

13:7, 17), seeking understanding of faith's application to the practice of leadership is simply another way of bringing an additional part of humanity under the submission of Jesus as King. Though popular press promotions of Christian leadership abound, unfortunately peer-reviewed articles providing academically researched material are sparse. An online search of the ATLA and ProQuest Religion databases using the terms leadership theology, church leadership, and equivalent terms resulted in 23 relevant articles. Articles were considered relevant whose main purpose was the development of a theology of leadership rather than simply the observation of leadership in various church contexts. A review of these articles revealed four primary themes that are guiding the development of a Christian theology of leadership.

First, research is much further along in the development of general leadership theory than any existing Christian theology of leadership.¹ Thus, many articles wrestled with the link between organizational leadership theory and a theology of leadership.

Second, the articles provided a starting point for the elements of Christian leadership that must be presented in order to remain faithful to scriptural revelation.

Third, one element that is worthy to recognize as a theme of its own is the role of context in the construction of a theology of leadership.

Finally, the fourth theme is the influence ecclesiology has not only on the development of a theology of leadership but in the practice of leadership.

Linking Theory and Theology of Leadership

The 20th century saw an explosion of interest in the characteristics and cultivation of leaders. The developments of trait, behavioral, transactional (Berne, 1963), and transformational (Bass, 1985) leadership theories provided a context within which Christians could apply this knowledge to the church. However, given core differences in the approach to leadership in these theories and in Scripture, it too often appeared as though a degree of anachronism was being used to find these theories within Scripture (Clark, 2008). Other theories had greater parallels to Christian thought, including servant (Greenleaf, 1977) and spiritual leadership (Fry, 2003) theories. Clark (2008), however, warns of the danger of simply incorporating these theories into a theology of leadership. The following of celebrity leaders and ideologies loses the unique exegesis of the truth contained in Scripture. Rather, Clark main-

lead to a reassessment or rejection of popular theory. This would likely cause the church some degree of social ostracizing. However, the core of Christianity—making followers of Jesus—requires faithfulness to God’s revelation that leads to service to the King rather than kingdom building (Clark, 2008).

Still, Beeley and Britton (2009) observe the following:

This surge of interest in leadership would seem to indicate both an innate sense of the importance, and perhaps the nature, of real leadership, as well as a painful recognition that it is lacking or absent in many places in both church and society at large. (p. 3)

They go on to note that much of current theory in the field of leadership focuses on the question of “what do we do to attain certain outcomes?” On the other hand, one of the primary questions that Beeley and Britton suggested must drive a theology of leadership is “why do we do what we do to conform to Jesus?” This shift in the driving question of leadership development is necessary in a Christian context because of the condition of humanity and its relationship to God (Beeley & Britton, 2009). More important still, Christianity sees everything fitting into the context of the Kingdom of Jesus. This context seeks a transformation of the heart and attitudes of followers at both the individual and community levels. Thus, the “why” of leadership becomes a more fundamental question than the “what” (Beeley & Britton, 2009).

invisible. In contrast, the popular Christian leadership press likes the highly “successful” pastor who started with a small group and within a few short years cultivated a church of thousands. This success preoccupation may betray its roots starting with general leadership theories rather than exegeting an image of leadership from Scripture. None of this is to suggest that large congregations developed out of general leadership theories are inherently unscriptural or that there is a special innate grace associated with small and/or declining congregations (Frank, 2006). It is important to balance the attendance numbers of smaller congregations with the still widespread, worldwide impact they have on It is important to balance thn

numbering the people of Israel in 1 Chronicles 21:1-4. While there is much at work within this passage, there are a couple of points specifically relevant to the topic at hand. There was no sin in counting the people (Exod. 30:11-12, Num. 1:1-3). In fact, the leadership theory of the day (especially as it pertained to the political field) would probably promote the practice in order to ascertain taxes, military might, and potential servitude. There is no foolishness in the action—unless there is a sinful heart behind it, which seems to be the condition in David’s case. This clearly illustrates how the “why” question becomes far more important to Christian leadership than the “what” question. Thus, in David’s case, the popular leadership practice is not the best route to take, because in this circumstance his heart is pursuing it for the wrong reason.

In summary, Christian leadership authors recognize that general leadership theories have valid and often useful truths that are applicable within a Christian context. In some ways, these theories can even contribute to a theology of leadership. However, the downfall of these theories is that they are often based on material outcomes. Those outcomes and the motivations behind them differ from the spiritual commitment outcomes and motivations that are expected of followers of Jesus. Thus if faith is no longer seeking understanding, the leadership practices can no longer be considered Christian leadership (Stone & Duke, 2006). Allowing general leadership theories to be the director of the development of Christian leadership theory eventually undermines the value of Christian revelation speaking into these critical areas of organizational development and leadership. Such leaders might use approaches to leadership that cause the church to be wildly successful—in non-scriptural terms—but bereft of any indication of its association to the Kingdom of Jesus. Thus, each of the researchers in the articles strongly propose that a theology of leadership be developed that is informed by general leadership studies while uniquely drawing its theoretical development from faith.

What Makes a Theology of Leadership?

If such a theology of leadership is to be developed, what elements are needed to maintain its allegiance and purity to Scripture? Beeley (2009) provides a helpful insight when he maintains that the starting point of this research must be a theology that defines leadership rather than a leadership theory that defines theology. The distinction is an important one. Without it a bifurcation may arise in which church

budget issues are in some way “practical” matters while the characteristic of God as Provider is a theological matter. By developing a leadership theory that grows out of theology, the so-called “practical” will not be seen as somehow dichotomous to theology. Instead, Beeley argues that all practical issues will be subsumed under the theological. This is a necessary and prerequisite outcome to all those who would submit themselves to the authority of Jesus.

However, this does not necessitate the total withdrawal from general leadership study. Gortner (2009) provides a helpful list of leadership habits culled from the general leadership research that have direct influence on Christian leadership, including mental, behavioral, directional, interpersonal, emotional savvy, and fluid and creative teamwork habits (p. 121). Gortner contends that these similarities between general leadership study and the needs of Christian leadership were neither coincidental nor minimal. Rather, the general leadership material offered significant insights for the Christian leader. Similarly, leadership material offered by Christians is not inherently helpful or accurate. He uses as an example Christian leadership literature making the false dichotomy between the “then” being bad and the “now” being good (or vice versa). This simplistic thesis-antithesis approach to leadership does not take into account complexities of time, culture, tradition, and the inability to predict the future. Thus, the Christian leader developing a theology of leadership does well to be deeply informed by general leadership research. Frank (2006), concurring with Gortner’s assessment, notes that today’s pastor often thinks of leadership in terms of preaching, teaching, and pastoral care:

Meanwhile, the work of managing churches and church institutions races on, expanding into areas as diverse as procedures for legal incorporation of church-sponsored activities, prevention of sexual harassment and abuse, public relations, and legal liabilities in leasing church facilities to community organizations. (Frank, 2006, p. 115)

Frank goes on to provide five helpful points drawn from leadership research to assist in integrating general leadership studies into a theology of leadership:

First, the Christian leader must identify the contemporary critical issues of leadership facing the church.

Second, the Christian leader seeks to integrate those issues into an established framework of biblical perspective that is informed by general leadership theory.

Third, given the church’s long history of leadership, the Christian leader should seek to understand how the current issues fit within the

larger tapestry of the church's history and how past leaders have dealt with similar issues.

Fourth, building on the previous point, there is great wisdom in attempting to understand how other perspectives within the contemporary Christian church are dealing with similar issues.

Finally, the Christian leader ought to understand the impact for leadership development not only on the local, individual church and its parishioners, but also its impact on the universal church and the unbelieving world.

Still, most general leadership theories presume some degree of autocratic or democratic environment (Shaw, 2006). Conversely, Christian leaders, according to Shaw, work in an environment under the rule of

Interestingly, identifying other elements of a theology of leadership is not as simple as listing the characteristics of primary biblical leaders. Though these representations of biblical leadership are a starting point, Bartz (2009) makes the insightful point that at face value, the only characteristic to link all the biblical leaders to one another is that they are included in Scripture. Such is the variety of biblical examples of leadership. However, Bartz goes on to note that a deeper study of the lives of biblical leaders unearths an important element to biblical leadership. All of the biblical leaders engaged their particular context according to the gifting that God had provided them and based on a partnership with what God was accomplishing (Bartz, 2009). In other words, although some traits may have assisted certain leaders in particular contexts, the leaders of Scripture seem rather content to be “themselves” and to make themselves available for God to work through them to accomplish His will.

Thus, any theological approach to leadership that seeks to identify or build upon a specific list of traits will probably fall short, not because of a wrong combination of traits, but an insufficient listing of traits. Any such trait listing would combine traits from different leaders in various situations and such a combined list would simply be impossible for any one person to obtain. What is often striking in Scripture is that God is quite willing to work with the traits available within imperfect individuals (Bartz, 2009).

Underlying this work of God is a fulfillment of His mission and a display of His power (Strawbridge, 2009). Mission is the purpose of God and His mission is the salvation of people. Salvation is planned by God, secured by Christ, and mediated through the Holy Spirit. It is communicated through revelation, obtained through faith in Jesus, and presented to the world by the church. Thus, the church’s central role and driving force is the completion of the Great Commission. However, a “driving force” suggests power, and some might rightly question what power will drive this force.

It is here that Strawbridge connects a biblical idea of power to a theology of leadership. She categorizes general leadership theories as presupposing influence primarily for the presumption of personal glory or goals. Such is not the power that the follower of Jesus pursues. Instead, the power of God is available to anyone who is fulfilling the mission of God. This is a necessary foundational element of a theology of leadership because it refocuses the locus of power from the individual leader to God. The leader becomes a jar of clay (2 Cor. 4:7). This

refocus avoids the pursuit of self-aggrandizement since the purpose of God's power is to bring salvation through His Son, not the Christian leader saving people through his or her own power. Strawbridge (2009) sums up her position well:

Mission does not happen until the leader knows what it means to embody Christ and is already on the path of faith to which others are invited and are empowered to join. This leadership is grounded in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ to such a depth that others are moved to embrace and embody the gospel in their own lives. A theology of leadership is not complex. It is comprehensive, but in the end, based upon the mission of the gospel and the power of God, leadership is rather simple. (p. 74)

However, Strawbridge's simple leadership does not exclude uncertainty. Rather, as Britton (2009) suggests, an integral part of a theology of leadership includes the leader being able to ask questions. Britton uses the example of a parish that was going to remodel its building. To begin, the rector asked a critical question that provided a unique element of leadership: "What are we trying to say with the new building?" Such a question redirects discussions from logistics and budgets to more fundamental questions of purpose. In many ways, this is the practical outworking of the other elements already identified, assisting the parish to redirect its attention to the centrality of Christ and His mission and power. Britton sees this element of a theology of leadership inherent in the questions that permeated much of Jesus' ministry: "Who do you say that I am?" (Matt. 16:15, New Revised Standard Version); "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46); "Do you love me more than these?" (John 21:15).

In fact, Britton (2009) points out that the believer is always one step short of certainty and therefore a degree of uncertainty must always be an element of a theology of leadership. Britton is quick to add that such uncertainty does not necessitate the eradication of all creedal and doctrinal truths. Rather, the orthodox understanding of the Christian faith provides the starting point of questions. In other words, the truth of the creeds provides more questions than answers, especially when applied to specific contextual phenomenon. Yet, for the Christian leader, all answers that are obtained must then be brought back to the orthodoxy to confirm its alignment with the truth of God's revelation that has been passed on to us. Thus, reflection and discovery become core elements of Christian leadership. However, this reflection and discovery are different from that of general leadership in that the leader seeks to further reveal and reflect the glory of God rather than the glory of the individual or organization.

It is here that Christian leadership most diverges from general leadership and adds an element unheard of in general leadership studies. As Jones (2009) points out, in reality the church is not headed up by a local leader or even an oligarchy of leaders but a community of leaders who are followers of the head of the church, Jesus. Peter clearly communicated this reality in speaking of the reigning priesthood of all believers (1 Pet. 2:9). The leadership within a Christian context is one defined by the church's mission (which encompasses the declaration and practice of the gospel) and thus extends a participatory role to all within the church family, including the contexts in which followers find themselves outside the church. An element of Christian leadership must include the opportunity for anyone within its community to lead in proclaiming the Gospel.

The obvious contradiction that arises out of this approach is that if everyone is a leader, then no one is leading. However, this rebuttal does not take into consideration the unique structure of the church. Undoubtedly, the preacher or priest may hold a uniquely public ministry of leadership. Parishioners may even look to the preacher for visionary and wise direction. However, in like manner, the pastor and priest must look to those within the church family to lead in ways that God has uniquely created them to accomplish the mission of the church (Jones, 2009). This necessarily redirects this leadership to contexts and influences outside the church. While the church spends a significant amount of energy trying to get the world inside the church one day a week, it must be remembered that the church is already in the world for the other six days of the week. Leadership occurs in both contexts, albeit by different people and in different ways. Thus, the local church in a fully revealed state is one in which all its members are pursuing the advancement of the mission of the church and are taking unique leadership roles in doing so. In practice, this means a move away from institutionalism and a deeper partnership between servant leaders and laypeople in which they work together to accomplish the mission of God within the sphere of influence where God has placed them (Maddix, 2009).

twelve Apostles promoted the care and unity of believers that reflected Jesus and thus promoted discipleship. The Apostles do not give any indication of how to serve tables, apparently believing that whatever general leadership principles the deacons had would inform the situation. Theology of the church, leadership, and social action are all in play during this decision. Finally, it is a development of theology, and specifically ecclesiology, in a new context in which biblical principles needed to be applied.

The literature, then, sees the primary elements of a theology of leadership as a God-governed, Christ-centric, Scripture-based use of the gifts with which God has empowered all believers in order to accomplish His mission in and for the world. A theology of leadership that lacks these nuances will be incomplete in assisting believers in understanding the practical leadership implications of their faith.

The Effect of Context

Despite these relatively fixed elements within the development of a theology of leadership, there is one element that is in a constant flux—context. Context is critical to the development of a theology of leadership because it shapes the way a leader interprets both Scripture and the application of its truth to the situation at hand (Clark, 2008). The Christian leader is always involved in hermeneutics—interpreting the current time, culture, community, and story. Additionally, the Christian leader is interpreting other parts of Christian history through contemporary eyes. However, Clark argues, if the Christian leader is to be effective in learning from the history of Christianity, it is necessary to remove, as much as possible, contemporary biases. Leaders must interpret church history within its constantly fluctuating context without losing the other elements noted earlier.

General leadership theories about culture also assist in understanding how context influences leadership styles. Some cultures lean more toward individualism, others more toward communalism; some accept high power distance as normal, others insist on lower power difference between leaders and led (Dean, 2009). These studies have shown that leadership is a complex configuration of cultural and contextual influences. In different settings, radically different leadership styles may be not only effective but also necessary. However, simply because a leadership style is pragmatic within a particular context does not mean that it is wholly biblical (Dean, 2009). It is here that the Christian must discern between that which is truth relative to God's revelation and that

which pulls the leader away from the basic elemental components of Christian leadership.

Fransen (1985) notes that the contextualization of leadership cannot be underestimated. Contextualized leadership respects the culture, understands the language, inherently communicates a transition away from the curse of Babel, promotes the gifting of individuals by the Holy Spirit, seeks to rectify past biases, racism, and ethnocentrism, celebrates diversity within the body of Christ, offers deeper perception of the nature of God, and pursues a completion of the Great Commission.

What this means is that there can never be a fixed equation or model of Christian leadership that is useful in all times and places (Beeley & Britton, 2009). In fact, the very significance of Christian leadership is that it contains enough truth to make it relevant in any context and yet enough flexibility to use the inherent truths to build upon any context. Christian leaders expect this because their leadership is “rooted in the eternal love and mercy of God” (p. 8). In fact, one could easily make the argument that for the Christian the meta-context of leadership is not the particular time and culture but instead is God’s revelation of Himself through Christ and Scripture (Eguizabal, 2009). Rather than asking, “How do we integrate this context into a theology of leadership?” the question becomes, “How can this context be transformed to the likeness of Christ in a biblical manner?” Perhaps this is why Paul’s concern over sexual immorality is less a leadership concern and more a christological concern (1 Cor. 6:15). Committing to building a community of leaders who are scripturally devoted to faith in and obedience to God in a Christ-like manner will bridge Christian leadership across times, cultures, and communities (Eguizabal, 2009).

Still, this is not a simple process precisely because Scripture is not written or designed to be a leadership textbook. Rather than being able to draw direct conclusions about leadership from Scripture, the interpreter must recognize that what we know of leadership from Scripture is more like light that shines through a prism and is refracted (Aitken, 2009). Understanding how to lead in a contemporary context will require a full understanding of Scripture’s statements on leadership to keep particular communities or passages within Scripture from driving the meta-narrative. This principle goes to the very heart of hermeneutics because not only must the different leadership perspectives be collected but they must also be interpreted within the specific context of the author and book (Aitken, 2009).

Additionally, when interpreting Scripture within the leadership

context, one must also recognize the inherent leadership qualities of the writings themselves (Aitken, 2009). The authors wrote the texts, in most cases, with a specific community and purpose in mind. For instance, when Paul wrote the Letter to the Galatians, his message was very specific in order to influence the Galatians to respond in a particular way. Thus, even though he was not with them, the text served as a form of leadership that provided concrete instruction based on the eternal truth of the Gospel.

This naturally leads to a flexibility that is rooted in Scripture. Thus, in a contemporary context, when Root (1985) attempts to differentiate church leadership from laity he noted both calling and activity. Note, however, that the distinctions remain flexible enough to be established across diverse cultures. Also, the distinctions allow for a difference from lay leadership yet does not diminish or excuse the calling and role of lay leadership. For instance, if an individual is called by God to a pastoral role such as associate pastor, that calling is unique from the calling of his or her parishioners. The activities and skills of the position, which might include Sunday school teaching, oversight of the seniors ministry, or visitation, are also unique to the pastoral role. Parishioners of this pastor are not likely to have this same calling or activity. However, this does not excuse the parishioners from their own particular calling in other spheres of influence—such as business, government, or academia—and the unique activities that would define leadership within those callings. Nor does the diversity of the leadership activities in different cultural contexts change the importance of understanding how faith is acted out in that leadership. This type of flexibility with specificity is what must constantly be balanced in the development of a theology of leadership.

In summary, it is important in developing a theology of leadership not to ignore the significant role and influence of context. Allowing Scripture to define the context within which the community interprets its circumstances places the weight of leadership development in the revelation of God and recognizes His empowerment and guidance. However, it is also necessary to recognize that any particular leadership context is likely to develop, evolve, and change, especially when attempting to apply it to other contexts. The literature does not intend to create a simplistic relativism of leadership. In fact, it is leadership practice anchored in Scripture that prevents relativism. Thus, the development of a theology of leadership must constantly balance the biblical narrative and the contextual application.

Leadership and the Church

But this all leaves the developer of a theology of leadership with one important question: What impact will this theology have on ecclesiology, the theological study of the church? Alternatively, what effect does ecclesiology have on a theology of leadership? It is the perennial question of the chicken or the egg. To answer these questions, Beeley and Britton (2009) take a more traditional route, insisting that defining the characteristics of the church is a prerequisite to understanding the authority and practice of its leaders. Kim (2007) essentially agrees with this stance and advances a hermeneutical-practice model of leadership theology development. Kim suggests that the desire is first to understand God's will through His revelation and then proceed with practicing what God has revealed. On the other end of the spectrum is Collins

its very definition, theology was practice-oriented (Gräb, 2005). According to Gräb, Schleiermacher taught that theology's content is to be shown in the practice of life, which Schleiermacher termed "religion." Thus, religion was a reflection of theology but theology was incomplete without religion. In this sense, a non-traditional study relevant to the church, such as leadership, was not a subset of a subset of theology but was in fact its own set of theology. Thus, in a similar manner to Cyprian, Schleiermacher was able to bridge between the

require an emphasis on one or the other, ultimately both sides must be fully reflected upon in order to understand both the motivations and outcomes associated with the church and leadership.

Conclusion

What becomes clear at this point is that Christians cannot simply rely upon general leadership theory to guide them to an expression of leadership that is Christ-like. Rather, there must be an understanding of how their faith is to be expressed under the governance of God, with Christ as its focus, and given the revelation of the Holy Spirit through Scripture. Their concern is the extension of the mission and power of God into every context of life, including leadership. The Christian's leadership activity then places Christ on display, through His church, irrespective of whether the leadership occurs within the ecclesial

