DIVINE EMPOWERMENT OF THE EARLY CHURCH
MOVEMENT AND RAPID GROWTH IN THE APOSTOLIC AGE
EXEGETICAL ANALYSIS OF THE BOOK OF ACTS

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Using an aspect of exegetical socio-rhetorical criticism, this paper identifies four principles of empowerment found within the Book of Acts in chapters 1, 2, 4, 6 and 15 that are very different to the modern culture of individual empowerment in hierarchical organizations. Applying exegetical analysis – (b) historical intertexture analysis; (c) social intertexture analysis; and (d) cultural intertexture analysis - gives a greater understanding of the issue of divine empowerment as the main explanation for growth in the Nazarene movement, beyond previously proposed social models. This paper builds upon Schor (2009), who developed four models to explain growth in the early Church, to which this contribution adds a fifth, that is, a non-institutional explanation of growth based on the nature of community teamwork and most importantly divine empowerment. Stark (1996) describes the early church as an open but organized movement, with certain social boundaries and a kernel of doctrine. According to Stark, this character of early Christianity, coupled with a high birth rate, resulted in an exponential growth during the first three centuries (Stark, pp. 4–45). However, this may give the impression that the church grew as a result of human endeavor and natural reproductive rate. We must not look just to the growth numbers of early Christianity, Luke’s repetitive references to the empowerment and direction of God’s Spirit emphasize the fact that the mission to which the new movement founded by Jesus are called is not simply human activity. The explosive growth activity of the early Church could only be fulfilled by the power bestowed upon believers by the gift of God’s Spirit.

I. INTRODUCTION

Robbins proposed a method of interpretation that provides insight about the social, cultural, and historical elements of ancient texts and allows authors to summarize epistemological views about a new text. The exegetical analysis of Acts, therefore, helps to understand the connections between the analysis events recorded in Acts within the context of Jewish culture and the early church in the first century A.D., and the implications of the phenomenon of divine empowerment in the Church in
modern times. Therefore, this exegesis analysis of Acts is intended to aid in the understanding that this was an organization unlike any other and the role that empowerment played in the early growth and expansion of the movement. The institutionalization of the Church may have proven antagonistic to divine empowerment and the demise of the movement.

Upon initial evaluation, it may not appear that Acts addresses the issue of empowerment beyond the ability of Peter to boldly preach in front of masses of people. For example, Gangel (1998) explains that the pouring out of God’s Spirit gave Peter new courage. Indeed, Acts 2 on its own seems to exclusively focus on the truth that Jesus is the true Lord and Messiah – a fact that is authenticated by the miraculous pouring out of God’s Spirit. But, broader consideration of how the first chapters of Acts developed within church history and the examination of the Church as a social movement leads to a richer understanding of the role of empowerment of the followers of Jesus. The current section will address two ways by which Luke uses Acts for the broader purposes he has for the book: (a) Divine empowering of the Nazarene movement in Acts; and (b) Empowered leadership, followership, and impact of the early Church organization.

II. DIVINE EMPOWERMENT OF THE NAZARENE MOVEMENT IN ACTS

The Greek word translated power is defined by Louw and Nida (1989) as “the potentiality to exert force in performing some function” (76.1). Jesus’ promise to the disciples reveals that the potentiality for fulfilling the commission of world evangelization rests upon the indwelling God’s Spirit (Kistemaker, 1990). This source of power comes upon them in Acts 2. In Acts 2, the indwelling presence of God’s Spirit empowers the believing community to boldly fulfill the mandate of Acts 1:8 and proclaim the death, resurrection, and leadership of Jesus.

Acts does not end with the fulfillment of Acts 1:8. On the contrary, it ends with “Paul confident that the gospel will be taken to the ends of the earth” (Hooker, 2003, p. 65). The empowerment necessary for fulfilling the task is rooted in the promise of Acts 1:8 and the fulfillment of that promise in Acts 2.

Luke shows God’s Spirit to be the director of the unfolding effective mission of the Church (Ladd, 1974). There are many instances in the New Covenant scriptures that the Spirit empowers individuals such as in Acts 8:29, where Luke records, “God’s Spirit said to Philip, ‘Go over and join this chariot.’” The direction of God’s Spirit led to the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch. Similarly, after baptizing the eunuch, God’s Spirit carried Philip away to Azotus in Israel (Acts 8:39). In Acts 10, Peter was in Joppa praying on the roof of Simon the tanner’s house. After seeing a vision, Luke writes, “And while Peter was pondering the vision, God’s Spirit said to him, ‘Behold, three men are looking for you… I have sent them’” (Acts 10:19-20). Peter’s obedience to the direction of God’s Spirit led to the conversion of Cornelius, an event that opened the door for evangelization among the Gentiles.

In Chapter 4, the Spirit of God comes upon the church’s meeting place in response to a prayer for God to empower the gathered community to continue to speak with boldness (vv. 29, 31). Thus, the Spirit of God confirms that God is at work in Peter and John, as in Jesus. The religious establishment is threatened by its loss of their power and control and appears as an opponent of the will of God (Stott, 1994).
Later in Acts 13:2, as the community of believers in Antioch was praying, God’s Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” The community’s obedience to commission and send Barnabas and Saul led to the evangelization of the Mediterranean world. Throughout his missionary journeys, Paul also was subject to the direction and redirection of God’s Spirit (Acts 13:4; Acts 16:6-10).

Based on sociological methodology and analysis, Stark (2007) proposes that by 350 A.D., the majority of people within the boundaries of the Roman Empire were Christians (p. 313). This observation may give the impression that the Church grew as a result of human endeavor and natural reproductive rate. However, we must not look just to the numbers, Luke’s repetitive references to the empowerment and direction of God’s Spirit emphasize the fact that the mission to which the new movement of Jesus are called is not simply the byproduct of human activity. The missionary activity of the church could only be fulfilled by the power bestowed upon believers by the gift of God’s Spirit. Ladd (1974) writes, “Jesus’ continuing mission to all nations [is] a mission that from first to last is no merely human endeavor, but it is carried out by the plan and power of ‘God’s Spirit of Jesus’” (p. 245).

Community empowerment has been studied in modern organizations, unfortunately it only describes a few aspects of how the Church may have grown in the first century such as participation and involvement. Yukl and Becker (2006) posit that psychological empowerment is the perception that followers can help determine their own roles, accomplish meaningful effort, and influence important decisions in an organization. They outline the facilitating conditions for effective empowerment, including characteristics of organizations, leaders, followers, and the effort itself: (a) Decentralized and low formalization; (b) Flexibility, learning, and participation; (c) High mutual trust; and, (d) Leaders elected by team members. Additionally they give some guidelines for effective follower and community empowerment which can be found in Acts: (a) involve people in decisions that affect them, (b) delegate responsibility and authority for important activities, (c) take into consideration individual differences in ability and motivation, (d) provide access to relevant information, (e) remove bureaucratic constraints and unnecessary controls, (f) express confidence and trust in people, (g) provide coaching and advice on a timely basis, (h) encourage and support initiatives and problem-solving, and (i) ensure accountability for the ethical use of power. However, psychological empowerment makes it evident that participative leadership and delegation are not the only types of leadership behavior that can make people feel empowered. Other types of leadership behaviors can directly affect psychological empowerment, and these behaviors may also enhance the effects of participative leadership and delegation (Forrester, 2000).

The role of zeal and involvement in the growth of the early Church can be explained mainly by empowerment. A study by Spreitzer (1996) found support for the proposition that psychological empowerment is a motivational construct manifested in four cognitions: meaning, self-efficacy, self-determination, and impact. When people feel that their actions have value and purpose they find meaning (1996) or feel empowered if the content and consequences of the effort is consistent with the person’s values and ideals. People get involved in the decisions that will ultimately affect them, as people will have more interest in getting involved in matters of importance to them.
personally. Leaders need to take into consideration the individual differences in the people in their group, as variability in ability and motivation will impact involvement.

*Christian leaders must be divinely empowered from above, not from within*

The human heart covets power. There is nothing more appealing to mankind than the possibility of possessing some kind of power (Dahl, 1957). It has been the desire for power and influence that has caused so many wars. Power is one of the more dangerous things one could desire, and yet when empowered by the God’s Spirit, and if used properly for the glory of God, power is one of the most important tools for the Kingdom of God. Yukl (2005) observes that the kind of power that easily corrupts is ‘positional,’ or referent, power. Yukl also suggests that leaders in effective organizations create relationships in which they have a strong influence not positional over followers but are also receptive to influence from them.

Acts has the most to offer contemporary theories of empowerment. In Acts 1:8 Jesus authoritatively prescribed the mission of the apostles to bear witness to him in all of the earth. But he also makes provision for the power necessary for the task by promising that they will receive power. Realization of that power in Acts is the phenomenon that initiates Peter’s sermon as an effective evangelist (Stott, 1994). Yet, it is important to recognize that the empowerment of God’s Spirit does not build on any internal ability to regulate one’s course of action. Rather it fills what was empty, bewildered, and afraid. Herein is an important aspect of Christian empowerment, as a Christian leader “who feels competent in himself to produce eternal fruit knows neither God nor himself” (Piper, 2002). As is demonstrated elsewhere in this paper, the power demonstrated in the early Christian community was attributable only to the power of God’s Spirit dwelling in human vessels. However, the power is inseparable from the vessels, as the Christian community is shown to have become the intentional means by which God’s authority is executed in the world. Implicit in a Christian understanding of empowerment is confidence that the power of God’s Spirit is sufficient and efficacious to both determine the steps in front of his servants as well as provide the means for taking these steps. Whereas many followers are afraid that empowerment is only a fancy name for delegation and desertion (Ciulla, 2010), the power of God’s Spirit is continuously present, as he himself is the gift (Acts 2:38).

*Empowerment, and the impact on the early Church community*

Offermann (2010) notes that empowered individuals believe that their use of delegated power can have an impact upon their organization. Couto (1998) differentiates between two types of empowerment. Psycho-political empowerment “entails change in the distribution of resources or in the action of others,” whereas psycho-symbolic empowerment “does not alter the conditions of a community or an individual” (p. 580). Ciulla (2010) surmises that leaders often promise the first type of empowerment, but usually deliver the second. Accordingly, Ciulla contends that “in many organizations, promises of empowerment are bogus” (p. 195). Thomas and Velthooven (1990) argue that perceived impact is an important cognitive element of empowerment. Believing that one’s efforts can make a difference has the effect of
reinforcing empowerment. Therefore the distribution of power must be accompanied by the authority to exercise power.

Power and Authority in the early Christian community seems to demonstrate a reality that is neither psycho-political nor psycho-symbolic. Regarding the former, power bestowed upon the believing community is inseparable from God’s Spirit. As is shown elsewhere in this paper, manifestations of power in the book of Acts are always attributable to the power of God’s Spirit working through his people. Regarding the latter, the bestowal of power is not “bogus,” as Ciulla (2010, p. 195) calls it. Rather the promise is certain, as is expressed in Peter’s final exhortation to the crowd:

Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of God’s Spirit. For the promises is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself. (Acts 2:38-39)

The promise of empowerment of God’s Spirit given by Jesus in Acts 1:8 is extended to all who will believe in Jesus as Lord and Messiah. Therefore the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel 2:28-32 is not an event completed on the day of Pentecost. On the contrary, it is a new reality that is initiated on the day of Pentecost and unceasingly carried into the ongoing experiences of the life of the Church. Later in Chapter 6, we see evidence of empowerment of more believers and authority passed on to an outer circle beyond the 12 Apostles, so that power status and authority are to be used for the sake of community. God is the One who directs to where that authority will be passed.

Confidence in the possibility to impact others does not originate within the individual who is empowered by God’s Spirit or even within the community in which he/she fellowships. Confidence is built upon the character formed by the bestowing authority (Werpehowski, 2007). This truth is reflected in Peter’s statement to the crowd: “Being, therefore, exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of God’s Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing” (Acts 2:33). Unlike the reluctance of leaders to empower others because of insecurity or self-enhancement bias (Offermann, 2010), the empowerment of God’s Spirit is sincere and authentic, hindered only by a Christian’s refusal or ignorance of the importance of being “clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49).

Bestowed authority was directed by God’s Spirit in the early Ecclesia. The Apostles commissioned their authority that Jesus had bestowed on them as described in Chapter 6 of Acts. The transference of power and authority is not-bureaucratic and not bestowed in a single person as in the dualism examples observed in the Old Covenant Scriptures.

For example, Elisha inherits Elijah’s Spirit (‘the spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha’, 2 Kgs 2:15), but the Lukan perspective is that the Church as a community receives the same Spirit that was upon Jesus (Lk. 3:16; 4:18; Acts 1:5, 8, 2:4, 33, 38). Pugh (2016) points out that Luke never once envisioned that there would be any single human successor to Jesus. In fact, Luke does not include the reference interpreted by Roman Catholics as hierarchal authority bestowed on Peter as the rock upon which Jesus would build his Church. Pugh associates Jesus’ model of succession as similar to the optimal model in nonprofit organizations in which the founder hands over to a vision-keeping board who then appoints some sort of successor. Jesus hands over his authority to the Apostles who are directed under the empowerment and authority of
God’s Spirit. Pugh (2006) describes that the only difference between this Jesus-Spirit-Church model and the Founder-Board-Successor model is that Jesus hands over to the singular Spirit, who lends power to the corporate Church under the leadership of the apostles and elders, while in a business, the founder hands over to a corporate board, which lends power to a singular successor.

According to Dreyer (2012), the apostolic mission involved traveling, preaching and healing, as well as writing. The letters of the apostles were important in spreading the Gospel and defending the Christian faith against heretics and pagan religion. However, the church grew because the non-institutional movement and zeal across all levels of the movement pushed the growth of the Church. Divine empowerment was not at this point solely attributed to the leadership. For Pugh (2006), the zeal that is at the heart of the movement is disseminated by the community, but as the community grows, the government structure faces challenges created when the time comes for the founder to transition the power.

**Effectiveness as manifested by signs and wonders in Acts**

In Luke 24:49, Jesus declares to his disciples, “And behold, I am sending the promise of my Father upon you. But stay in the city until you are clothed with power from on high.” The verse points forward to the coming of God’s Spirit at Pentecost. Ladd (1974) notes that throughout the book of Acts the disciples demonstrate a constant dependence on God’s Spirit for the power to fulfill their mission. In Acts 4:5-12, Peter testifies to the name of Jesus the Messiah in the presence of the Jewish rulers (including the high priest). Luke writes that Peter was “filled with God’s Spirit” (Acts 4:8). In Acts 4:23-31, the disciples prayed for boldness to speak the word of God. Luke records the answer to their prayer in verse 31, “They were filled with God’s Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.” In Acts 6:10 Luke records that Stephen’s accusers “could not withstand the wisdom and God’s Spirit with which he was speaking.” Likewise at Stephen’s death, Luke describes him as “full of God’s Spirit” (Acts 7:55).

The signs and wonders that accompanied the pouring out of God’s Spirit on the day of Pentecost confirmed that the fulfillment of the prophecy in Joel 2 had been inaugurated. But, the book of Acts demonstrates that the signs and wonders referenced by the prophecy (Joel 2:30; Acts 2:19) extend far beyond the day of Pentecost. Marshall (2007) explains that Joel’s prophecy became the interpretive key for all of the signs and wonders coming upon all people (Jew and Gentile) throughout the book of Acts. Treier (1997) maintains that at every significant stage in the expansion of the Gospel in Acts, signs, and wonders accompany the call to repentance.

Analysis of the use of the words for works (Greek *dunamis*), wonders (Greek *teras*), and signs (Greek *semeion*) within the book of Acts provides better insight into how the power of God’s Spirit was regularly manifested in the life of the early Christian community. The word for *works* is used ten times in Acts. In some contexts, the word is translated as “power” (e.g. 1:8); in other contexts, the word is translated as “mighty works” (2:22), “great miracles” (8:13), or “extraordinary miracles” (19:11). These supernatural acts are conceptualized by Louw and Nida (1989) as “deeds manifesting great power” (76.7). In every reference except one (8:10), the power and mighty works are attributed to God’s Spirit and are manifested in the lives of Jesus and his followers.
The word for *wonders* is used nine times in Acts and is defined by Arndt, Danker, and Bauer (2000) as “something that astounds because of transcendent associations” (p. 999). In every reference except one (7:36), wonders are performed either by Jesus or his followers. In most instances, wonders serve to attest to the divine origin and effectiveness in the Church to deliver the message. The word for *signs* is used 13 times in Acts. Arndt, et al. define a *sign* as “an event that is an indication or confirmation of intervention by transcendent powers” (p. 920). Every instance of the word except one (7:36) refers to the acts of either Jesus or his followers and serves to authenticate divine empowerment (Olander, 2006).

III. EMPOWERED LEADERSHIP, FOLLOWERSHIP, AND THE IMPACT OF THE EARLY CHURCH

Schor (2009) proposed the ‘Apostolic mission model’ where the for expansion in new Christian converts was the influence of individuals perceived to possess some spiritual gift (2009). The apostles were important in the expansion of the church, especially in light of Schor’s remark on ‘spiritually gifted’ individuals and the role they played in convincing people of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (p. 475). In Acts 2, Peter under the direction of the Spirit of God at Pentecost had impacted thousands of people in one day, making the Church a group-focus movement, these movements are focused on affecting groups or society. However, by the second century, the local churches gave birth to individual-focused factions that were focused on affecting regionalized individuals. Most religious movements would fall under the individual-focused category but there is a stark contrast to the ability to impact the world from the group-focused movement empowered by the Spirit at Pentecost.

Contemporary leadership theorists discuss the benefits and challenges of implementing empowerment models of leadership in organizations. Offermann (2010) defines empowerment as the “sharing of power, whereby a hierarchically superior leader gives some of the authority and decision-making latitude previously in his or her own purview to one or more followers, thus expanding the follower’s sphere of influence” (p. 191) and thus creating self-determination and autonomy in followers. Offermann (2010) notes that empowered individuals have a sense of autonomy, choice, and self-determination. Likewise, Ciulla (2010) emphasizes that empowerment must include authentic and sincere freedom for a person to act on his/her own judgment. He also notes that empowerment models of leadership tend to be uniquely embraced in societies that highly value freedom and individualism. Thomas and Velthouse (1990) explain that leaders encourage a sense of autonomy and self-determination in order to foster the growth of empowerment within the organization.

Acts presents a contrasting perspective on self-determination and autonomy. The mission for which the Nazarene community needed empowerment was not self-determined or self-contrived. Jesus’ commissioning of his disciples to be his witnesses (Acts 1:8) was the uncontroverted direction of the early church. Luke’s presentation of the early church bears witness to the fact that there was little decision-making latitude implicit in the task. Luke bears witness to the absolute sovereignty of God in knowing every person’s heart (Acts 1:24), the death and resurrection of Jesus (Acts 2:23-24), the movements of believers (Acts 8:1), and the fulfillment of His eternal purposes expressed in Old Covenant Scriptures prophecy. The mission for which believers were
empowered was determined by the trustworthy and authoritative power of their Lord; and contrary to contemporary concerns for autonomy and abuses of power, first-century Christian leaders understood themselves as servants of God empowered by Him.

In the first chapters of Acts, we see that power and authority were imparted on the Apostles. Later, in Acts 4:1–31, religious officials arrest and question Peter and John because the two apostles healed and preached in the name of Jesus “whom God raised from the dead” (v. 10). Russell (1986) argues that the key issue in the account is authority, the authority that comes from God and empowers Peter and John and the new movement they represent, over against the authority of the religious establishment. God is sovereign over systems of power. Like his assistant Luke, Paul also sees power delegated by authority and empowerment to the community of believers, he says, “I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you God’s Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better” (Ephesians 1:17) and he was praying that it would happen in multiple areas. One of the areas had to do with the power of God as a source of strength.

Table 1: God is sovereign over systems of power, Example in Ephesians 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Opening Proposition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1:18</td>
<td>I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people,</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:19</td>
<td>and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:20</td>
<td>he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Conclusion</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:21</td>
<td>far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to come.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:22-23</td>
<td>And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.</td>
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**Rapid Organizational Growth and Decline of the Nazarene Movement**

At the turn of the first century of the Church, the ‘people with authority’ were bishops, presbyters, and deacons (Schor 2009, p. 475). By the turn of the first century, ‘institutional’ clergy and ‘charismatic’ leaders or divinely empowered healers were involved in the conversion of people and expansion of the Church. However, as the process of institutionalization continued (Dreyer 2011:47), the bishops progressively subordinated any other charismatic leaders (Schor 2009) under the new ecclesiological model proposed by Ignatius of Antioch where the Church as an organization was now proposed to have a new non-Jewish identity and new emphasis on hierarchical leadership with a clergy class and a laity class (Barnard, 1963). Consequently, the divine empowerment that is demonstrated in Acts now was concentrated and controlled.
by human hierarchical authority, but the very roots of the Church as a social movement was focused on teams and teamwork.

The success of the movement may also be explained by the charisma deposited primarily with the community-forming power on the Apostles (Dreyer, 2012), and this is the reason why the Church must be constantly reforming itself, constantly re-checking and re-establishing its connectedness to the community-forming power that is the Spirit. Spirit and the commitment to plurality, to teams, to dissemination and decentralized power was at the heart of the Nazarene charismatic movement of the first century. Under the Biblical model, Jesus as the founder, hands over power to the disciples and authority under the direction of the Spirit. The result is that the founder’s transition is not replaced but his charisma is directed and disseminated to the community and not concentrated under leader. Pugh (2006) points out that the main threat to the duplication model was traditionalism, and the main danger with the dissemination model is bureaucratization and routinization or to convert to a traditional leader-focused organization.

Staggenborg (2013) explains that Bureaucratization in social movements generally refers to the formalization of social movement organizations in terms of record keeping and decision-making procedures, although movement organizations never become as complex in their structures as bureaucracies such as governments, movements often develop organizations that meet minimal standards of bureaucratic organization. Although centralization of power is often seen as a feature of bureaucracy.

Removing unnecessary bureaucratic controls and constraints will ease successful completion of tasks (Yukl & Becker, 2006) in organizations. The self-governed Nazarene community was able to effectively empower other new leaders and followers by the nature of involvement and motivation this allowed it to impact Israel and the rest of the Mediterranean world in the first century. We see a mighty unfolding in the Book of the Acts. Pagan powers are smitten, the lame are made to walk, the dead are raised to life, and thousands of souls are born anew. Never before had a group so large known such enthusiastic and intimate fellowship. The world was to witness a new revolutionary movement.

According to Dreyer (2012), conversion to Christianity was never just about theology or behavioral norms; it was about group relations which he calls a social reaction model, which explains why the power of community is so valuable in social movements. ‘Christian praxis demarcated the Church as an imagined community, linking unacquainted people across hundreds of cities’ (Schor 2009, p. 483). Ordinary social contact between Christians and non-Christians would have greatly influenced people to convert. Stark (2009) explains that people tend to convert when their social network relations tilt more towards the new community than the older (p. 483). De la Porta and Diani (2006) point to the fact that successful movements follow predictable patterns. A community forms around a common goal. In Acts, we see that the mission is to bear fruit in order that movement may have broader human appeal. In order to accomplish that, the community mobilizes resources and finds solutions and draws people in. The movement is finally accepted by the establishment and declines.
Demonstrations of team leadership in the early Church

Under the leadership of the twelve Apostles of Acts 1, the gospel had spread to the Western World and even Africa and India (Goold& Lake, 1975), making the church a global movement with wide range organization reach, as well as a social movement with transcultural objectives, values, and goals. Initially, on the Coalesce stage of the movement, the global movement of the Church had Apostolic centers in the bigger urban centers of the Mediterranean and this global movement. Organizational structure was characterized by less-formalized roles and procedures; flexible and adaptable, without a rigid status hierarchy; fewer followers; and a subunit of the larger Church (Caron. 2013). Most importantly, the movement may have grown due to the fact that the effective team leadership model as recorded in Acts promoted relational actions internally within the movement such as coaching, collaborating, managing conflict, meeting the needs of people, and modeling principles. The movement also promoted external relations such as sharing information, networking, forming alliances with other believers, and negotiating support or buffering members from environmental distractions (Dreyer, 2012).

The external and internal behaviors observed in Acts fit perfectly with the functions of Hill’s model of team leadership presented in Northouse’s (2010). The
strength of the model for today as it was for the early Church is that team effectiveness and growth takes into account the role of leaders and followers in organizations and goes beyond previously proposed social models. The model fits well with the early Nazarene movement because it does not focus on the position power of a leader but instead focuses on the critical internal and external functions of leadership as diagnosis and action-taking. Any team member can perform the critical leadership functions and the very same actions we see in Acts and portrayed in Table 2. This approach is consistent with the current trend in organizations to rethink leadership responsibilities in teams. The responsibilities of leadership such as setting goals and coaching have rested with the group's formal leader/Within non-hierarchical organizations, however, these duties and responsibilities often are distributed across the team.

Table 2: Hill’s Team Leadership Functions and Effectiveness (Bearing Fruit) of the Movement in Acts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Verse</th>
<th>Internal Leadership Actions</th>
<th>External Leadership Actions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Task</td>
<td>Actor(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:6</td>
<td>Goal Focusing (The Christian community is oriented to witness of God’s kingdom)</td>
<td>Pneuma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:42</td>
<td>Structuring for Results</td>
<td>Jesus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:1-6:7</td>
<td>Facilitating Results</td>
<td>Apostles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2:45-2:47</td>
<td>Maintaining Standards</td>
<td>Apostles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13:1-13:3</td>
<td>Training</td>
<td>Apostles</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By the second century, the global decentralized movement had been bureaucratized into local movements with local scope with local or regional objectives (Stark, 1986) led by bishops as the authority of these localized churches. As time progressed, the regional churches started to implement less external functions from Hill’s model and focused internally and formed more of a local identity as a natural progression of the organization (Cohen, 1985), and in the near centuries to come, competition arose among regional churches (Ehrman, 2003). Organizational behavior theories propose that competition among teams in an organization can create unhealthy rivalries that result in members resenting one another, which is especially true if one person or team always wins the competitions. This can result in a breach between what
Ehrman (2003) calls ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ in the early Church that may have proved to be unhealthy in internal relations. Competition can also create undue stress that may actually prove to be counterproductive to some efforts. Fierce competition may also resulted in rivalries and the decline to the united global movement of the apostolic age.

**Departure of the team leadership model towards a hierarchical bureaucracy**

The first and second centuries turned out to be a time of factions and gave birth to competing disagreements to the point that the Church was composed of competing views on doctrine and direction to the new movement (Ehrman, 2003). In order to resolve the divisions among factions of the Church, the multiple councils up to the third century gave birth to a new bureaucratic orthodox institution which was for the most part centralized in Rome. In the following centuries, the institutionalized organization adopted more of characteristics of the bureaucratic worldly government of Rome that had officially declared Christianity as the official religion of the empire (Siker, 2000). Consequently, the new Christendom overshadowed the movement nature of the Church Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 where unity, consensus, and empowerment are demonstrated. This stage, where there was a turning away from being directed by the Spirit and divine empowerment as portrayed in Acts, transformed the social movement towards a religious government derived from human power and under a centralized authority. Paradoxically, this marks the decline of the movement even before emperor Constantine (Dunn, 1999).

Another piece of evidence that making Christianity a state religion exterminated the very nature of the movement comes from studies about optimal group sizes like Dunbar (1992) who had argued that 150 members would be the mean group size only for communities with a very high incentive to remain together. The number is a byproduct of absolute necessity that may be due to intense environmental and economic pressures. For a group of this size to remain cohesive, Dunbar speculated that as much as 42% of the group's time would have to be devoted to social grooming. Dunbar (1992) showed the number evidenced in subsistence villages, nomadic tribes, and historical military groupings. Dunbar noted that such groups are almost always physically close.

**Values of Leaders and Followers and Impact in the Nazarene Movement**

Another explanation for the rapid growth of the movement may not necessarily have to do with the organizational structure of the social movement, but to the values of the leaders and followers within the organization. Weber (1946) sees empowerment as the ability to effect change in others. Dreyer (2012) explains that the early Christians were not afraid to associate with those on the fringes of society (i.e. slaves, outcasts, and dispossessed people) to make an impact in society. Christian masters freed their slaves who converted to Christianity. The official emancipation took place in the presence of the bishop. Several of these freed slaves eventually became bishops themselves (Chadwick, 1993).

As a result of the promise of the Spirit to empower all people in Acts 2:17, many women became the first converts in a family (Chadwick, 1993), often leading their husbands to conversion but even more so raising their children as Christians. It was
often through wives that Christianity penetrated the upper classes of Roman society, with the result that Christians became increasingly influential (Dreyer, 2012).

Schor (2009) proposed another model to Church growth: a values growth model to explain the expansion and new identity of the early Church. He explains that values like charity, hospitality, mutual support, self-control, and purity along with others drew people to Christianity (p. 478). It was not only the teaching of these values by the apostles which attracted people but rather the way ordinary Christians gave practical expression to Christian love by the caring for the needy, weak or the poor. We find this reflected in many different texts, of which a few examples will be given: The First Letter of (first) Clement to the Corinthians around 100 AD (Goold & Lake 1975).

Servant leadership. Perhaps the best style of leadership fitting this description of influence by values and also that fits within the analysis of Acts would be servant leadership. Sendjaya and Sarros (2002) examined the philosophical foundations of servant leadership by drawing on the value-laden concepts initially developed by Greenleaf (1977) and lessons from Christian traditions. Servant leadership as a paradigm begins with the natural desire to serve before making the conscious choice of aspiring to lead. According to Greenleaf, the test of a servant-leader is to make those served healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, effective on the least privileged in society, and not deprived but gaining benefits (p. 27).

Jesus taught his disciples that in order to be great, one must first be last (Mark 10) and that a leader must serve his followers in humility (John 13:4-5). These acts “highlight the philosophical basis of servant leadership in terms of who the servant leader is and what the servant does” (Sendjaya & Sarros, 2002, p. 59). The altruistic act of serving is the primary intent of servant leadership and can only be demonstrated by a leader who is moral and altruistic (p. 60). From this emanates the idea of stewardship, or that of servanthood, not in the sense of a low-class individual but of someone entrusted to care for those being served. The idea of stewardship is that of a trustee to whom something of value, such as power, is entrusted (p. 61).

Values driven leadership and followership. Offermann (2010) notes that empowered individuals recognize their work as consistent with their values and ideals in such a way that it provides meaning in their lives. Mankoff (1974) explains that values are enduring standards held by a person that become criteria for selecting a course of action. The church of the first century was a radical but peaceful movement, the radical movements are dedicated to changing value systems in a fundamental way, and this is what the Nazarene movement did initially as a sect of Judaism.

Thomas and Velthouse (1990) explain that a low sense of meaningfulness and value congruence results in apathy and detachment. As a point of contrast with secular empowerment theories, it is important to notice that the values implicit in Christian empowerment are not negotiable or subject to individualized perspective. The verbal persuasion from the values and beliefs expressed by Peter cut his audience to the heart because they demonstrated uncompromising authority. For this reason, the only option was full embrace. “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 2:38).

Schor (2009), with reference to Stark (1996), concludes that values contributed to a higher birth rate under Christians than the general population, resulting in accelerated growth. Again, using quantitative models based on certain assumptions,
Schor concludes that this model of growth indicates that the number of Christians could have reached 33.9 million by 350 AD (p. 481).

Schor (2009) indicates which factors also relating to social interaction would have influenced people to convert to the early Nazarene movement beyond social pressures or prejudices, for someone already interacting with Christians, conversion catalysts might include theological similarities, shared values, or understandable rituals. (p. 484)

Stark (1996) has suggested that Christianity initially grew because it treated women better than pagan religions. He also suggested that making Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire weakened the faithfulness of the Christian community by those who did not really believe or had a weaker belief. This finding has been validated by contemporary religious movements, where once-successful faith movements gradually decline in fervor due to the free-rider problem and diluted values that once marked a distinctive movement. This may have been, in fact, what made the divine empowerment of members stop when the Church institutionalized formally in the third century.

IV. CONCLUSION

This paper went beyond a study of Spirit empowerment in order to give background for a proper insight into the understanding of the growth of the organization known as the Church in the first century A.D. This article also compared this perspective with current models of leadership to understand what God’s Spirit-Empowered team leadership functions represents for believers in Jesus in modern days. Social Movement theories that were also applied to the analysis of the biblical text revealed several themes regarding God’s Spirit-empowered followers that one day would turn into new leaders by their character and service. Leaders in Acts do not seek power for themselves, but rather they serve the community that is empowered externally by the Divine Creator. They also embody and transmit values of what modern theory of leadership would describe as ‘Servant leaders’ in order to effectively impact society. Indeed God’s divine empowerment and psychological empowerment at the individual level, as well as at the community level, led this new Nazarene organization to make a major impact in the first century. In the Scriptures, the God’s Spirit is the presence of God in the world to reveal Himself by some action or word. Therefore, when Joel says that God will pour out His Spirit on all flesh, he means that God will draw near to a diverse community and not just one person, and make Himself known and felt in a powerful way through the movement that bears fruit to accomplish the mission. He aims to be known as God, not manifested by just another social movement, philosophy, or some indescribable fantasy, but through real supernatural events, as described in Acts.

Today, there are new movements that try to capture the essence of the early Church, which was concentrated in smaller groups and characterized by quality relationships and faith. For example, the Luke 10 movement (lk10.com) focuses on smaller congregations where community and networking (as discussed here) is truly built. Another movement such as described in Caron (2013) calls for the restoration of the apostolic office and a model away from those churches ruled by and employing pastors as CEOs of congregations. This new Apostolic Centers movement is quite provocative since it does not concentrate on position such as a priest or pastor as an
officer of the modern church, but concentrates more on restoring the five-fold ministries described in Ephesians 4:11, where elders as leaders took functions of execution of the most important facets of the congregation. While these movements look promising as a new push to return to the foundations established in Acts, these new Post-charismatic movements should always keep in mind that the areas examined in this paper. The key to growth is the importance of divine empowerment and how it resides on guidance by the Spirit of God as the engine of the community and the individual. As Acts demonstrates, the Spirit is to be outpoured to all flesh: the leaders and the followers.

About the Author

Dr. Becerra received his Ph.D. in Organizational Leadership from Regent University in 2016. His dissertation focused on the role of pastoral servant leadership on commitment of church members in Latin America and the USA. He has extensive organizational management experience in the financial industry and the ability to lead teams to come with strategic solutions via informed research and data analysis. His leadership skills have led him to hold management positions in non-profit organizations and executive positions in two of the top-5 banks in the USA. He is currently an economist for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. His passions are church growth, leadership development and researching about organizational factors that facilitate innovation, cooperation and teamwork. He is currently authoring a book about issues of identification with charismatic and transformational leaders. He resides with his family in historical Williamsburg, Virginia.

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