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BRINGING CHRIST TO THE TABLE OF LEADERSHIP: MOVING TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF LEADERSHIP

Abstract: The church's leadership experience spanning the centuries places it in a unique position to contribute to leadership studies. Any contribution should grow out of the development of a theology of leadership. Consideration of that development should be informed by general leadership studies while uniquely drawn from its faith. Its primary elements should include a Scripture-based, God-governed, Christ-centric reflection on the use of the gifts that the Holy Spirit has empowered all believers with in order to accomplish His mission in and for the world. A theology of leadership must constantly balance the biblical narrative and contextual application. This leads to both ecclesiology and practical leadership being advanced simultaneously. Research can be furthered through greater analysis of both scriptural and historical leadership contexts.

Keywords: *ecclesiology, theology of leadership, leadership theory, practical theology*

Christianity, at its deepest essence, is a practice of followership. The final command of Jesus before bodily leaving this earth was to go and make disciples. It should come as no surprise, then, that despite historically renowned political, educational, cultural, industrial, artistic, and familial leaders (including both the laudably beneficial and the fatally detrimental), Christianity has done little to develop a theology of leadership. However, if theology is, as Stone and Duke (2006) suggested, "faith seeking understanding" (p. 7), then the application of revealed truth to every aspect of the human experience is necessary. Since it is clear from Scripture that to be primarily followers of Jesus does not exclude the practice of leading others (Acts 1:20; 15:22; Rom. 12:8; Heb.

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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 maintained that an exegesis from Scripture of a theology of leadership might

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).

Frank (2006) illustrates well the danger of starting with the wrong fundamental question. General leadership theory first establishes a determination of desired outcomes. For the most part, in the American context, this results in measuring sales, acquisition, and stock prices. Thus, the definition of leadership has often become linked to measurable growth. When researchers uncritically integrate such definitions into a Christian theology of leadership, it is quite possible that financial growth, constituent growth, or a combination of both in facility growth become the indicators of success. Such a leadership paradigm need never ask whether spiritual growth and maturity reflective of Jesus has been accomplished. However, this focus on asking “why” in the development of Christian leadership leaves the researcher in a conundrum. As Frank so eloquently puts it, “Who would write let alone read a book about a stable, small company providing a useful service through the hard work of lifetime employees? This is not the sizzle that sells” (Frank, 2006, p. 118). While thousands of small churches have successfully influenced in meaningful and noteworthy ways the families and communities where they are planted, they are small and thus nearly

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 local communities. It is important to balance the sometimes culturally-driven rather than biblically-driven leadership practices that can occur in larger congregations with the vital insights into leadership application they have provided Christian theologians.

Cohn (1993) provides an example of the type of integration that can exist between general leadership theories and Christian leadership. He refers to Michel’s social leadership theory, which states that even in democratically based organizations, eventually power will rest in the hands of one or a few holders. This is neither inherently bad nor unacceptable to the rest of the organization. Michel’s point is simply that organizational groups would naturally tend towards this outcome. The application, as Cohn points out, has been useful in understanding ecclesial leadership. Specifically, when the members see the church leader as an indispensable component of the church, as having significant avenues of influence, and that there are no other similarly competent individuals capable of filling in the role of the leader, then Michel’s social leadership theory will become active in churches. Cohn shows that ecclesial research suggests this is a common occurrence in churches. However, Cohn provides a case study of a church in which not all of Michel’s prerequisites for oligarchic leadership existed and yet the leader maintained a large degree of power and influence. Though there were peripheral factors at work to offset the oligarchic structure, Cohn identifies the strong membership requirements of the church (no effort to recruit, difficult to obtain, and freedom for dissatisfied members to leave) as a primary factor reversing Michel’s theoretical structure development. Given the approach of Jesus to discipleship (including few efforts to recruit [John 7:3-9], difficult expectations of followers [Matt. 10:34-39], and freedom for dissenters to leave [John 6:60-67]), there seem to be truths here that Cohn has unearthed that dig out deeper realities than what Michel perceived apart from Scripture.

An interesting biblical example of this theme is the story of David

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 God. Those outside of a scriptural environment often misinterpret this rule of God as the church's attempt to recapture its political power and enforce its moralism on unwilling participants. However, a scriptural understanding of the rule of God looks nothing like this picture. Instead, God as Lord follows a Romans 13:1-2 model, where the church recognizes the appropriate authority vested into governments of this world (and, naturally, other authority structures) while at the same time recognizing the greater authority of God in matters of sovereignty (Shaw, 2006). This emphasis on the rule of God within Christian leadership will necessarily be rooted in the recognition of the deity of Jesus (Koenig, 1993). This viewpoint is a natural outworking of the follower taking on the role of servant to Jesus the King (Mark 9:35). The deity of Jesus and the follower's relationship to Jesus requires a position of servanthood. However, the requirement of a Christ-centric, God-governed leadership returns to the final command of Jesus—make followers of Jesus who are taught to live as He lived. Since Jesus Himself came not to be served, but to serve (Mark 10:45), it is the same for His followers. It is perhaps here that a clear distinction can be made between general leadership theories and a theological leadership. In Greenleaf's (1977) proposal of leadership, his book's subtitle defines its intended outcome—legitimate power and greatness. Though Jesus is certainly imbued with both power and greatness—as are also, by extension, all those who are in Jesus—it is not for the purpose of power and greatness that He came. Thus, any leadership theory that has as its outcome power and greatness is necessarily going to be at odds with the purposes of Jesus (Koenig, 1993). This christological, God-governing element becomes foundational to all the other elements that are identified in the literature.

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).

Clark (2008) provides a helpful summary of these elements necessary to develop a theology of leadership: (a) a promotion of faithful discipleship; (b) a correlation between theology and general leadership studies; (c) placing theology within a context; and (d) a constant reflection and development of theology (pp. 15-20). These are best illustrated in Acts 6 with the choosing of the seven deacons. The decision of the

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 (2002), who uses the development of the Quakers as an example of orthopraxy taking precedent over orthodoxy. Clark (2008) also follows a doing-first approach, though he uses a cyclical model: practice-informing-theology-informing-practice. Similar to the approach of the Quakers in identifying practice as the starting point, both Clark and Collins suggest that as we act in faith we will learn God's will.

Of course, as already noted, context becomes important. The context of Beeley and Britton's (2009) approach is in the modern 20th- and 21st-century American milieu of obsession with leadership definition and systematization. Within such a context, and granting the wide opportunities for general leadership research to unbiblically influence Christian leadership, it is not a surprise to see Beeley and Britton taking the approach that ecclesiology must drive leadership theology. However, in the very different context of the late 15th and early 16th centuries, where a heavy-handed state church attempted to impose its theological aims with some degree of hypocrisy, it is not a surprise to see the Quakers that Collins studied place a greater emphasis on the practice of leadership and allowing it to influence its development of ecclesiology.

Both of these approaches, viewed from a distance, probably seem like two ends of a spectrum. The outcome of Dunn's (2004) research on Cyprian of Carthage recommends a middle ground in the question of whether leadership drives ecclesiology or vice versa. "Heresy is to orthodoxy what schism is to orthopraxy.... What one believes and how one acts are intricately interwoven" (Dunn, 2004, p. 551). Perhaps an even more helpful approach is that taken by the German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher. His approach to theology was such that, by

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 philosophy of theology and the practice of leadership.

What all this suggests is that in different contexts different approaches to the integration of the practice of leadership and the theology of ecclesiology are going to be used, but they can and should never be separated. An ecclesiology that causes devolution of leadership does not reflect Christ, but neither does a Christian leadership that morphs the church into anything other than the bride of Christ. For a practical example of this being pastorally applied in real circumstances, one can turn to Swart's (2008) research. Discussing the role in leading social change in Africa that goes beyond liberation theology, Swart (2008) provides an excellent model of questions to ask to make sure that theology and practice are both balanced (1 and 2 can be switched depending on contextual emphases):

1. "What can the church do?" seeks to understand praxis.
2. "What should the church do?" focuses on the theological foundation and motivation for involvement in the societal changes.
3. "What have non-ecclesial studies contributed to this situation?" assists in shaping both the possibilities of praxis (What seems to have worked in the past?) as well as theology (Did they work because of pragmatism or because they were a part of God's truth reflected in creation?).
4. "Will the answers from 1-3 work practically within this context?" clarifies contextual fit.
5. "How can we promote this ideological/paradigm change?" is a natural outgrowth of the preceding steps.

Ecclesial involvement with the reduction and eradication of poverty and exclusion within the African context was pursued, given the theological and praxis parameters that had been established, allowing the church to be a leader in these areas. Swart's (2008) material is strongly recommended for more specific details.

Thus, the dichotomy between philosophy and practice, or ecclesiology and leadership, really ought not to exist. Though certain contexts will

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 sphere or not.

Ironically, this is where the term "theology" has a way of sneaking into the conversation. For the Christian, what is desired is not simply a leadership theory or theories that have been deemed sacred. Rather, leadership is to be an expression of faith within the political, academic, corporate, media, artistic, familial, and ecclesial spheres of influence within every culture. The overarching question, then, is "How do we understand faith to be expressed in these leadership contexts?" If Stone and Duke's (2006) definition of theology as "faith seeking understanding" (p. 7) is accepted, then the question can be put even more simply: "What is our theology of leadership?" The answer to that question will necessarily include the leadership examples from Adam's dominion in the garden (Gen. 1:26) to the reigning of the saints in eternity (Rev. 22:5). Additionally, Christians are able to draw from the history of the church and its leaders. Combined, these are a treasure trove of leadership case studies!

In a world where it is necessary for Christians to exhibit greater and greater interpersonal, organizational, and societal leadership, this is a pursuit that cannot be relegated to a future generation or the back pages of systematic theology after the "important theological material" is well expressed. As deeply as Christians have attempted to understand the nature and ministry of Jesus, they must also understand what impact His death, resurrection, and ascension have upon every vocation of life, including leadership. Such a theology of leadership would at times be counterintuitive. However, its strength would lie in its long and diverse historical support. Any such development of a theology of

leadership will not only contribute to general leadership theory and benefit the ongoing work of thousands of churches around the world, it will ultimately subsume leadership where it belongs—under the submission and rule of Jesus the King.

Endnote

¹For the sake of this article, general leadership theory is all leadership theory that does not have Scripture, church history, and/or Christian theology as its primary basis.

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