What is 'Christian' About Christian Leadership?

Introduction

What *is* "Christian" about Christian leadership? In this article, I propose that theories of Christian leadership can be defined, implemented, and evaluated through qualitative and quantitative research (Alvesson and Skoldberg, 2000). Qualitative-research methods suit the complex (Heifetz, 1994), context-embedded nature of leadership, which involves an inter-relation of contextual boundaries and leader characteristics (Antonakis, Cianciolo, & Sternberg, 2004). Qualitative research can prepare the way for quantitative research, which is better suited to testing theories (Lowe & Gardner, 2000).

At the pre-theoretical level, leadership is common to all people. Everyone participates in leadership within his or her spheres of influence, and everyone does so with or without refined reflections about leadership (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). Various models of leadership exist at the theoretical level. In this article, however, I focus on a specific model of Christian leadership. In that model, leadership is "a dynamic relational process in which people, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, partner to achieve a common goal . . . [which is] . . . serving others by leading and leading others by serving" (Christian Leadership Center, 2005).

The CLC model for Christian leadership may be evaluated and its implications explored by meta-theory dialog (Dyck, 1970; Meeks, Moltmann, & Trost, 1999) with a model of Christian theology as a study of God which is as Christ-centered, biblical, and relevant to the world in which we live (Hanna, 2006). The Christ-centered characteristic corre-sponds to the term "Christian leadership" because the disciples, or follow-ers, of Christ (Jones, 1995) are called Christians (Acts 11:26). The biblical characteristic provides a way of evaluating the Christian authenticity of Christian leadership (Malphurs, 2003) in terms of faithfulness to the Christ of Scripture (Hanna, 2006). The characteristic of relevance to the world encourages the evaluation of Christian-leadership theory according to lead-ership research in general (Plantinga, 2002; Wheatley, 1999).

Spiritual leadership is increasingly recognized in leadership literature (Dodd, 2003; Greenleaf, 1988). At the same time, researchers acknowledge that not enough study has been given to models of spiritual leadership (Hunt, 2005, 1-2; Heifetz and Laurie, 1998). In the subsequent sections

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of this article, I present a discussion of what is "Christian" about Christian leadership in relation to these four elements of the CLC definition:

- The influence of the Holy Spirit.
- The dynamic, relational, partnership process.
- The implementation of servant-leadership.
- The necessity of a partnership to achieve a common goal.

In addition, in dialog with Christ-centered, biblical, and relevant theology, I present four leadership initiatives of the Holy Spirit in relation to current leadership-research issues. (Note: All scriptural citations are from the King James Version of the Bible.)

What Is "Christian" About the Influence of the Holy Spirit?

The most obvious "Christian" dimension of the CLC definition of leadership is the reference to "the influence of the Holy Spirit" (CLC, 2005). This idea is compatible with the fact that Scripture does link the influence of the Spirit to leadership. For example, "the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gideon, and he blew a trumpet, summoning the Abeizrites to follow him" (Jud. 6:34). Scripture does not limit the ministry of the Spirit to those who regard themselves as the people of God. In the Old Testament, the Spirit is active in the creation of the heavens and Earth (Gen. 1:1-2; Ps. 33:6, 9) and the four spirits of the heavens go forth from standing before the Lord of all the earth (Zech. 6:5). In the New Testament we read of the seven spirits of God sent forth into all the Earth (Rev. 5:6). So, if the ministry of God's Spirit is worldwide, what is "Christian" about the influence of the Holy Spirit?

It is Christ who sends the Holy Spirit to be a Christ-centered guide or leader. "When He (the Spirit of truth) is come, He will guide you into all truth; for He will not speak of Himself. . . . He will glorify me for He will receive what is mine and show it to you" (Jn. 16:13-14). Four Christ-centered leadership initiatives of the Holy Spirit take place in cooperation with the actions of those who follow the Spirit's leading. This action involves four leader-follower synergies: conviction-confession, conversion-repentance, consecration-obedience, and confirmation-perseverance (cf. Stagich, 2003). Leader-follower synergy is central to Christian leadership. "He who thinketh he leadeth and hath no one following him is only taking a walk" (Maxwell, 1993, p. 1).

The Spirit's first leadership initiative is conviction. "When He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment" (Jn. 16:8). Judgment includes the condemnation of sin. He convicts "of sin" (Jn. 16:8) "because they believe not on me [Jesus]" (16:9;

cf. v. 11). Judgment is also the gift of discerning the difference between sin and righteousness. "He will guide you into all truth" (Jn. 16:19). The Spirit's leadership initiative in conviction calls for a human response in confession. "If we confess our sins, He [Christ] is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 Jn. 1:9). We are also to confess the truth about Christ into which the Spirit leads. Jesus said: "I am the truth" (Jn. 14:6, King James Version) and the Spirit "will guide you into all truth" (Jn. 16:13). As Paul put it, "if you confess . . . the Lord Jesus, you will be saved" (Rom. 10:9).

How is the conviction-confession synergy relevant to Christian leadership and to leadership research in general? In the research literature, one point of contact is the frequent discussion about the overlap between management and leadership—and of the distinction the two roles. Although leadership is applied in management (Bass, 1990), it is a completely different role from management (Burchard, 2003). According to several researchers, management maintains the status quo whereas leadership points out what is wrong with the status quo and identifies the ways in which to make it right. Management is not necessarily evil, because the status quo may be good. At the same time, a leader has gained followers when he or she has persuaded others to confess or admit that there is a problem and that they can participate in its solution (Nelson & Toler, 2002). Poor leaders manifest an attitude of unwillingness to confess and correct mistakes. Effective leaders make themselves vulnerable by modeling a willingness to admit, acknowledge, apologize, accept, and then to act (Malphurs, 2003, p. 69). In addition, Christian forgiveness is relevant not only for sin against God; it also is relevant for offenses against human leaders and followers. Christian leadership fosters communities of people who forgive each other. Jesus said, "forgive and you will be forgiven" (Lk. 6:37). This admonition is part of the dynamic relational processes among members of a team fostered by Christian leadership.

What Is "Christian" About a Dynamic, Relational, Partnership Process?

At the beginning of the CLC definition, Christian leadership is described as "a dynamic relational process in which people . . . partner" (CLC, 2005). This idea parallels elements of non-Christian definitions of leadership. For example, according to Centerpoint for Leadership, a non-sectarian organization, "Leadership is a dynamic relational process of influencing the thinking, behavior, and actions of others toward a shared purpose" (Grey, 2005). Similarly, one of the insights of feminist research is that "relational leadership is dynamic" (Regan & Brook, 1995, p. 103). This overlap of Christian

and non-Christian definitions suggests this question: What is "Christian" about the dynamic, relational, partnership processes of Christian leadership?

Each of the leader-follower synergies discussed in this article is a dynamic, relational, partnership. On the side of the initiative of the Holy Spirit, Jesus referred to conversion as a new birth through the Spirit without which one cannot enter the kingdom of heaven (Jn. 3:3, 5, 6). As Matthew expressed the thought, "Except you be converted . . . you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3).

The concept of conversion, or new birth, is relevant to the debate concerning whether leaders are born or made. Some researchers suggest that leaders are partly born and partly made (Drucker, 1986; Goleman, 1986; Kouzes & Posner, 1987). Christian leaders are made through the new birth in the Spirit (Ford, 1991).

> Effective spiritual ministry flows out of being, and God is concerned with our being. He is forming it. The patterns and processes He uses to shape us are worthwhile subjects for leadership study. Those who study [these] patterns and processes, and use insights from them in life and ministry, will be better prepared leaders. (Clinton, 1988, p. 18).

Dynamic, relational partnership in conversion is evident on the side of the human response in repentance. Conversion is a unilateral or arbitrary act of the Spirit. As the apostle Peter preached, "Repent and be converted that your sins may be blotted out" (Acts 3:19). The relation between conversion and repentance is dynamic. Repentance is directly related to the reception of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38), to the adding of persons to the Church (Acts 3:41, 47), and to the maturing of members of the Church. Paul writes this to a divided church: "I travail in birth again until Christ is formed in you" (Gal. 4:19).

As implied above, Christian leaders are not only born; they are born into a Church community (Clarke, 2000). This corporate result of conversion-repentance is relevant to the strong move in leadership circles toward team-development. Lessons learned with teams on the sports field (Gangel, 1997; Parcells, 1995) have produced much of the creativity that we see in the high-tech field (Klopp, 2004, p. 135). Similarly, an important strategy for Christian leadership is developing genuine team ministry and team leaders. Some elements of such a strategy are evident in Paul's reference to the Church as "the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12), which, although flawed, is called to model the ways in which dynamic relationships among different persons may manifest an ever-growing unity in diversity. To this end, we must "endeavor to keep unity of the Spirit" (Eph. 4:3) "till we all come

into the unity of the faith" (Eph. 4:13). Each member is a team leader in harmony with the chief leader who is Christ. This is how we "grow up into Him . . . who is the head, even Christ; from whom the whole body increases, fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplies, according to the effectual working of every part" (Eph. 4:15-16).

Christian team leadership also has worldly relevance. "It is God's will and purpose to gather all things in heaven and earth in Christ who is head [leader] over all things to the Church, which is His body" (Eph. 1:9-11, 22-23). "Unto Him [Christ] be glory in the Church in all ages, world without end" (Eph. 3:21). As we shall discuss in the next section, like Christ, Christians are servant-leaders to the world.

What Is "Christian" About Christian Servant-leadership?

The concept of servant-leadership is presented in the CLC definition in terms of "serving others by leading and leading others by serving" (CLC, 2005). It is important to note that some non-Christians also practice a leadership model that is described as servant-leadership. Robert Greenleaf, a Quaker Christian, presented servant-leadership as a model that works in the non-Christian world (Malphurs, 2003, p. 21). As a result, the Greenleaf Center for Servant-Leadership defines the term without any reference to Christ:

> Servant-leadership is a practical philosophy which supports people who choose to serve first, and then lead as a way of expanding service to individuals and institutions. Servant-leaders may or may not hold formal leadership positions. Servant-leadership encourages collaboration, trust, foresight, listening, and the ethical use of power and empowerment" (Greenleaf Center, 2005; Greenleaf, 1977, 1991).

Greenleaf's definition provokes the question, What is 'Christian' about Christian servant-leadership? The answer is implied in the biblical teaching on the third Spirit-initiated leader-follower synergy of consecration-obedience. Only those who follow God's lead as servants are qualified to be leaders. The leadership initiative of consecration persuades and enables those who are led by the Spirit to follow God's lead by the practice of obedience. Consecration (or sanctification) prepares human beings for righteous actions. Such persons are "elect . . . through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience" (1 Pet. 1:2). The same point is emphasized in another Bible text: "As you have always obeyed . . . , work out your own salvation . . . because it is God who works in you both to will and to do his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12-13). Christian leaders delight in the leadership of God (Klimes & Klimes, 1977). "Leaders are responsible for influencing specific

groups of people to obey God. They will not achieve this unless they them-selves know how to obey" (Klopp, p. 109). Christian leaders must "lead with a follower's heart" (Habecker, 1990).

The Bible also makes explicit that servant-leadership is connected with Christ-centered, Spirit empowered consecration-obedience. The Apostle Paul presents servant-leadership as a "consolation in Christ" and a "fellow-ship of the Spirit" (Phil 2:1). He writes, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who . . . took . . . the form of a servant, and . . . became obedient unto death" (Phil 2:5-9). God does not call all his leader-followers to give up their physical life as part of their consecrated obedi-ence. However, He does call us all to "present our bodies as a living sacri-fice fully acceptable to God" (Rom. 12:1). We do this because, in harmony with the mind of Christ, our minds are "renewed" so we may know and follow or obey the "will of God" (12:2).

In reaction to the concepts of "obedience till death" and "living sacri-fices" (Carson, 1993), even Christians sometimes question the relevance of servant-leadership, because they view it as powerless. It is important to note that servant-leadership is not weak leadership. Servant-leadership redefines leadership and redefines service: "it is serving others by leading and leading others by serving" (CLC, 2005). Servant-leaders serve as well as lead. They are "focused, intentional, and proactive" (Clinton, 1988; cited in Klopp, 2004, p. 84).

Paul encourages those whom he leads to "follow me as I follow Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). Many individuals . . .

> are trying to lead based only on the servant side of the servant-leader model. Why is that? Jesus was willing to serve and give his life for his fol-lowers, but he also had a plan and a strategy for what he wanted to do with his disciples. His strategy was not to get up every morning, turn to his disciples, and say, 'I have no idea of what we should do today, so what do you think? What would you like to do?' Jesus exemplified in perfect form how to be both a servant and a leader. (Klopp, 2004, p. 39-40)

In fact, servant-leadership leads to greatness for the leader as well as for those who are led. Jesus said, "The one who would be first or chief should be the servant of everyone." He adds, "Many that are first will be last, and the last first" (Mk. 10:44, 31; cf. 9:35). This is demonstrated in the case of Christ. Because He humbled Himself,

> God also has highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and in earth, and under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Phil. 2: 9-11)

This thought brings us back to the issue of cooperating with God's leadership through obedience. Jesus said, "Why do you call me Lord while you refuse to do what I say?"(Lk. 4:46). Fortunately, Christ is the model for Christian servant-leadership, and He provides the power to practice it: "We are buried with Him [Christ] by baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). "All His biddings are enablings" (White, 1900, p. 333).

When Christians contemplate the challenges and sacrifices involved with servant-leadership, it is reassuring to recognize that leadership is not an end in itself. It is a means to an end. Servant-leadership is relevant because it is consecrated and obedient to God's ultimate purpose for the world.

What Is "Christian" About Partnership to Achieve a Common Goal?

Let us now examine the aspect of the CLC definition that describes Christian leadership as a "partner[ship] to achieve a common goal" (CLC, 2005). As with other aspects of the CLC definition, this one parallels non-Christian definitions. Most non-Christian leadership researchers would agree that the considerable time and effort required to find real partners inside and outside one's institution who share the same goals is well worth the endeavor (Linsky & Heifetz, 2002). Therefore, it is important to ask this question: What is "Christian" about Christian leadership as "a partnership to achieve a common goal"?

The partnership aspect of Christian leadership may be illuminated by the fourth leader-follower synergy initiated by the Holy Spirit. The Bible highlights the purpose and process of Christ-centered, Spirit-gifted confirmation-perseverance in terms of waiting and ministering until the end and until the perfecting of unity in Christ: "The testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: so that you come behind in no gift [of the Spirit while] waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless" (1 Cor. 1:5-8). The gifts of the Spirit equip leaders (Eph. 4:6) "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come into the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect person, unto the measure of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:11-12; cf. 1 Pet. 4:11).

Encouragement in pursuing the high standard of confirmation-perseverance may be found through focusing on Christ. We are to "run with patience the race set before us looking unto Jesus . . . who for the joy that

was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12: 1-2). Additionally, Christian leaders should not expect absolute perfection from themselves or from those they lead. A progressive attitude constitutes Christian perfection. Paul wrote, "I don't count myself to have attained perfection. This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching toward those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded" (Phil. 3:12-15). Ironically, when we Christians think that we are perfect, we are not; when we acknowledge that we are not perfect, we are perfect in Christ.

Some people have questioned the relevance of Christian leadership by suggesting that the focus on God's ultimate purpose makes Christian leaders so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good (McIntosh, 2000). In response, it is important to point out that perfectionism does no good on Earth or in heaven. Even "in heaven we are continually to improve" (White, 1900, p. 331). This perspective is compatible with leadership research on the importance of measurable and dynamic goals that can change (Riley & Louis, 2000). Anyone who expects to attain absolute perfection is engaged in mere rhetoric. At the same time, nothing releases organizational energy, generates creativity, and satisfies human beings, as does a meaningful goal! It is important, therefore, that Christian leaders develop the ability for goal re-orientation along a path of continual progress. Theological absolutes never change, and philosophical purposes seldom change. We need dynamic long-range objectives and short-range goals. In addition, we need to change activities or methods in order to achieve flexible objectives and goals under the umbrella of absolutes. Goals are valid if they are definitive, inspiring, embraced by the group, and useful for choosing suitable activities. People do not have difficulty achieving realistic goals; they have difficulty setting them (Hendrix, 2000).

The relevance of the Holy Spirit initiative of confirmation-perseverance is evident when the various goals of Christians are viewed as stages along the way toward God's ultimate purpose for the world. God's plan is for the universe to be the context for divine fellowship with all His creatures (1 Cor. 15:28). In Romans, Paul announces that "those who are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God" (Rom. 8:14). He then develops the theme of perseverance in light of God's glorious purpose for the entire world.

> The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. . . . The creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glori-

ous liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation
groans and labors with birth pains together until now. (Rom. 8:18-19,
21-22)

This biblical personification of the desire of the non-human creation for
the Spirit-led children of God calls for Christian leaders to recognize the
relevance of a new field of research on the ecology of leadership (Edginton,
1997).

Conclusion

In this article, I have begun to answer the question, What is "Christian"
about Christian leadership? The qualitative investigation in this article
needs further development through ongoing dialogue with other leadership
researchers. Clarification of specific implications for leadership formation
and behavior is also needed. Doing so would build on research already
begun at the CLC and elsewhere. Additional quantitative research projects
are also needed to evaluate the effectiveness of the actual implementation of
such insights.

The meta-leadership dialog with theology suggests that the Christ-
centered leadership influence of the Holy Spirit is relevant to the world in
which we live. The dynamic, relational, partnership process of Christian
leadership includes relations between Christ and the Church, among the
members of the Church and between the church and the world. In addi-
tion, the posture of Christian servant-leadership, as modeled by Jesus, is
progressively manifest in the Church for the benefit of the world. The flex-
ible goals of Christian leadership are stages along the way to God's eternal
purpose for the ecology of the world.

Through the Holy Spirit, Christian leaders are commissioned to coop-
erate in the divine-human synergies of conviction-confession, conversion-
repentance, consecration-obedience, and confirmation-perseverance. They
are to foster dissatisfaction with the status quo, redirection of perspectives,
empowerment, long-term motivation, and flexible short-term action plans.
In this way, Christian leaders also foster synergy among human leaders
and followers. They inspire responsiveness on the part of followers. The
leaders lead and the followers cooperate. At the same time, Christian lead-
ers are responsive to those whom they serve. Christian leaders lead with a
follower's heart.

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