a discussion of why one should examine this theory from a biblical perspective. The research showed an underlying biblical foundation for shared leadership. Nevertheless, much of the current literature regarding shared leadership in the ecclesial setting does not employ qualitative research from a biblical perspective. Utilizing Robbins' (1996) innertexture analysis revealed several antecedents, outcomes, and biblical perspectives of shared leadership theory from Acts 15:1-35. The antecedents included in this discussion are team heterogeneity and a charismatic leader. Outcomes included better decision-making and higher team satisfaction. The application of biblical perspectives from the innertexture analysis occurred throughout the discussion regarding shared leadership theory.

Shared Leadership Theory in Acts 15:1-35

Shared leadership was essential to the New Testament church. The majority of churches today have a tradition orientation of hierarchical leadership, and therefore, pastors are overwhelmed and unable to meet the expectations of their congregations (Barna, 2013; Brown, 2014; Carlson & Lueken, 2011; Crosby, 2012; Daniels, 2014; Dorsett, 2010; Osborne, 2014). Pearce and Conger (2003) found shared leadership to be "an effective solution to a fundamental dilemma: no single individual possesses the capacity to effectively play all possible leadership roles within a group or organizational setting" (p. 288). More recent research confirmed that shared leadership is a practical leadership approach to the complexity facing leaders and organizations today (Serban & Roberts, 2016; Wu et al., 2020).

While an increasing number of studies exist regarding shared leadership in secular organizations (Serban & Roberts, 2016; Wu et al., 2020), very little research exists regarding the relationship between shared leadership theory and leadership in the ecclesial context. Of the nineteen articles and books dealing with shared leadership in the ecclesial context, only eight mentioned the theory of shared leadership or the work of Pearce and Conger (2003) as a basis for their conclusions (Batchelor, 2015; Bell, 2014; Brown, 2014; Daniels, 2014; Davis, 2015; Rivera, 2012; Veliquette, 2013; Youn, 2013). Daniels (2014) noted the need for church leaders to reflect on a theological understanding of shared leadership, and Youn (2013) argued for a model of leadership education for ecclesial organizations that desire to move into a shared leadership model.

The purpose of this study was to provide ecclesial leaders with a greater theological understanding and ministry practice of shared leadership. Utilizing Robbins' (1996) innertexture analysis of Acts 15:1-35 revealed how the Jerusalem Council effectively employed attributes of shared leadership theory to achieve a positive outcome for the church. This analysis revealed the important practice of shared leadership theory in the local church today.

Shared Leadership Theory

Shared leadership, according to Pearce and Conger's (2003) seminal work is, "a dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both" (p. 1). Shared leadership is less about formal structure and authority, and more about the influence and knowledge leaders bring to the group (Pearce & Conger, 2003). Fletcher and Kaufer (2003) recognized shared leadership as being dependent on a network of relationships, rather than on individual leaders. This "post-heroic" model centers around relationships, networks, and social interactions (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003, p. 21). More recent research has confirmed shared leadership as a practical leadership approach to the complexity facing organizations (Serban & Roberts, 2016; Wu et al., 2020).

Building from the work of Pearce and Conger (2003) regarding the antecedents and outcomes of shared leadership, both Serban and Roberts (2016) and Wu et al. (2020) provided research models for analyzing shared leadership. Both models recognized an internal team environment as an essential antecedent to shared leadership, and both models revealed team performance as a critical outcome of shared leadership (Serban & Roberts, 2016; Wu et al., 2020). Wu et al.'s (2020) research provided a deeper understanding of the antecedents to shared leadership by reviewing essential team characteristics, such as team heterogeneity, intragroup trust, and team interdependence. As has been noted, very little research exists regarding the relationship of shared leadership to the local church context.

The literature reviewed revealed deficiencies in research on shared leadership theory in the ecclesial context, and a limited number of works exist on the theological foundation for shared leadership. Shared leadership theory or the work of Pearce and Conger (2003) was only referenced by a few authors discussing the role of shared leadership in the local church (Batchelor, 2015; Bell, 2014; Brown, 2014; Daniels, 2014; Davis, 2015; Rivera, 2012; Veliquette, 2013; Youn, 2013). Some of the articles discussed a theological basis for shared leadership, using the Trinity as a basis for participative leadership (Bell, 2014; Cladis, 1999; Crosby, 2012; Davis, 2015; Dorsett, 2010; Hellerman, 2013; Horsthuis, 2011; Ruffner & Huizing, 2016).

Davis' (2015) purpose was to "give a theological basis for the practice of shared leadership" (p. 105). This purpose was repeated with others (Bell, 2014; Cladis, 1999; Crosby, 2012; Davis, 2015; Dorsett, 2010; Hellerman, 2013; Horsthuis, 2011; Ruffner & Huizing, 2016), as they studied the biblical precedent for collaborative leadership. Daniels (2014) investigated the role of theological reflection of shared leadership on clergy couples who work together. Horsthuis (2011) gives an extensive review of a perichoretic theology of leadership that finds its roots in the doctrine of the Trinity and argues that this doctrine "invites us to view leadership in participative terms" (p. 81). Several other authors engaged in exegetical research to show how the doctrine of the Trinity is the fundamental theological basis for shared leadership (Cladis, 1999; Crosby, 2012; Davis, 2015; Horsthuis, 2011; Ruffner & Huizing, 2016). Ruffner and Huizing (2016) not only used the doctrine of the Trinity to show shared leadership but also studied the leadership and writings of Peter to argue for a shared leadership approach.

Three categories of findings regarding shared leadership exist in the literature reviewed. Two of the findings are related to the seminal work of Pearce and Conger (2003), which include the antecedents to shared leadership and the outcomes of shared leadership. The third finding relates to the importance of examining shared leadership theory from a biblical perspective.

Antecedents to Shared Leadership

Pearce and Conger (2003) found that knowledge sharing was vital in the successful implementation of shared leadership. Six of the studies in this literature review connected knowledge and learning as a facilitating condition for shared

leadership (Batchelor, 2015; Cladis, 1999; Crosby, 2012; Daniels, 2014; Rivera, 2012; Youn, 2013). Batchelor (2015) found that sharing knowledge was positively related to the commitment of followers in a shared leadership organization. Daniels (2014) noted the need for church leaders to reflect on theological understanding as they approach shared leadership, and Youn (2013) argued for a model of leadership education and training for organizations that desire to move into a shared leadership model.

Pearce and Conger (2003) also found that “Greater dispersion of power and influence enhances the likelihood of shared leadership” (Pearce & Conger, 2003, p. 291). Keywords and phrases in the literature reviewed were “collaboration” (Barna, 2013; Cladis, 1999; Crosby, 2012; Davis, 2015; Hartwig et al., 2015), “inclusive” (Batchelor, 2015), “willingness to release power” (Carlson & Lueken, 2011), “empowering” (Cladis, 1999; Crosby, 2012; Grandy, 2013), “splitting responsibilities” (Carlson & Lueken, 2011), “shared responsibility” (Grandy, 2013), “delegated authority” (Rivera, 2012), “mutual submission” (Ruffner & Huizing, 2016), “participative cooperation” (Ruffner & Huizing, 2016), and “engagement” (Veliquette, 2013). These concepts supported the idea of shared power and influence in churches that desire to excel in shared leadership.

Other facilitating conditions presented by the literature revealed leaders who create a team culture designated to facilitate shared leadership (Barna, 2013; Brown, 2014; Cladis, 1999; Davis, 2015). Churches desiring to move toward shared leadership must remove barriers to shared leadership (Davis, 2015) and enable structures that facilitate shared leadership (Brown, 2014). The work of leaders in designing environments of support, encouragement, and accountability is instrumental in shared leadership creation (Barna, 2013). Visionary leadership and clear communication are also crucial in facilitating shared leadership (Brown, 2014; Cladis, 1999; Crosby, 2012; Davis, 2015; Hartwig et al., 2015; Hellerman, 2013).

The importance of a key leader is a critical aspect of facilitating shared leadership (Barna, 2013; Crosby, 2012; Grandy, 2013). Pearce and Conger (2003) reported that “the vertical leader’s actions are critical to the implementation process” of shared leadership (p. 294). Specifically, a key leader is involved in the essential tasks of leadership selection, creating culture, coaching, and developing others, empowering team members, and encouraging problem-solving and decision-making by a team (Pearce & Conger, 2003). Barna (2013) noted that their research revealed that every successful team had a leader who was a servant, provided guidance and was involved in the recruiting process. Crosby (2012) noted the importance of a leader who came alongside team members through facilitating and coaching and Grandy (2013) went so far as to say, “this leader is the driving force of this model of shared leadership” (p. 628).

Outcomes of Shared Leadership

Pearce and Conger (2003) found that shared leadership affected group behavior and performance. Team members were more apt to exert effort, make better decisions, and have a higher quality of problem-solving skills as a result of shared leadership

(Pearce & Conger, 2003). Also, they reported a stable connection between shared leadership and team member satisfaction, including a higher level of trust and creativity amongst the team (Pearce & Conger, 2003). These were also clear outcomes of the research reviewed in this article.

Shared leadership in churches resulted in greater trust amongst team members (Barna, 2013; Cladis, 1999; Crosby, 2012; Grandy, 2013; Hartwig et al., 2015; Horsthuis, 2011). It also resulted in a culture of honor lived out in teams (Crosby, 2012; Davis, 2015; Rivera, 2012). Mutual respect and deep friendship were also outcomes of shared leadership (Carlson & Lueken, 2011; Grandy, 2013).

Another key outcome of shared leadership revealed in the literature was better decision-making by teams (Batchelor, 2015; Carlson & Lueken, 2011; Grandy, 2013; Hartwig et al., 2015; Hellerman, 2013; Rivera, 2012; Veliquette, 2013). Not only were better decisions made, but the research highlighted and celebrated the collaborative and consensus-based model of decision-making (Carlson & Lueken, 2011; Grandy, 2013; Hartwig et al., 2015; Rivera, 2012). This outcome is consistent with the reporting of Pearce and Conger (2003) as well.

Biblical Perspectives of Shared Leadership

Several authors studied a Trinitarian model to build a case for shared leadership, including Cladis (1999), Crosby (2012), Davis (2015), Horsthuis (2011), and Ruffner and Huizing (2016). Horsthuis (2011) argued, “leadership as a participative movement of grace that originates within the triune God” (p. 83). Ruffner and Huizing’s (2016) analysis of 1 Peter 5 revealed Peter’s concept of leadership as trinitarian. Bell’s (2014) research was the broadest study done in looking at the creation narrative in Genesis through the founding of the early church as a theological basis for shared leadership. Hellerman (2013) employs socio-rhetorical criticism to the text of Philippians 2 in order to “craft a biblical theology of leadership and community that will equip us to address issues of power and authority in our churches today” (p. 15). These studies revealed the inherent connection and importance between biblical principles and shared leadership theory.

The research reviewed in this article showed an underlying biblical foundation for shared leadership, which should encourage church leaders to pursue the study of this theory to the future leadership work of the church. Nevertheless, much of the current literature regarding shared leadership in the ecclesial setting does not employ qualitative research from a biblical perspective on shared leadership. Opportunities to study biblical passages and existing churches that employ shared leadership methodology await the researcher to determine the attributions and outcomes of this biblically-based leadership theory. This paper adds to the literature by utilizing an innertexture analysis of Acts 15 as it relates to shared leadership in the ecclesial context, revealing that the Jerusalem Council effectively employed shared leadership theory attributes to achieve a positive outcome for the church. In doing so, this article

answers the question: Does Acts 15:1-35 legitimize the practice of shared leadership theory in the church today?

Innertexture Analysis of Acts 15:1-35

deSilva (2018) recognized the book of Acts as a primarily historical piece of literature with a narrative emphasis. Therefore, one must approach the writings of Luke in the book of Acts as both history and narrative. Osborne (2006) noted the important similarities and distinctions of historical fiction and historical narrative. One must recognize Luke's historical writing to show Theophilus (Acts 1:1) all that happened and also his narrative writing, which places the history of Gentile Christians in the context of a larger story of Judaism and the life of Jesus Christ.

Utilizing Robbins' (1996) inner texture analysis will aid in understanding this historical narrative pericope. Robbins (1996) presents an overview of the types of inner textual analysis one can use, such as repetitive, progressive, narrational, opening-middle-closing, argumentative, and sensory-aesthetic texture. These tools guide the following analysis.

Repetitive Texture and Pattern

Repetitive texture and pattern observe words and phrases which repeat more than once in the pericope and, according to Robbins, provides an overarching view of the text (Robbins, 1996). The following words were repeated in the pericope three times or more: God (9x), brothers (9x), Gentiles (9x), Paul (6x), Barnabas (6x), sent (6x), Lord (5x), Apostles (5x), men (5x), Elders (5x), Antioch (5x), church (4x), Moses (3x), Judas (3x), together (3x), gathered (3x), and Silas (3x). The repetitive texture of the pericope revealed six groupings: (a) opposing sides, (b) ongoing discussion, (c) strategic movement, (d) divine messaging, (e) essential characters, and (f) unified conclusion.

The opposing sides in the pericope represent Paul and Barnabas (15:2) on one side and "men from Judea" (15:1) on the other. The ongoing discussion represents the two sides of the issue regarding Gentile conversion to Christianity (15:1). Strategic movement is seen throughout the pericope between Jerusalem where the apostles and elders reside (15:2) and Antioch from where Paul and Barnabas were sent (15:3). These two locations also represent the two sides of the issue: Jerusalem, where the decision will be made and Antioch, where many Gentile converts reside.

Divine messaging is revealed in the reports of Paul and Barnabas regarding all that God had done among the Gentiles (15:4, 12), the custom of Moses (15:1, 4, 21), the work of Christ (15:11, 26), and the work of the Holy Spirit (15:8, 28). Other essential characters are revealed in the pericope as well, including the apostles and elders (15:2, 4, 22, 23), the brothers (15:1, 3, 7, 13, 22, 23, 32, 33), the church (15:3, 4, 22, 30), the Gentiles (15:3, 7, 12, 14, 17, 23), Peter (15:7), James (15:13), and Judas and Silas (15:22, 27, 32). These characters are instrumental in leading the discussion and communicating the decision. A unified decision for the Gentiles to abstain from things

polluted by idols, sexual immorality, that which has been strangled, and from blood (15:20, 29) brings rejoicing and encouragement to the Gentiles (15:31, 32). In other words, Gentiles do not have to follow the custom of Moses to be circumcised but do need to follow the purity codes established by Moses.

Progressive Texture and Pattern

Robbins (1996) described progressive texture and pattern as the “sequence of words and phrases,” which reveals a deeper meaning to the pericope. Analyzing the six groupings of the repetitive pattern reveal several progressions: 1) progression of conflict; 2) progression of movement; 3) progression of leadership; 4) progression of revelation.

Progression of Conflict

Paul and Barnabas return to Antioch from their missionary journey with high reports of what God has done among the Gentiles. Men from Judea also come to Antioch and teach that these converts must be circumcised (15:1). There is a sharp disagreement, which moves the conflict to Jerusalem, where the apostles and elders take it up for consideration (15:2). After ongoing discussion, which includes much debate (15:7) and wisdom from the Holy Spirit (15:8), Peter and James both speak, and the conflict concludes with a unified decision (15:22).

Progression of Movement

Paul and Barnabas move around a great deal. Their missionary travels begin in Antioch and eventually delivers them to Jerusalem (15:2). On their way to Jerusalem, they take the opportunity to connect with other believers and share all that God has done through them (15:3). They stay in Jerusalem for the council (15:4-29) and then return to Antioch, with two leaders, Judas and Silas, to report on the council's decision (15:30-35).

Progression of Leadership

Throughout the pericope, one sees layers of leadership that exist in the church of that region. Paul and Barnabas confront teachers from Judea (15:2). There are apostles and elders and brothers Jerusalem (15:1-4, 7, 13, 21-23, 32, 33). It appears Peter and James hold some type of authority, as they are the only ones quoted by Luke (15:7-11, 13-21), other than the brief one-sentence remarks of the men from Judea (15:1) and the believers from the party of Pharisees (15:5). Judas and Silas, leaders and prophets from the Jerusalem council, act as representatives to the church in Antioch (15:27).

Progression of Revelation

Peter tells the Jerusalem Council that "God made a choice" (15:7). Also, Peter reminds the council that the Gentiles received the Holy Spirit just as the rest of them had, showing God was doing this work himself (15:8-9). Paul and Barnabas report on all

that God had done through them, revealing God's purposes (15:12). James refers to the agreement of the Old Testament prophets as another revelatory confirmation of God's will (15:15-18).

Narrational Texture and Pattern

Assistance in interpreting the meaning of the passage requires what Robbins (1996) described as the narrational texture and pattern. These "voices" used in a pericope, describe a pattern or flow, which assists in interpreting the meaning of the passage. In Acts 15:1-35, six different voices are employed with Luke's being the primary voice as narrator. Luke's voice often represents a larger group of leaders (the apostles and elders, the church, the assembly, or the brothers).

The men from Judea communicated disagreement (15:1). As the author, Luke recorded dissension and debate which was referred up to the leaders in Jerusalem (15:2-4). Believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees insisted that Gentiles be circumcised (15:5). Luke then recorded the gathering of leaders to consider the issue (15:6). Peter reviewed what God had already done among the Gentiles (15:7-11). Luke acknowledged that Barnabas and Paul then shared their stories of how God reached the Gentiles (15:12). James then summarized the discussion and made a recommendation (15:13-21), which Luke recorded as a decision made (15:22). A letter is then drafted that outlines the made decision (15:23-29). Luke recorded the implementation of the decision and resulting outcome in Antioch (15:30-35).

Opening-Middle-Closing Texture and Pattern

An overview of the pericope often is the result of a clear opening-middle-closing texture (Robbins, 1996). The opening of this pericope began with a conflict and the subsequent travel to Jerusalem (15:1-3). The Jerusalem Council convened and within this middle section it has its own opening-middle-closing texture and pattern as well. It begins with division (15:4-6), speeches made (15:7-21), and ends with a decision (15:22-29). The pericope ended with the journey back to Antioch (15:30-35).

Argumentative Texture and Pattern

Robbins (1996) described argumentative texture as the means to convince another person by utilizing persuasive techniques to move their thinking or acting. Acts 15:1-35 is resplendent with argumentative technique. The primary claim of this particular pericope is why the decision was made in the Jerusalem Council not to have Gentile Christians be circumcised. Nine different techniques were employed in this pericope to persuade the early church: results reported (15:3; 15:4; 15:7-10; 15:12), God's authority employed (15:8-11; 15:28), reminded of tradition (15:1; 15:5), dissension and debate (15:2; 15:7), rebuke (15:10-11), repetition (15:13-19; 15:29), proposal (15:19-21), statement (15:23-29), and ambassadorial authority granted (15:27; 15:32).

Sensory-Aesthetic Texture and Pattern

Robbins (1996) described the sensory-aesthetic texture and pattern to show how language connects with our emotions, our feelings, and our senses. Utilizing three zones, Robbins (1996) encouraged an approach to the pericope that involves “emotion-fused thought, self-expressive speech, and purposeful action” (pp. 30-31).

Zone of emotion-fused thought

Acts 15:1-35 is infused with emotional thought. Dissension and debate (15:2, 7) eventually leads to great joy (15:3) and rejoicing (15:31). As a result, the Gentiles are encouraged and strengthened (15:32).

Zone of self-expressive speech

Several individuals and groups express their opinion in the pericope. Paul teaches (15:1), describes in detail all that God had done among the Gentiles (15:3-4). Peter shared his experience of telling the Gentiles about the gospel (15:7) at which point the Jerusalem Council fell silent (15:12) as Paul and Barnabas related what signs and wonders God had done among them (15:12). James replies (15:13) and echoes what the prophets also spoke regarding the salvation of the Gentiles (15:15).

Zone of purposeful action

Throughout the pericope the purposeful action of key characters is seen. Men came down from Judea to teach about the need of circumcision (15:1). Paul and Barnabas disputed the need for circumcision (15:2). This dispute led to the appointment of a group to go up to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and elders about the question of circumcision (15:3). The Christians sent them on their way (15:3) and after arriving in Jerusalem were welcomed by the church (15:4). The church gathered to consider the dispute (15:6) and recognized that God had made a choice regarding the Gentiles (15:7) by giving them his Holy Spirit (15:8). A judgement is made (15:19), a letter is written to the Gentile believers (15:20), and a chosen group of men and elders sent (15:22) to encourage the Gentiles to abstain from food sacrificed to idols and sexual immorality (15:29).

Discussion

The innertexture analysis of Acts 15:1-35 reveals antecedents, outcomes, and a theological perspective to shared leadership theory. The antecedents included in this discussion are team heterogeneity and a charismatic leader. Outcomes include better decision-making and higher team satisfaction. Also given space is the application of the theological perspectives seen in the innertexture analysis to shared leadership. Lastly, discussion regarding these antecedents and outcomes reveal applications to church leadership today.

Antecedents to Shared Leadership

Team Heterogeneity

Team heterogeneity positively contributes to shared leadership even though the early stages of a diverse team experience challenges to connect and understand each other (Wu et al., 2020). Their research discovered these very challenges bring teams together (Wu et al., 2020). Team heterogeneity exists throughout Acts 15:1-35. Leaders from different groups came together to both disagree and discuss. The men from Judea interacted with the brothers in Antioch (15:1). Paul and Barnabas, who represented another viewpoint, “had no small dissension and debate” with the men from Judea (15:2). This debate led to the Jerusalem Council convening. The makeup of the Jerusalem Council included elders from the party of the Pharisees (15:5) as well as the other apostles (15:6). Peter and James give their viewpoints and experiences as well (15:7-18).

The diversity of thought revealed in the innertexture analysis confirms the importance of heterogenous teams as an antecedent to shared leadership. Pearce and Conger (2003) revealed that shared leadership is less about formal structure and authority and more about influence and knowledge leaders bring to the group. One study of shared leadership in churches found that the strategic act of sharing information and knowledge, a shared leadership approach, and a shared vision all contributed to a greater sense of belonging and effectiveness (Grandy, 2013).

Based on the innertexture analysis of the pericope, it is clear the focus of the Jerusalem Council was less about a formalized leadership structure and more about those who had knowledge and expertise regarding the challenge they faced as a community. In essence, the Jerusalem Council convened as a direct result of the diversity of opinion represented. Churches who wish to be effective in today's culture, like the church was in Acts 15, must implement shared leadership principles, such as sharing information and knowledge, sharing leadership influence, and creating a shared vision. Executive teams, ministry teams, and self-managed work teams can all benefit from greater use of leadership heterogeneity.

Davis (2015) writes, “Jesus was not interested in uniformity for his growing group of disciples, but rather, unity” (p. 116). It was in the integration of diverse groups of leaders, which enabled the Jerusalem Council to discover together the way forward. Churches today would benefit from a shared leadership birthed from heterogeneity teams. Drawing from the various cultural groups, which embody the present-day body of Christ, might very well lead to not only better decisions but also a more unified church moving into the future. An integrated community of diverse leaders can help shape, through shared leadership, a more effective church (Davis, 2015).

Research showed the majority of churches have a tradition orientation of hierarchical leadership and pastors feeling overwhelmed and unable to meet the expectations of their congregations (Barna, 2013; Brown, 2014; Carlson & Lueken,

2011; Crosby, 2012; Daniels, 2014; Dorsett, 2010; Osborne, 2014). Pearce and Conger (2003) found shared leadership to be "an effective solution to a fundamental dilemma: no single individual possesses the capacity to effectively play all possible leadership roles within a group or organizational setting" (p. 288). Researchers also discovered leadership teams as the most productive model for future leadership in the church (Cladis, 1999; Crosby, 2012). Therefore, church leaders must consider shared leadership as an invitation to involve a diverse group of leaders in the problem-solving and decision-making enterprise of the local church.

A Charismatic Leader

Charisma was described by Weber (1947) as a way of influencing followers based on how the follower perceives the leader as being exceptional. In particular, Weber (1947) found that charisma is especially needed during a crisis when a leader emerges with a compelling vision to solve the crisis. The voices recorded by Luke in Acts 15, displayed signs of charisma, inspiring followers to their way of thinking. Everywhere Paul and Barnabas traveled, they communicated "all that God had done with them" (14:27; 15:12), "describing in detail the conversion of the Gentiles" (15:3), and how it brought "great joy" (15:3) to the believers. Peter displayed charisma in his visionary speech to the Jerusalem council (15:7-11), as did James when he spoke to the assembly, arguing for historical and biblical precedence for Gentile conversion (15:13-21). Charisma is sometimes associated with a more top-down, heroic-style of leadership rather than shared leadership, but as Yukl (2012) argues, heroic leadership is a myth, and "most major changes require a cooperative effort of many people in the organization" (p. 241). Yukl also notes that group-level theories, such as shared leadership, help inform how leaders influence followers. One way leaders influence followers is through casting a compelling vision. In this way, charisma might find itself, as it did in Acts 15, as part of shared leadership theory.

In the local church today, charisma is a necessary attribute to shared leadership. It is an essential mechanism for communicating vision and inspiring the group or team to action (Yukl, 2012). Floor (1976) contributed an intriguing insight into the role of charisma in the early church by showing how the church of the New Testament existed in two periods: the charismatic period and the institutional period. Floor (1976) argued that the church during the charismatic period borrowed heavily from Greek democracy by utilizing eldership to lead the ekklesia. It was only, in the later institutional period, that leaders began to lead in isolation.

Even though we still exist in the institutional period, leaders can choose to use their charisma to move the church back to the shared leadership of its founding. The innertexture analysis of Acts 15:1-35 revealed charismatic leaders were drawing people together, casting a compelling vision, and inspiring the church toward a more inclusive and shared leadership model. Also, charisma is necessary in times of crisis (Yukl, 2012). The church in Acts 15 was facing a crisis of membership. Would Gentiles be allowed into the fellowship, and what price would need to be paid (e.g., circumcision or not)? As Peter, James, Paul, and Barnabas all showed, charismatic leaders, in a group

setting and a shared leadership model, can use their charisma to influence the group toward needed action. Leaders in today's church, which faces many challenges and complexities, must rise to the occasion. Not in a top-down, heroic sense, but in an empowered and shared way. Shared leadership theory gives room for individual leaders to have a voice and mentor the group toward a shared purpose and shared decision-making.

Outcomes of Shared Leadership

Better Decision-Making

Serban and Roberts (2016), as well as Wu et al. (2020), confirmed the validity of shared leadership as a practical approach to complex leadership decisions. The outcome of the Jerusalem Council, amid dissenting voices, reveal a shared leadership approach as an effective way to navigate complex issues. The shared leadership employed by the Jerusalem Council directly led to a better decision and greater unity in the process.

One of the most important decisions ever made by the early church was the decision to embrace Gentile converts in their gatherings, without also requiring circumcision (Acts 15). Yukl (2012) discussed two vital and strategic responsibilities for shared leadership: 1) monitor the "external environment to identify threats and opportunities, and 2) determine a strategy for the "future survival and prosperity of the organization" (p. 277). This strategic decision-making process accurately describes what was taking place in Acts 15. The apostles and elders were monitoring the external environment and taking strategic steps for the church's survival. They understood both the threat and opportunity Gentile conversion was to the church. The lack of resolution regarding purity issues was a threat to the church's survival, but it was also an opportunity to expand the mission of God as Jesus instructed. So, they made a strategic decision to make it easier for Gentiles to come to Jesus without having to be circumcised and going through Jewish purity rituals (Acts 15:28-29). The leadership assembly did ask for a level of purity, which was another strategic decision to keep the unity between the Jewish Christians and the Gentile Christians.

The early church sought a participative decision-making process, which culminated at the Jerusalem Council. Research has shown that participative decision-making often results in a higher-quality decision as well as broader acceptance of the decision among followers (Pearce & Conger, 2003). The involvement of those who disagreed with the conversion of Gentiles without circumcision (the men from Judea in verse 1 and the party of the Pharisees in verse 5) was an essential aspect of the decision-making process in Acts 15. These voices were not silenced but given voice. Druskat and Wheeler (2003) note the importance of leadership advocating the position of followers. The party of the Pharisees (Acts 15:5) participated, and, as a result, the decision made involved all sides. As a result, the Jerusalem Council made a better decision and gave a better opportunity for buy-in from all involved.

For the church of today to make significant decisions, leaders must incorporate team-oriented leadership. Barna (2011) recognized this trend in churches:

Rather than waiting for the superstar to make pronouncements and give permission to act, the new form of leadership invites all gifted leaders to coordinate their efforts with those of other leaders, focusing on a common vision and crafting ways of collaborating for heightened productivity and impact. (What's Happening with Models and Methods section, para. 3)

Scott and Caress (2005) found, in their study of Christie Hospital, that staff thrived when given an invitation into the decision-making process. Anderson's (2017) work revealed the reduction of pastoral dependency in a Seventh-day Adventist Church was a direct result of self-managed ministry teams, a form of shared leadership.

Another aspect of a shared decision-making process in the local church is leaders inviting the Holy Spirit to engage in the process. The innertexture analysis of Acts 15:1-35 revealed the Trinity working alongside and with a multitude of leaders to make the best decision possible. Facing a complex problem regarding the conversion of Gentiles, this team approach to leadership enabled a decision that seemed good to the leaders and God. Gentiles received the decision with open arms.

Deep theological reflection and the work of the Holy Spirit were both utilized in the Acts 15 decision (15:7-21). Matthews (2005) argues for theological reflection being an integral part of any decision-making process in pastoral ministry. Therefore, church leaders of today, in order to make the best decisions, must involve others in a shared practice of decision-making, including time given to theological reflection as it relates to the decision-making process.

One of the benefits of shared leadership is not only better decision-making but unified decision-making (Davis, 2015). Davis (2015) showed how a model of shared leadership flows from Jesus' vision for church unity and the unity of the Trinity. Also, Grandy (2013) showed how a plurality of leaders involved in decision-making would result in more ownership of the results of the decision (Grandy, 2013). Shared leadership increases the effectiveness and outcomes of change (Pearce & Conger, 2003), thus giving church leaders greater affirmation in moving forward in decision-making with what God has spoken. As scripture says, "Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed" (Proverbs 15:22, ESV). This multitude of counsel in Acts 15:1-35 strengthened the decision made by the Jerusalem Council. Effective, shared leadership will get the right people in the room together to make crucial decisions (Grandy, 2013), just as the key leaders did in the Jerusalem Council.

Lastly, this pericope challenges the notion of individualism. Shared leadership, as revealed in the innertexture analysis of Acts 15:1-35, show a better and more effective way to lead in difficult times. Involving a diverse group of voices in the decision-making process will lead to a more unified church (Grandy, 2013) and produce a better decision.

Higher Team Satisfaction

Team satisfaction is a significant outcome of shared leadership (Pearce & Conger, 2003; Serban & Roberts, 2016). Hartwig et al. (2015) found “greater joy and satisfaction among team members” (p. 59) in local churches who employ shared leadership attributes. Other research also found an increase in team satisfaction in a shared leadership approach in the ecclesial context (Barna, 2013; Bell, 2014; Cladis, 1999). An innertexture analysis of Acts 15:1-35 revealed team satisfaction among the Jerusalem Council.

In the pericope, team satisfaction occurred as a result of shared leadership. Prior to the decision, the passage reveals dissension (15:2) and debate (15:7). After the recommendation from James is accepted, the passage reads, “Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church” (15:22). The decision resulted in group satisfaction and ultimately resulted in the rejoicing of the Gentiles (15:31). It “seemed good” to the group is reiterated two more times in the selected pericope to emphasize the satisfaction this decision had on the Jerusalem Council (15:25, 28).

Shared leadership in the literature reviewed and, in the passage studied, resulted in greater team satisfaction. Church leaders can employ shared leadership theory with confidence that one outcome will be a greater level of satisfaction among followers and teams. As Barna (2013) writes regarding churches which function out of shared leadership, “Leaders serving in these churches get great pleasure and satisfaction from leading within a team context” (p. 116).

Conclusion

Does Acts 15:1-35 legitimize the practice of shared leadership theory in the church today? An exhaustive literature review provided an overview of shared leadership theory in the ecclesial environment. Examining shared leadership from a biblical perspective provided a qualitative look at the potential impact of shared leadership in churches today. After an extensive search, only nineteen articles and books exist regarding shared leadership in the ecclesial context. Of these nineteen, only eight mentioned the theory of shared leadership as contributing to their results.

Categories of the findings in the literature include antecedents, outcomes, and biblical perspectives for shared leadership. The research showed an underlying biblical foundation for shared leadership. Nevertheless, much of the current literature regarding shared leadership in the ecclesial setting does not employ qualitative research from a biblical perspective of shared leadership.

Utilizing Robbins' (1996) innertexture analysis revealed several antecedents, outcomes, and biblical perspectives to shared leadership theory. The antecedents included in this discussion were team heterogeneity, and a charismatic leader. Outcomes included better decision-making and higher team satisfaction. Biblical perspectives from the innertexture analysis applied throughout the discussion regarding

shared leadership theory. Also, these antecedents and outcomes of shared leadership are necessary and applicable to church leadership today.

This paper added to the literature by utilizing an innertexture analysis of Acts 15 as it relates to shared leadership in the ecclesial context, revealing that the Jerusalem Council effectively employed shared leadership theory attributes to achieve a positive outcome for the church. In doing so, this article answers the question: Does Acts 15:1-35 legitimize the practice of shared leadership theory in the church today?

Future research utilizing the socio-rhetorical analysis of biblical passages and applied to shared leadership methodology is needed. Also, quantitative research of churches that employ shared leadership theory will produce interesting and helpful results. This quantitative research would help determine the essential attributes and outcomes of this biblically-based leadership theory to the local church. Hopefully, this article has encouraged ecclesial leaders to pursue the study of shared leadership theory to the future leadership of the church

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