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## From the Co-Editor

Joshua D. Henson, Ph.D.  
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On behalf of Regent University's School of Business and Leadership and the editorial board of the Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership, I thank you for supporting the journal.

This issue continues our mission of exploring, engaging, and extending the field of knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon of leadership as found within the contexts of the Hebrew and Christian scriptures. The growing conversation on emotional intelligence as central to effective leadership served as a catalyst for our latest issue.

This short issue serves as an exciting transition for the *Journal of Biblical Perspectives* as we will begin a leadership transition in 2025. I want to offer a special thanks to Dr. Carlo Serrano for his long-time work as co-editor of JBPL. As his work as president of Manna University must be priority, Dr. Serrano has stepped aside as co-editor. He has been an invaluable leader and resource for the journal.

I will also begin my transition out as co-editor of JBPL in 2025. I have been blessed to serve on the editorial team for the journal since 2017; however, the priorities of my schedule and responsibilities now require fresh vision and leadership for JBPL. I am grateful for the leadership and engagement of Dr. Doris Gomez. She and I look forward to working together to ensure that JBPL continues to be a platform for biblical Christian leadership scholarship for the Regent community.

Grace and peace in the name of Jesus Christ.



## The Editorial Board

Representing a diverse group of scholars in biblical, social-science, historical, and leadership studies, the JBPL editorial board aims to provide a much-needed multi-disciplinary and global perspective on current research and interest in Biblical perspectives in the study of leadership. Each member of our diverse editorial board has been selected because of their published research, practical experience, or focused interest in exploring leadership within the Christian Scriptures and its application in the many varied contexts worldwide. To contact the editorial staff, please send an email to [jbpl@regent.edu](mailto:jbpl@regent.edu).

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## Operationalizing A Christlike Leadership Competency Model: Being and Doing What is Right and Just

Linda Silver Coley

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Remembering that God chose Abraham to direct future generations to “keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just” (Gen. 18:19), so that all nations would be blessed through him, as God promised. And, reflecting on Jesus, the offspring of the promise, *Christlike leadership competency* is conceived and constructed. The unique three-dimensional model incorporates relational leadership competency and executional leadership competency. These two dimensions of leadership, which are important in any leadership domain, were operationalized, empirically tested, and validated in the business sector. After respecifying these two existing dimensions of leadership to integrate theological perspectives, a central third dimension is introduced, defined, and specified to reflect leadership under God’s authority. This third dimension is labeled *humble, passionate, leadership obedience*. It captures unique tangible and intangible aspects of *being* and *doing* what is right and just, like Christ did. All three dimensions of Christlike leadership competency capture both the *property* of being a leader and the *process* of doing leadership work. Its multidimensional and multidisciplinary conceptualization consider the Word of God, extant leadership theory, and words from Christian leaders. Christlike leadership competency is the envisioned antecedent to social innovation outcomes to uplift “the least of these” (Matt. 25:40).

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### A Call to Be Righteous and Do Justice

#### Premise

Upon calling Abram (Abraham) into leadership, the LORD promised him, “in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 12:3 NRSV).<sup>1</sup> God later said to him, “I am God Almighty, walk before me and be blameless” (Gen. 17:1). Adding, “I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you and kings will come from you” (Gen. 17:6 NIV). Contemplating about whether to hide a judgement decision concerning the

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<sup>1</sup> All Scripture references are NRSV unless otherwise noted.

destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah from Abraham, God confirmed, “Abraham will become a great and mighty nation” (Gen. 18:18), “and all nations of the earth shall be blessed through him” (Gen. 18:18 NIV). Remembering God’s plans for Abraham, God decided not to hide the planned destruction from Abraham, revealing that Abraham was

“chosen. . . , so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just, so that the Lord may bring about for Abraham what he has promised him” (Gen. 18:19 NIV).

Thus, all generations after Abraham are expected to obey the directive “[. . .] to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice” (Gen. 18:19). The generations after Abraham include Abraham’s children and theirs; Jesus Christ and his followers; and all “families of the earth” (regardless of nationality, race, sex, or class), “not only in this age but also in the age to come” (Eph. 1:21). Said another way, all people then, now, and those to come, especially those who claim faith in God in the name of Jesus, are linked to the directive governing the promises of God. Case in point, God also said to Abraham, “I will establish this covenant between me and you, and your offspring after you throughout their generations” (Gen. 17:7). Certainly, the “offspring” of God’s covenant with Abraham is Jesus Christ (Gal. 3:16).

Christ walked blamelessly before God. He obeyed the directive governing God’s promises. Then, to ensure continual, multigenerational obedience from all nations, Christ directed his followers to “make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20). Therefore, today’s Christian leaders and followers, who confirm their inheritance in the kingdom of God through faith in Jesus (Gal. 3:15-28), are also called to “walk blamelessly before” God (Gen. 17:1). They are expected to be and do “[. . .] righteousness and justice” (Gen. 18:19) and to teach followers to obey Christ’s commands<sup>2</sup> (Matt. 28:20).

## Purpose and Perspective

This project is foundational towards operationalizing *Christlike leadership competency* as a latent construct<sup>3</sup> to provide a renewed focus and a framework for understanding the theology of leadership through the lens of obedience to God’s directive through Abraham to “keep the way of the Lord by doing what is right and just”

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<sup>2</sup> At least fifty commands of Christ have been documented in the Gospels. The Scriptures are: Matt. 4:17, Matt. 4:19, Matt. 5:12, Matt. 5:16, Matt. 5:17-18, Matt. 5:24-25, Matt. 5:29-30, Matt. 5:37, Matt. 5:38-42, Matt. 5:44, Matt. 5:48, Matt. 6:1-18, Matt. 6:19-21, Matt. 6:33, Matt. 7:1, Matt. 7:6, Matt. 7:7-8, Matt. 7:12, Matt. 7:13-14, Matt. 7:15, Matt. 9:36-38, Matt. 10:16-20, Matt. 10:26-28, Matt. 11:15, Matt. 11:28-29, Matt. 15:4, Matt. 16:6, Matt. 18:10, Matt. 18:15-17, Matt. 18:21-22, Matt. 19:6-8, Matt. 20:26-28, Matt. 21:13, Matt. 21:21-22, Matt. 22:19-21, Matt. 22:37-38, Matt. 22:39, Matt. 24:42-44, Matt. 26:26-27, Matt. 26:41, Matt. 28:19, Matt. 28:20; Luke 6:38, Luke 9:23, Luke 12:15, Luke 14:12-14; Luke 24:49, John 3:7, John 14:15, John 21:15-16, John 21:19b.

<sup>3</sup> A latent construct is theoretical. It cannot be seen directly and therefore it cannot be directly measured. However, items (such as humbleness, integrity, or character) can be captured and measured at level one, to operationalize the latent construct, which will unfold, anticipating testing via structural equation modeling.

(Gen. 18:19 NIV). Operationalizing a latent construct generally means defining its observable and measurable components or specifying its expected behavior.

Ultimately, the Christlike leadership competency construct is envisioned as the antecedent<sup>4</sup> in a network of variables driving innovative outcomes that address today's social issues, including poverty (e.g., Prov. 19:17), oppression (e.g., Ps. 9:9), and injustice (e.g., Micah. 6:8). Or, as Mike Ayers (2018) might say, driving innovative solutions that “yield some benefit to that which matters to God – namely people” (p.15). All people matter to God. Notwithstanding, God singles out the importance of “the least of these” to God, identifying them as “members of my family” (Matt. 25:40). God's family need leaders who model Christlike leadership competency, by being and doing what is right and just, demonstrating the credibility, integrity, and character that Christ modeled.

Conceptualizing and operationalizing a theology of leadership to drive outcomes that matter to God is a very important spiritual and conceptual assignment. Offering insight into the spiritual and conceptual dichotomy that motivates the operationalization of Christlike leadership competency, Glibert R. Rendle (1998/2014), in *Leading Change in the Congregation*, says:

But [a theology of leadership] is not only a spiritual issue. It is a conceptual issue as well. [. . .], for ideas and the way we use language are extremely powerful tools. . . Ideas and language provide a focus and a framework for our understanding. [. . .]. The power of ideas and of language to help us understand or to limit our understanding should not be underestimated (p. 51).

The spiritual leadership issue addressed here is requisite obedience to the Word of God, namely to Jesus Christ. Obedience is linked to the promises God made to Abraham, requiring all generations after him to “keep the way of the LORD by doing righteous and justice” (Gen. 18:19). Specifically, Christian leaders are governed by biblical principles and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, the “offspring” of God's covenant with Abraham (Gal. 3:16). Thus, the exemplars of obedience to God by Abraham and Jesus are relevant to today's church leaders. The conceptual issue centers on developing a theology of leadership model, rooted in Scripture, grounded in leadership theory, and informed by practice, that captures the language and image of *being and doing* as Christ commanded of “those who love” Him (John 14:12-24).

Christian leaders have adopted several leadership models and theories over the years. However, many of those models and theories aim primarily to explain some best habits and practices of today's organizational, political, church, and community leaders. Nevertheless, most capture only one feature of Christlike leadership. Some of the most notable leadership theories and concepts include: 1) Adaptive leadership theory, which was introduced by Ronald Heifetz (1994) and further co-developed with his colleagues at Harvard University (Heifetz et al., 2009). This theory emphasizes the importance of flexibility, resilience, and the ability to embrace change when leading complex

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<sup>4</sup> An antecedent is any variable that precedes a response variable. So, in a network of variables in this context, Christlike leadership competency would precede (or cause) the response or the outcome that matters to God.

organizations in modernity; 2) Ethical leadership is a concept which focuses on moral integrity and ethical behavior, and it emphasizes leading by example (cf. McManus, et al., 2023). Ethical leadership aligns well with several biblical principles of leadership; 3) Relational leadership theory is a people-centric approach, related to “interpersonal trust,” focused on leader-subordinate exchange (cf., Brower et al., 2002, p. 227); 4) Transformational leadership theory empowers people to be positive change-makers, inspired by big vision and a common purpose (cf., Bass 1995); and 5) Servant leadership, coined by Robert K. Greenleaf (1970), is a popular leadership theory in today’s Christian leadership conversations. It is based on the idea that a leader’s primary role is to serve others.

There are many biblical leaders whose leadership traits, styles, skills and/or behaviors could be described in part by one or more of the mentioned contemporary leadership theories. Even so, those leaders also demonstrated theologically unique leadership competencies that are not captured by current models. The most striking are obedience to God and faith in the promises of God. For example, this truth can be explained by keeping with the biblical leaders introduced in the premise, Jesus and Abraham.

First, Jesus’ obedience to and faith in God goes without question and is documented throughout the Gospels. Still, confirming this to make the point here, consider that Jesus, obeying God, came down from heaven to do God’s will (John 6:38; Heb. 10:7). He demonstrate righteousness and justice (Rom. 3:21-6), endured His crucifixion, and accepted death on the cross (Matt. 27:35, John 10:17-18) to save humanity (Gal. 1:3-5). Jesus had faith that on the third day He would rise again (Matt 16:21), and He did. Jesus’ obedience to God’s commands and faith in the promises of God are unparalleled.

Second, Abraham demonstrated obedience to and faith in God when at the age of seventy-five, at God’s command, he left the land he was familiar with and started a new life in a strange land (Gen. 12:1-4). Abraham also demonstrated faith in and obedience to God when he prepared to sacrifice his only son Issac (Gen 22:1-9), while still believing God’s promise that many nations would come from him (Gen. 17:6).

In summary, biblical leadership implies that followers of Jesus are accountable to God, not man. Thus, motivated by faith in God, they must align their will with God’s will. Christian leaders are expected to hear God’s word and obey God’s word, (cf., Luke 11:28, 1 John 5:3), as they abide in Jesus’ love (John 15:10-14). These are not secular leadership concepts. They support the need for a unique Christlike leadership competency model.

This methodology integrates extant leadership theory, which is relevant in any context, with unique biblical principles of leadership to operationalize a three-dimensional Christlike leadership competency model. This conceptualization of leadership for God’s church understands that some principles of biblical leadership, that are important to leadership in God’s kingdom, simply do not map well into contemporary leadership theory.



## Insight from Theologians, Practitioners, and Scripture: “Being and Doing What is Right and Just” Like the Word of God

### Theological Perspectives

#### *Christian Leadership Authors*

The works of several Christian leadership authors and practicing theologians were consulted to add credibility and perspectives that might govern this proposed *being and doing* like Christ conceptualization. For example, Kevin Mannoia (1996), author of *The Integrity Factor*, argues that “it is [a leader’s] responsibility to pursue a balance between identity [, being] and activity [, doing]” (p. 37). In James M. Kouzes’ & Barry Z. Posner’s (2017) edited book, *Christian Reflections on the Leadership Challenge*, contributor John C. Maxwell quotes Fred Smith (1986), who said “Leadership . . . is both something you are and something you do,” and Maxwell calls Smith’s seminal words “profound” (p. 47). Ken Blanchard et al., (2016) in *Lead Like Jesus*, remind leaders through James 1:22 that “we are encouraged to be ‘doers of the word,’ not merely ‘hears’ of it.’ In other words, we must move from *being* to *doing*” (p. 210). Finally, in *Power to Lead*, Ayers (2018) echoes, “For as we look at the Bible and history, we see that leadership is not only something that God *does*; it is by nature who he *is*” (p. 5).

Towards a theology of leadership, Russel L. Huizing (2011) advocates “starting with . . . exegeting an image of leadership from Scripture” (p. 58). Thus, this project began by exegeting an image of Abraham’s call to leadership, which revealed a requisite obedience clause, beyond his call. Obedience, beyond Abraham’s call to leadership, is linked to the leadership of Jesus Christ (Gal 3:6) and to Christ-followers to whom Jesus said, “if you love me, you will obey my commandments” (John 14:15, GNT).

#### *Theology Scholars*

Douglas A. Campbell (2020) urges such theological retrospection and alignment of Old and New Testament Scripture, before offering practical solutions, “when navigating the challenges of any context, including the especially astringent [leadership] challenges offered by modernity” (p. 741). The challenges of seeking a practical solution towards operationalizing Christlike leadership competency are evidenced by the questions driving this project, which are, “What does Christlike leadership competency look like?” “How is it actualized in a framework for practical understanding in modernity, for those who are called to lead God’s church, ‘at such a time as this’ (Est. 4:14)?” “What are the properties (attributes) and processes of Christlike leadership competency in God’s economy?”, and “Beyond secular leadership, what might a multidimensional leadership model look like that captures biblical principles, creating a unique dimension of leadership that operationalizes being and doing like the Word of God?”

Remembering, as Robert W. Jenson (2016) highlights in *A Theology in Outline*, that “God create[d] all things by divine speech” (p. 4), addressing these questions,

began with “exegeting an image of leadership [through words spoken by God] from Scripture” (Huizing 2011, p. 58). The image of leadership in this assignment focused on the words spoken by God to Abraham and the Word of God, who is Jesus. In addition to words from Scripture, the answers to the questions posed are also informed by words from decades of leadership theory, and insight from the published words of diverse contemporary practitioners who write about Christian leadership. This methodology was used to establish a common leadership language across sectors, while identifying unique Christian leadership language to inform model development. This idea recognizes that while contexts may differ, competent leadership embodies a common language. Informing this methodology, Ayers (2006), in *Towards a Theology of Leadership*, crediting Paul Edwards (1967) with the idea, offers “that attempting to coverage and integrate different concepts and disciplines of study begins with developing a common language” (p. 8).

## **Leadership Words from Theory and Practice**

### ***Words from Leader-Trait, -Style, -Skill, and -Behavior Theory***

The words from leader-trait, -style, -skill, and -behavior theory found in a literature search among leadership scholars and authors between the 20th century, such as Jago (1982) [note: Jago analyzed Byrd (1940), Gibb (1947), Jenkins (1947), Mann (1959), and Stogdill (1974)], and 21st century, including Kouzes & Posner (2002, 2017) and Peter G. Northouse (2004) are shown in Table 1.

To establish a common leadership language, the 20th century and 21st century leadership and leader behavior words in leadership theory, which are captured in Table 1, were juxtaposed with those same words mentioned by Christian leadership authors. The authors whose Christian leadership books were reviewed to map onto leadership language across sectors are respected practitioners, educators, and consultants on Christian sector leadership. Identified in Table 1, the authors are male and female; African, Asian, and European Americans. The authors have diverse denominational affiliations, leadership contexts, sociocultural worldviews, and positional leadership experiences. Kouzes & Posner (2002) add perspective to this procedure saying, “Words matter. . . Words send signals, and, if you listen intently, you may just hear the hidden assumptions about how someone views the world” (p. 57).

While the literature review of leadership concepts is extensive, the cross-cultural, interdenominational, male and female list of Christian authors is not exhaustive. Therefore, the list of uniquely biblical leadership words in Table 2 is not exhaustive. That is, many known words used by biblical leaders and today’s Christian leaders (e.g. resurrection, Holy Eucharist) are not captured in the practitioner word list, but they are considered when operationalizing Christlike leadership competency. Still, it is important for generalization of the proposed concept that the list of Christian authors represents a diversity of leadership contexts.

Specifically, the diverse set of authors include 1) an African American female leader, who served as bishop, in a male dominated culture. She wrote *Not Without A Struggle: Leadership Development for African American Women in Ministry* to teach the

next generation of young women how to lead with excellence in a culture where they might be considered different (Mckenzie, 1996/2011); 2) an European American male who wrote *Leading Change in Congregations* to offer leadership advice and training amidst “shifting paradigms” while “facing changes not only in our congregations, but in our families, our work places, our government, and our schools. . .” (Rendle, 1998/2014 p. 3); an Asian American male who, as stated on the back cover of *Invitation to Lead*, leads in “predominately white and multiethnic contexts” (Tokunaga, 2003); 4) a curious award-winning two-man university research team, referenced earlier, who were troubled by the perception that leadership is only about “people at the top” and who “wanted to know what people from all walks of life and all levels of the organization did to get extraordinary things done” (Kouzes & Posner, 2004, p. 1); 5) an European American “prominent speaker and author” who is regarded as “one of the most influential leadership experts in the world” as captured on the back cover of *Lead Like Jesus* (Blanchard et al., 2016); and 6) an European American female who, as stated in the preface of *How to Lead When You Don’t Know Where You are Going: Leading in a Liminal Season* “has been consulting with congregations and their leaders for over two decades” (Beaumont, 2019).

**Table 1***Speaking a Common Leadership Language:**Leader-Trait, -Style, -Skill, and -Behavior Theory Words*

<b>Cross-Sector Leadership Language and Behavior Words</b>	<b>Mckenzie</b>	<b>Rendle</b>	<b>Tokunaga</b>	<b>Kouzes &amp; Posner 2004</b>	<b>Blanchard et al.</b>	<b>Beaumont</b>
Accountability	X	X	X	X	X	X
Authenticity / Authentic		X	X	X	X	X
Change Agent / Change Management		X	X	X	X	X
Charismatic / Charisma				X		X
Collaboration	X	X	X	X	X	X
Commitment /Committed		X	X	X	X	X
Communication / Communicate		X	X	X	X	X
Compassion / Empathy / Caring		X		X	X	X
Competence	X		X	X	X	X
Confidence / Self-Confidence	X	X	X	X	X	X
Courage / Risk Taking / Open to Failure	X	X	X	X	X	X
Credibility				X		X
Crediting Others / Recognition of Others	X		X	X	X	X
Decision Making		X	X	X	X	X
Encouragement	X	X	X	X	X	X
Emotional Balance / Emotional Intelligence	X		X	X	X	X
Empowerment / Power Sharing	X			X	X	X
Enthusiasm		X		X	X	
Faith	X	X	X	X	X	X
Focus	X	X	X	X	X	X
Influence	X	X	X	X	X	X
Innovation / Creativity / Reshaping / Imagination / Reinventing / Originality / Recalibration	X	X	X	X	X	X
Integrity / Character / Values	X	X	X	X	X	X
Interpersonal Skills / Sensitivity	X				X	X
Listening / Paying Attention	X	X	X	X	X	X
Mission / Purpose	X	X	X	X	X	X
Motivation		X	X	X	X	X
Passion	X	X	X	X	X	X
Problem Solving	X	X	X		X	X
Relationships / Relationship Building	X	X	X	X	X	X
Responsibility		X	X		X	X
Results / Implementation / Performance / Execution	X	X	X	X	X	X
Self-Discipline / Self-Control / Self-Awareness	X	X	X		X	X
Servant Leader / Humility	X		X	X	X	
Spirituality / Spiritual Discipline / Spiritual	X	X	X	X	X	X
Transformational / Transformation /Transforming	X	X		X	X	X
Trustworthiness (Trust)	X	X	X	X	X	X
Vision	X	X	X	X	X	X

Not surprisingly, this process also identified some theologically unique leadership language among the same practitioners. The findings are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Some Unique Leadership Language Spoken by Christian Leaders*

Unique Christian Leadership Language and Behavior Words	Mckenzie	Rendle	Tokunaga	Kouzes & Posner 2004	Blanchard et al.	Beaumont
Advocacy / Advocating /Advocate		X	X		X	X
Anointed / Anoint	X			X	X	
Attending (versus Advocacy) / Soul Tending	X	X		X	X	X
Authority (submitted to) / From God	X		X		X	X
Bless / Blessed / Blessing			X	X	X	X
Called People / Calling / Called to Ministry	X	X	X	X	X	X
Community	X	X	X	X	X	X
Contemplation / Contemplative / Contemplate	X		X		X	X
Discernment	X	X			X	X
Divine / Divinely Inspired	X			X	X	X
Encouragement / Encourage	X	X	X	X	X	X
Evangelism	X	X	X	X	X	
Faith in God	X	X	X	X	X	X
Fear / Fears	X	X	X	X	X	X
Followers of Jesus Following Jesus	X		X	X	X	X
Forgiveness		X	X	X	X	X
Generosity			X	X	X	X
Gifts from God / Spiritual Gifts / Talent	X	X	X	X	X	X
God's Agency / Agent of Grace	X	X			X	X
Grace	X		X	X	X	X
Gratitude			X	X	X	X
Heaven	X		X	X	X	X
Holy Spirit Lead / Holy Spirit	X		X	X	X	X
Hope	X	X	X	X	X	X
Humanity / Human being	X	X		X	X	X
Humble / Humbleness	X		X	X	X	X
Jesus	X	X	X	X	X	X
Joy			X	X	X	X
Justice	X	X	X	X	X	X
Judgement / No Judgement					X	X
Liminal / Liminality			X			X
Loneliness / Lonely			X	X	X	
Love / Love-based Leadership	X	X	X	X	X	X
Mercy		X	X		X	X
Ministry / Missions	X	X	X	X	X	X
Moral / Morality		X	X	X	X	
Obedience	X	X	X	X	X	X
Ordained	X	X	X	X		X

Peace	X		X	X	X	X
Power (of God / Divine)	X	X	X	X	X	X
Prayer / Pray	X	X	X	X	X	X
Prophetic / Prophecy	X	X		X	X	X
Remembering	X	X		X	X	X
Repentance			X	X	X	
Security	X	X	X	X	X	X
Self-Sacrifice / Giving (Sacrificially)	X			X	X	X
Servanthood / Servant / Service to Others	X	X	X	X	X	X
Solitude			X	X	X	X
Surrendering (vs Striving)		X			X	X
Truth Telling / Truth Tellers	X	X	X	X	X	X
Vision from God	X	X	X	X	X	X
Wisdom from God	X	X	X	X	X	X

### **Common Leadership Language Application of Biblical Leadership Practices and Modern Leadership Practice**

The Bible is a relevant source for demonstrating multidisciplinary leadership practices in modernity. Briefly, Table 3 supports with Scripture that common leadership skills and behaviors, practiced in today's cross-sector contexts, were operationalized centuries ago by biblical leaders.

**Table 3***Common Leadership Language Operationalized in Scripture and Practiced in Modernity*

<b>Common Leadership Language</b>	<b>Biblical Practices (supported with Scripture)</b>	<b>Modern Leadership Practices</b>
Accountability	Leaders should be accountable and hold each other accountable. (e.g., Job 2:1-10; Ps. 51, 82; Prov. 28:13; Matt. 12:36-37; Rom. 2:12; 1 Cor. 12:26-27; 2 Cor. 5:10; Gal. 6:1-2; Eph. 4:25, 5:21; Heb. 13:16-17, James 5:16)	Meeting commitments responsibly and “owning” the outcomes and consequences.
Collaboration	Leaders work together in unity and harmony. (e.g., Ps. 133; Prov. 27:17; Eccles. 4:9-10; Matt. 18:20; Luke 3:10-11; Rom. 15:5-6; 1 Cor. 1:10, 12:4-7, 12:20-25; Eph. 4:11-16; Gal. 6:2, 6:9; Phil. 1; Heb. 10:24-25; 1 Pet. 4:8-10)	Team Building; encouraging teamwork and diverse perspectives to enhance productivity, ensuring a sense of belonging.
Courage	Leaders reject the spirit of cowardice, stay focused, and be strong and courageous. (e.g., Deut. 31:6; Josh. 1:6-7; 2 Sam. 7:27, 10:12; 1 Chron. 28:20; Ps. 27:14, 24; 1 Cor. 16:13, Ephes 6:10-11; Phil. 1:28)	Resilience; making tough decisions, facing adversity with an unwavering focus on purpose.
Credibility	Leaders “walk the talk.” There is evidence that they do what they say they will do, in the name of God. (e.g., Ex. 3:1-4:31; Josh. 1:7-9; 1 Sam. 17; Neh. 1-2; Dan. 6; Acts 2:14-41; 2 Cor 1:12)	Practicing what you preach; while making a recognizable and respectable positive difference, in the context of promised deliverables and spear of influence.
Encouragement	Leaders encourage and uplift others, fostering a safe and supportive environment. (e.g., Deut. 31:6; Josh. 1:9; Isa. 41:8-10, 43:2; Matt. 6:31-34; John 16:33; Rom. 8:28, 15:4, 15:13; 1 Cor. 15:58; Phil. 4:13; 1 Thess. 5:11)	Practicing Emotional Intelligence; empathizing with others, managing, understanding, and positively using your emotions.
Integrity	Leaders make decisions that honor God, embodying trustworthiness and moral character in words and action. (e.g., Prov. 10:9, 11:3; Ephes. 4:25; James 1:22)	Ethical Leadership; upholding strong ethical standards, builds trust, earn respect.
Servant Leadership	Leaders serve others, like Jesus did, not exercising power over them. (e.g., Matt. 20:25-28; Mark 10:42-45; John 10:11, 13:1-17; Gal. 5:13; Phil. 2:3-11)	Servant Leadership; demonstrating humility and prioritizing the needs of others over self.
Vision	Leaders have a clear vision about their assignment from God. (e.g., Neh. 1-4; Isa. 6; Joel 2:28-32; Matt. 28:19-20; Luke 4:16-21; John 17:20-25)	Visionary Leadership; articulating a compelling vision for the organization or community.

Some of the more unique leadership language spoken by Christian leaders and operationalized in the Bible could benefit secular leadership practices. For example, one finding noted in the common language literature review is the use of the words *spirit*, *spiritual* or *spirituality*. These concepts were introduced into the business sector by

authors such as Maxwell (e.g., 1995 p. 5) and Kouzes & Posner (e.g., 2002 p. 66). In his cross-sector writing and teachings, Maxwell (1995, 2005) also used leadership related words, which were found in this search to be unique to Christian leadership practice, and not yet broadly adapted across sectors. Some of these words are *community* (e.g., 2005 p. 319), *discernment* (e.g., 2005 p. 286), *generosity* (e.g., 2005 p. 135), *gratitude* (e.g., 1995 p. 23, 2005 p. 227), *humility* (2005 p. 273), *servanthood* vs *servant leadership* (e.g., 1995 p. 23, 2005 p. 286), and *security* (e.g., 1995 p. 26, 2005 p. 286). Other unique words used by Christian leadership practitioners, that secular business leaders and scholars who teach leadership might consider adapting for utility across sectors are *forgiveness*, *grace*, *love of neighbor*, *solitude*, and *truth telling*.

In the next section, this common leadership language and unique Christian leadership language are integrated into the process of operationalizing Christlike leadership competency. First, leadership and competence are defined in the present context. Second, an empirically tested and validated leadership two-dimensional model which was operationalized in the business sector is introduced as the base model for the present study. Then, the proposed three-dimensional Christlike leadership competency model is introduced, defined, and specified. The step-by-step process specifies each level and each dimension of the model. This process is followed by a conclusion and detailed next steps.

## **Operationalizing Christlike Leadership Competency**

### **Grounded in Leadership Theory and the Competence Perspective**

#### ***Definition of Leadership***

Leadership is a complex construct with a myriad of definitions, theories, and perspectives. Its complexity is captured by David V. Day et. al., who cite Avolio, et. al. (2009) when they acknowledge that, “There is a relatively long history of leadership theory and research spanning more than a century” (2014, p. 64). Respecting the many definitions for leadership available for consideration, the seminal definition chosen to ground Christlike leadership competency in extant theory is contributed by Arthur G. Jago (1982) as published in *Leadership: Perspectives in Theory and Research*. He says,

Leadership is both a process and a property. The process of leadership is the use of noncoercive influence to direct and coordinate the activities of the members of an organized group toward the accomplishment of group objectives. As a property, leadership is the set of qualities or characteristics attributed to those who are perceived to successfully employ such influence (p. 315).

The *property* and *process* components of Jago’s definition make it a relevant choice for grounding the idea of “*being* and *doing* what is right and just” in extant theory. It works well because it recognizes that leadership is not a one-dimensional construct about being a leader. It is also about what leaders do. Additionally, this definition embraces dynamic interactions between leaders and followers, towards



“accomplishment of group objectives” Jago (1982, p. 315). This type of dynamics is also relevant in God’s economy, as leaders and followers of Jesus Christ interact to help execute God’s plan for humanity.

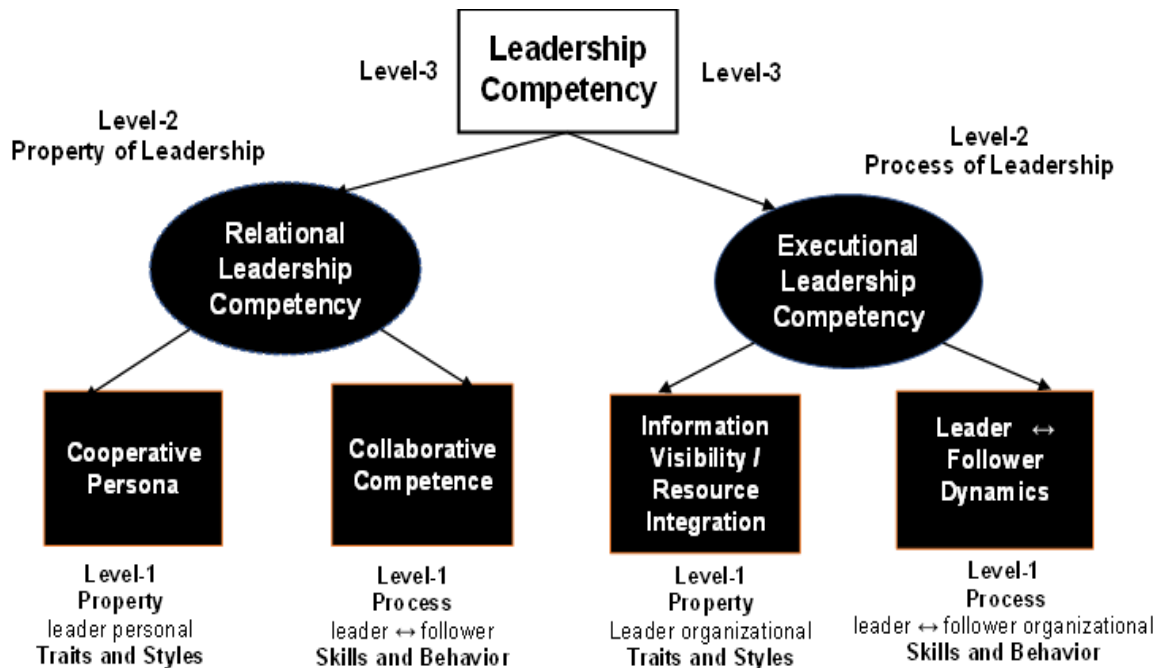
Furthermore, according to Jago (1982), and like Christ demonstrated, leadership "does not involve force, coercion, or domination [; and leadership] is not necessarily implied by the use of such titles as manager, supervisor, or superior" (p. 315). Similarly, leadership in God’s economy is not necessarily implied by the Christian church’s positional leadership titles such as bishop, pastor, or elder. I agree with Mannoia (1996) who says, “every Christian must accept the label of leader to the extent that he or she becomes salt and light to the world” (p. 27).

### ***The Competence Perspective***

While some 20th century attributes associated with leaders and reported by Jago (1982) were no longer noticed in the leadership literature after 1986 (e.g., *masculinity, dominance, sociability, extrovert, popularity, prestige, conservatism, talkativeness, socio-economic position, weight, and height*), competence is among the desired leader-attributes that have endured. **C. K. Prahalad and Gary Hamel (1990)** extended the utility of the competence perspective to a corporate level of understanding. They believe that a firm’s “core competence” can be leveraged to master innovative new ideas that fuel market place leadership (Prahalad and Hamel, 1990). However, the interest in this perspective as linked to the present work is the idea of “a harmonized combination of multiple resources and skills” (Schilling, 2013, p. 117). That is, the multiple resources and skills needed to inspire collaboration among congregations and communities to execute God’s will for God’s people. The idea is that Christlike leadership competency could be leveraged to drive social innovation at the community level of the ecology to benefit humanity.

### **Overview of the Leadership Competency-Based Model**

Kouzes and Posner (2017) explain, “Leadership competence refers to the leader’s track record and the ability to get things done” (p. 34). Earlier, Linda S. Coley (2004) integrated the competence perspective with the property and process elements of Jago’s (1982) leadership definition to operationalize the leadership competency concept for business purposes. She developed a model coined as supply chain network leadership competency to drive brand innovation. That model was empirically tested and validated among leaders in the global supply-chain network of a Midwestern, United States fortune 50 firm (Coley, 2004). Operationalizing the concept considered decades of leader-trait, -style, -skill, and -behavior theory. Christlike leadership competency is built from that model, identified in Figure 1 as the leadership competence base model.

**Figure 1***Leadership Competency-Based Model*

As shown, the base model has two dimensions and three levels. Coincidentally, the dimensions and levels of the base model were operationalized by integrating many of the common leadership words and modern leadership theories identified earlier in this article. Integrating theory signals both the complexity and universality of leadership. The complexity and universality of leadership support the need for multidimensional leadership models and multidisciplinary perspectives, respectively. The two dimensions at Level-2 of the base model were coined as relational leadership competency and executorial leadership competency. And both dimensions have the property and process components of leadership at Level-1.

***Relational Leadership Competency***

The relational leadership competency dimension of the leadership competency model captures an ideal leader's personal attributes. It has two Level-1 components labeled as *cooperative persona* and *collaborative competence*.

**Cooperative Persona.** This Level-1 component captures the leader's personal attributes such as character and integrity. According to Coley (2004), these properties help "to set the stage to create a transformational work environment, with . . . confidence in partners . . . [and] commit[ment] to a network's partner's goals" (p. 90). Other attributes captured are the leader's "ability to show trust . . . listen . . . value contributions of others, and . . . have the courage to do the right thing" (p. 90). As shown earlier in Table 1, these are common leadership attributes that are also relevant in the

church leadership context.

**Collaborative Competence.** This Level-1 component captures the leader's personal collaboration in the process of doing leadership work in a community, organization, or network. It is defined as

leadership skills and behaviors related to the task (vs. the trait) element of leadership; the ability of partners to dynamically collaborate with influence. This would suggest that the actors must respect a . . . partners' conceptual and technical skills; [and it] has two-way, leader ↔ follower connotations (Coley 2004 p. 92).

Also, according to Coley (2004) this dimension of the leadership competency model captures:

[the] dynamics [of] leadership ↔ followership processes that lead to exemplary results. This include leader-skills and leader-behaviors needed to accomplish work in a community, organization, or a network. It also has two Level-1 components, *information visibility / resource integration* and *leadership ↔ followership dynamics*.

### ***Executorial Leadership Competency***

The executorial leadership competency dimension of the leadership competency base model captures

[the] dynamics [of] leadership ↔ followership processes that lead to exemplary results" (Coley, 2004 p. 95). This include leader-skills and leader-behaviors needed to accomplish work in a community, organization, or a network. It also has two Level-1 components, *information visibility / resource integration* and *leadership ↔ followership dynamics* (Coley pp. 95-98).

**Information Visibility / Resource Integration.** This Level-1 component captures dynamic system-level leadership ↔ followership properties such as sharing vital information with chosen people. To explain, using the exegeted Scripture in the premise, God decided to share vital information with Abraham, concerning the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (instead of hiding this judgement from him). God decided to share this important information with Abraham because God had entrusted him with a major assignment that was vital for humanity in all nations then, now, and for generations to come.

The information visibility / resource integration component also include vital tangible and intangible resources needed to accomplish masterwork (Coley, 2004, p. 95). Informed by empirical business research, intangible resources may be more important to the process of accomplishing masterwork than tangible resources (Coley et al., 2012). Relatedly, Dotan Leshem (2016) says intangible Christianity assets are "its most important. . . assets" (p. 34). The intangible assets that Leshem (2016) is "referring to . . . [are in] that space within the world in which the divine appears as part of the

salvation economy” (p. 34), such as prayer, baptism, and the Holy Eucharist. Intangible resources also include faith, hope, discernment, and the Holy Spirit.

**Leadership ↔ Followership Dynamics.** The other Level-1 process component carries the label leadership ↔ followership dynamics. It is defined as

the ability to adapt unique capabilities of dynamic business processes / network goals, alternating who takes the lead and who is to follow based on capabilities. It suggests that the actors must respect a . . . partner’s conceptual and technical skills [when deciding who is to lead and who is to follow] (Coley, 2004, p. 98).

Next, building from this base model of leadership competence, Christlike leadership competency is defined and then operationalized.

## **Towards Operationalizing the Christlike Leadership Competency**

### **Overview**

First, towards operationalizing Christlike leadership competency, findings in Table 1 confirm that a common leadership language exists among secular leaders and Christian authors who practice leadership and/or train church leaders (e.g., character, integrity, commitment, trust, and courage). Furthermore, some of the same common language is linked to principles of leadership that were practiced by biblical leaders in Scripture (Table 3). These findings add support for adapting as the base model the empirically tested and validated leadership competency model (Figure 1), that also embedded this underlining common leadership language in its operationalization.

Even so, for Christian leadership adaptation, some of the theologically unique language found in Scripture and among Christian leadership authors in Table 2 (e.g., joy, peace, love, remembering, discernment, etc.) is added to the two existing Level-2 dimensions of the base model. This move recognizes that (a) the existing Level-2 dimensions are important in any leadership domain; but (b) theologically unique language is needed to define leadership in God’s economy.

Second, *cooperative persona*, a Level-1 component in the base model, is re-labeled as *credible persona* in the new Christlike leadership competency model. According to Kouzes & Posner (2004), “the most important personal quality people look for and admire in a leader is personal credibility” (p. 120). Although credibility surfaced as a word used in only two of the six books reviewed in this study-set, credibility is demonstrated throughout the Bible. For example, in Acts 3:1-6 Peter and John demonstrates credible persona when they met “a man lame from birth;” and Peter spoke the language of healing to him, identifying the credible source of his authority saying, “in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.” Credible persona is when one’s public image or the social role one adopts matches one’s actions. This act of healing was a public demonstration of healing in the credible name of Jesus.

“Jumping up [the man] stood and begin to walk [. . .] All the people saw him walking and praising God and they recognized him as the one who use to sit and

ask for alms. . .; and they were filled with wonder and amazement” (Acts 3:8-10).

Peter continued to demonstrate credible persona throughout his leadership in the early church (Acts 2:14-41).

Also, Abraham (Abram), being described in Scripture as a righteous man known to keep the way of the LORD (Gen 15:6), demonstrated credible persona. Remember what Abraham did when he realized that the land he was living on could not support both his family and Lot’s family, causing strife among the herdsmen. According to Scripture, when Abraham realized that he and Lot needed to separate, he gave Lot first choice of the available land and allowed him to have “the plain of the Jordan [, which] was well watered everywhere like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt” (Gen. 13:8-11). This was not only a show of credibility it also demonstrated self-sacrifice to benefit Lot’s wellbeing. Correspondingly, Kouzes & Posner (2004) says, “Leaders are selfless. Leaders sacrifice and by sacrificing, they demonstrate that they are not in it for themselves; instead, they have the interests of others at heart” (p. 124).

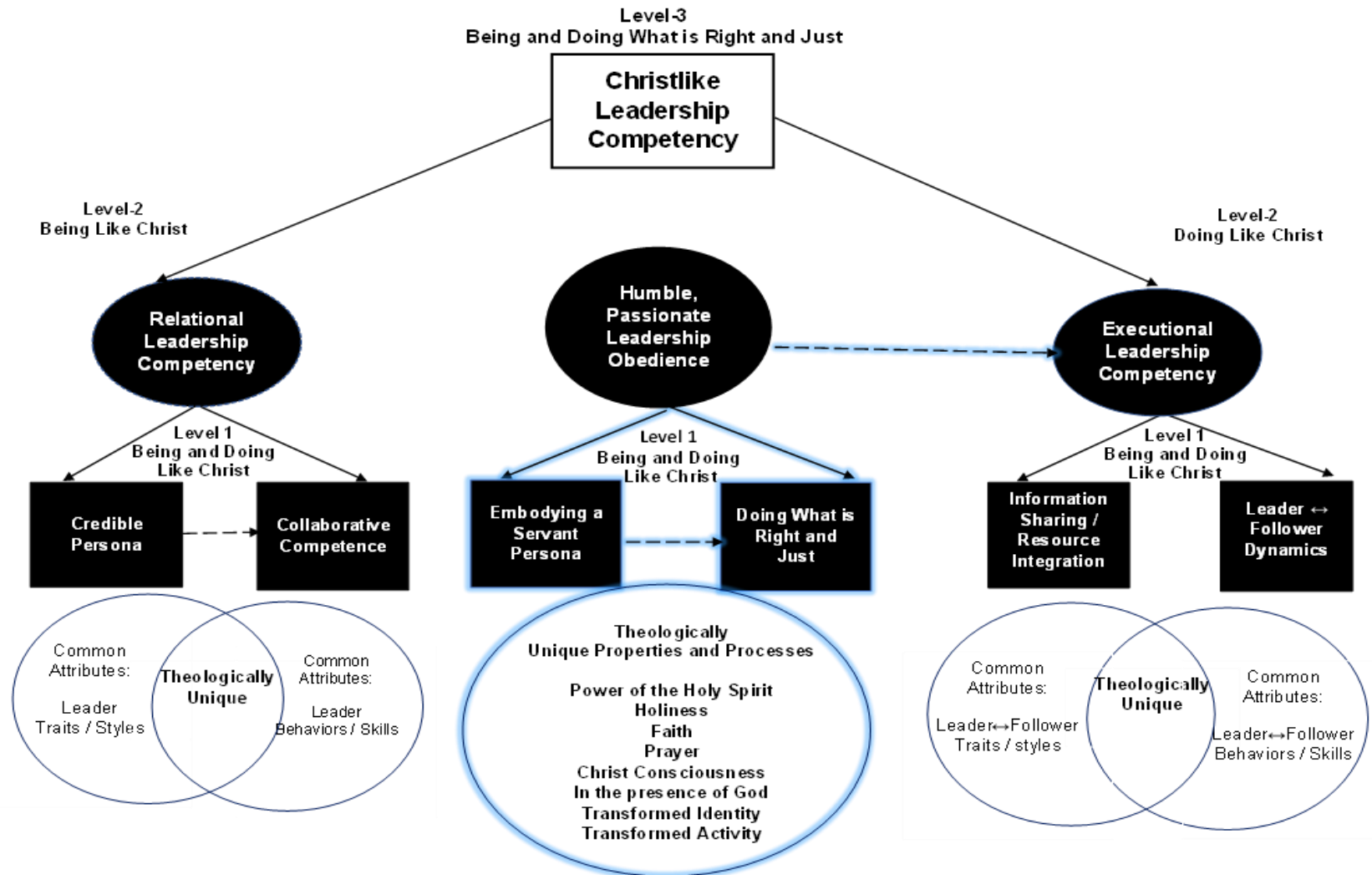
Third, a theologically unique dimension is added to the base model at Level-2 with the two original dimensions of the leadership competency base model. The third dimension is labeled *humble, passionate, leadership obedience* and it is placed in the center of the model to symbolize its predicted impact on the other two dimensions. Figure 2 shows the full conceptualization of the Christlike leadership competency model. Movement and the expected causal relationships are symbolized by the arrows.

To establish the intent of the central placement of this unique leadership obedience concept with the word *passionate* included in its label, we must not fail to remember the biblical account of the passion of Christ, His crucifixion (and resurrection), as reported in all four gospels (Mark 14-15, Matt. 26-27, Luke 22-23, John 18-19). Christlike leadership competency embraces the idea that, in addition to being relational and executing God’s call to leadership with excellence, Christlike leaders are required to be obedient to God and they just might endure suffering and sacrifice in the process of implementing God’s will. As to *obedience*, Blanchard et. al. (2016) offers,

When you choose God as the authority of your life, obedience to His Word is your standard. The first step in living out this choice is to return to Him the love He has shown us, and that means obeying Him. Jesus put it this way: “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. [. . .] Our obedience is born out of our love of God” (p. 78).

**Figure 2**

*Christlike Leadership Competency: Being and Doing What is Right and Just*



Fourth, as shown in the model in Figure 2, like the other two Level-2 dimensions, the new central Level-2 dimension has two Level-1 components: (a) *embodying a servant's persona*, which captures the leader's personal properties associated with being a servant leader like Jesus; and (b) *doing what is right and just*, which captures the leader's process of doing works as Jesus prescribed in John 14:10-12, while recognizing that the authority to do these works comes from God.

Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, because I am going to the Father.

These four moves explain the theoretical, physical, and Scriptural evolution of the Christlike leadership competency model. In the following sections, common and theologically unique leadership terminology is integrated to operationalize the Christlike leadership competency model at Level-3, then at Level-2, and finally at Level-1.

### ***Specifying Christlike Leadership Competency (at Level-3 of the Model)***

Theologically unique terminology is italicized (e.g., *authority from God*) in the box below, to set it apart from common terminology (e.g., authenticity). Common leadership terminology, used across domains and sectors, and theologically unique terminology are integrated in narrative following the text box (See Figure 3).

### **Figure 3**

#### *Christlike Leadership Competency (Level-3)*

#### **Level-3:**

#### ***Christlike Leadership Competency: Being and Doing What is Right and Just***

**Key Common and Theologically Unique Concepts** – authenticity, *authority from God*, *blessed*, *call*, *called to do God's will*, catalyst for change, character, commitment, communication, competence, courage, *crucifixion*, *disciples*, *divine*, envisioning, faith, *faith in God*, *Father*, *followers of Jesus*, *Holy Spirit*, *heaven*, *humanity*, *humble*, influence, integrity, *justice*, listening, *missional*, motivation, paying attention, *power of God*, *power of the Holy Spirit*, purpose, relational, relationship, *resurrection*, responsibility, *Son*, transformed, transformation, trust, trustworthiness, *the leadership gift*, vision, *vision from God*, *wisdom*.

**Integrating Key Common and Theologically Unique Terminology.** While some leader-traits, -styles, -skills, and -behaviors are common across secular and sacred domains, Christlike leadership competency understandably pivots away from typical leadership theory. It embraces the Holy Spirit's miraculous role as our helper

(John 14:26). Envisioning being led by the power of the Holy Spirit; it courageously breaks down barriers to address systemic evil in systems and structures. Christlike leadership competency recognizes that “no one can comprehend what is truly God except the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2:11b). Luke Bretherton (2019) offers insight for grasping this vision, of power given by the Son through the Holy Spirit, from the Father saying,

[Christ’s crucifixion,] the resurrection, and ascension unveil the deepest and only life-giving source of power: the power of the Spirit. The Spirit brings calm out of storms, health out of disease, and resurrection out of death. And at Pentecost, this *power* is poured out on all flesh so that all may have abundant life. By implication, at the most basic level of confession, Christians are to realize that the institutions and structures of this world, and those who rule them, while fearsome, are not in control and do not have the last word. Jesus is Alpha and Omega and, as Lord of the cosmos, relativizes and points beyond all human structures and authorities that shape our common life. His Lordship admits no other – there is only one, and this one is like no other – meaning that it defies and relativizes all other claims to rule (Deut. 6:4-5). Conversely, politics and economics neither exhaust nor explain what it means to be human; while bread is necessary to live, we cannot live by bread alone (p. 20).

**Christlike Leadership Competency is Relativized by the Complex Image of Christ.** Jesus was a complex leader with impeccable character acting with authority from God. He was masterful in the process of communicating God’s vision and intentions for this world, as related to the missional responsibilities assigned to his disciples, then, now and in ages to come. Jesus was relational. For example, he was a friend to Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (John 11:3-5). He also built relationships with social outcasts such as the Samaritan woman he met at the well as well as those other Samaritans who heard Jesus speak (John 4:4-42); and the foreign leper who returned to thank Him (Luke 17:11-19). And, through the Holy Spirit, Jesus continues to build relationships today with people such as you and me. He confirmed his everlasting relational intentions with us saying, “All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away” (John 6:37 NIV).

Jesus executed God’s plan for humanity with courage, integrity, and credibility. His credibility was enhanced through authenticity and problem solving, sometimes communicated through parables and manifested as miracles (Matt. 12:22-13:53; Luke 7:1-17). He was masterful at mending the broken hearted, ministering, and multiplying, as a role model to his disciples. He executed all with a reputation for competent leadership ↔ followership dynamics with his Father (Luke 22:42; John 6:38, 12:49-50).

Furthermore, Christ knew that his authority, relative to the evil in this world, was given to him from heaven (John 3:1-27). Therefore, he stood his ground with rulers that govern earthly systems and structures. Importantly, Jesus was a catalyst for change. He changed the narrative about poor and oppressed people in the global polity, by calling them “blessed” (Luke 6:20-23).



Sent to save humanity, he honored Abraham's multigenerational directive to do "what is right and just" (Gen. 18:19 NIV), so that "all families" and "all nations," including those in this present age and in ages to come, could be blessed. Jesus' vision for humanity is still being actualized. I agree with Blanchard et. al. (2016), "[I]f we want to lead like Jesus, we need to become more like Jesus" (p. 210). Thus, Christlike leadership competency, being and doing like Christ, is needed among leaders in this world today. Seemingly prophetic voices to the present work, Blanchard et. al (2016), also says, "In other words, we must move from being to doing. This shift is particularly important since we believe the next great movement in Christianity must be not just proclamation; it must be demonstration" (p. 210).

### ***Additional Level-3 insight from Scripture and Practitioners***

**Vision from God.** The term *vision* has both common and theologically unique connotations. Vision could be the direction envisioned by the leader for the future of the organization in both domains. Ideally, visionary leaders will involve their chosen followers, with whom they are in dynamic leadership ↔ followership relationships, when casting the vision for the organization. This is as God did with Abraham and Jesus, and as Christ did with his disciples when casting the vision for humanity.

There are also prophetic visions from God. A prophetic vision is unparalleled with any secular leadership concept. An example is Daniel's night vision of Jesus being led into the presence of God. The prophet declares,

In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all nations and peoples of every language worshiped him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed (Dan. 7:13-14 NIV).

**Called to Do God's Will.** As with Abraham, church leaders are said to be called by God, to do God's will. Being called by God to do as God wills is clearly a theologically unique concept. Ayers (2018), notes,

If there is any single distinction to biblical leadership, setting it wholly apart from every other definition, it is the notion that there is a God in heaven who calls forth individuals to go, lead, and make a difference in this world (p. 73).

Making a difference in this world, when called into leadership by God, is the opposite of building a self-willed or ego-driven leadership outcome. It is doing God's will to effect outcomes that matter to God, not to self. Jesus says, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). What is doing the Father's will, and what outcome does it accomplish? 1st Pet. 2:15 (ESV), says: "For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people." Then, what does "doing good . . . [and] . . . silenc[ing] the ignorance of foolish people" look like? What does the

LORD require of leaders called by God?” According to Micah 6:8 (ESV), “He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” Then what attributes does God want to see develop as to the persona, skills, and behavior of a Christlike leader, called to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God?

**Character Commitment, & Integrity.** Christian and secular leaders agree that a leader’s personal character and integrity are most important leader-traits. These common language concepts also align with God’s instructions upon calling Abram (Abraham), “I am God Almighty; walk before me and be blameless” (Gen 17:1 NIV). As to *character*, McKenzie (1996/2011) says, “Character is just as important as or more important than what a leader does” (p. 74). In addition, Mannoia and Walkemeyer (2007) opines, “Godly character is more valuable than good ministry skills. Both are important, but the lack of Godly character has far greater consequences” (p. 155).

Christian and secular leaders also agree that competence or competency is a very important leadership skill. Linking integrity, character, and competence, Ayers (2018) opines, “Just as integrity of heart (character) is vital to biblical leadership, so are skillful hands (competence).” Ayers (2018) supports his assertion with Ps. 77:72 (NIV), “And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them” (p. 38). Tokunaga (2003) captures the competency concept with the phrase “the leadership gift” (p. 70). Thus, as Huizing (2011) suggests we do, Tokunaga (2003) deflates the ego and brings Christ to the table through Romans 12 and Acts 1:20. Consequently, he rightly positions leadership as but “one of the handful of gifts needed [if] the body of Christ is to function well” (p. 71). This uniquely theological language, “Godly character” (Mannoia and Walkemeyer 2007, p. 155) and “the leadership gift” (Tokunaga 2003, p. 70), add insight into the attributes required of a Christlike leader.

Kouzes and Posner (2004) offer additional perspective by relating commitment to character and competence in the context of developing future leaders. They say, “After you have given critical tasks to the right people, your commitment as a leader is to develop their character and their competence [such as God did with Abraham and Jesus did with his disciples]” (p. 94).

**Trust & Trustworthiness.** The common language factors, trust and trustworthiness, are related closely to character, commitment, and integrity; and a lack of trust could affect perceptions of leadership competency among believers as well as unbelievers. The forward to *The Integrity Factor* (Mannoia, 1996), gives trust a unique theological significance in relation to a call to leadership in God’s economy. It reads, “To be chosen by God as a leader of integrity is our highest trust” (p. 11). Also, Rendle (2019) reminds the reader that part of leadership is “trusting in God’s agency” (p. 86). Like in the base leadership competency model (Coley 2004), and now considering theology’s use of the concept, trust is an important item in operationalizing Christlike leadership competency.

## Operationalizing Humble, Passionate, Leadership Obedience (Level-2): Embodying a Servants Persona and Doing What is Right and Just (Level-1)

Again, the theologically unique terminology (see Figure 4) is italicized (e.g., *authority from God*) in the box below, to set it apart from common terminology (e.g., commitment').

### Figure 4

#### *Theologically Unique Terminology*

**Level-2: *Humble, Passionate Leadership Obedience***

**Level-1: *Embodying a Servant's Persona (Being Like Christ)***

**Level-1: *Doing What is Right and Just (Doing Like Christ)***

**Key Common and Theologically Unique Concepts** – *authority from God*, commitment, *competing commitments*, consistency, credibility, *crucifixion*, *disobedience*, encouragement, enthusiasm, *faith in God*, *fearing God*, *forgiveness*, *grace*, *Holy Eucharist*, *honoring difference*, *humble*, *humbleness*, *humbling*, humility, *justice*, *love God*, *love your neighbor as yourself*, listening, mentoring, *obey*, *obedience*, paying attention, passion, *passion of Christ*, passionate,

The central dimension of the model in Figure 2, *humble, passionate leadership obedience*, personifies in “spaces where the divine appears [such as the Holy Eucharist]” (Leshem 2016, p.34). In addition to earlier justification for the central location of the obedience construct, Mannoia (1996) also lends support to the conceptualized central location as well as justification for one of its Level-1 components, *embodying a servant's persona*. He says, “Our identity as a servant of God is the center point around which our activity in ministry revolves” (p. 125). Blanchard et al. (2016) also lend support for the conceptualized central location of humble, passionate leadership obedience. They say, “obeying God and expressing His love is a central Doing Habit” (p. 210). However, obeying God and “abiding in His love” is also a central “Being Habit” (Blanchard et. al., 2016, p. 86). Thus, humble, passionate leadership obedience reflects two Level-1 components that capture being like Christ or embodying a servant's persona and doing like Christ or doing what is right and just.

#### ***Level-2: Insight from Scripture and Christian Practitioners.***

**An Obedient Leader Obeys the Called.** To obey God and to pledge obedience to those who are called into Christian leadership by God is another clearly theologically unique leadership notion found in Scripture (Heb. 13:17). There is virtually no secular leadership theory equivalent to the notion of obey as used in theology. In the English language, obey means “to follow the commands or guidance of, to conform or comply with” (Merriam-Webster). Children are expected to obey their parents. Military personnel

are expected to obey commanders; and followers of Jesus are expected to obey their leaders. For example, Tokunaga (2003) references obedience at the human authority level of God's economy, quoting Hebrews 13:17, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls and will give an account" (p. 82). While his point in *Invitation to Lead* is about being obedient to human authority, as it is rooted in Scripture (pp. 37, 57), there is no doubt that Tokunaga assumes that Christian leaders will first obey God. In the Bible, the term obey or obedience is primarily in reference to the leader's responsibility to obey God. Obedience "is a supreme test of faith in God and reverence for Him" (Bible Concordance, Bible Hub).

Having a purpose and taking responsibility are also common notions across leadership and theology domains. However, Ayers (2018) associates one's call to do God's will with one's purpose (p. 73) and he makes the theological distinction saying, "For the called leader there is . . . an obligation rooted in obedience to God [']s will]" (p. 91). He describes a theological purpose this way, "A call to lead is characterized as a unique prompting of God to be used by him to influence others in order to receive some kind of God honoring future" (p. 80).

**An Obedient Leader is Committed Beyond the Call.** One might ask, "Well, okay God, what do YOU expect after the call? God answers this question in Genesis 17:9 (CEV), commanding "Abraham, you and all future members of your family must promise to obey me." Hence, the commitment to obey God is not yet fulfilled, as obeying God is a continual, multigenerational responsibility, after the call to do God's will. Then, one might wonder, are disobedient leaders standing in the way of a commitment to mentor future generations of leaders to obey God?

An intention of the proposed theologically unique central dimension of Christlike leadership competency, is a commitment to bring obedience to God's will more directly into the leadership conversation among leaders called to do God's will when training the next generation of leaders. Beyond the call, missing from the conversation and from daily leadership practice are topics about a commitment to obedience and a commitment to mentor future generations to also obey the commands of Christ.

Extending the utility of the commitment concept Beaumont (2018) offers the idea of using "competing commitments" to intentionally provoke dissatisfaction when leading in liminal seasons (p. 142). She says, "When people acknowledge competing commitments, they are more likely to let go of stability, to discover new ways to satisfy more of what we value" (p. 143). The competing commitment with obedience to God's will in God's economy is disobedience or self-will.

Abraham loved God and continued to obey God's commands after obeying his call to leadership. Likewise, Jesus loved His Father. Therefore, He was committed to obeying His Father's commands after His call to leadership, even submitting to death on the cross. Furthermore, just before his physical departure from earth, still mentoring the next generation of leaders, Jesus advised his disciples, "If you love me, you will obey what I command" (John 14:15 NIV). The pattern of Christ becomes inherent, in the leader who is Christlike, over time through obedience. At a time, such as this, God's

church needs called leaders who show their love for God by obeying God's commands. The world needs leaders who do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God, embodying integrity and righteousness (e.g., Gen. 6:9; Micah 6:8; Mal. 2:6), while honoring Christ's greatest commands, which are: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37-39).

**An Obedient Leader Honors Differences.** Beaumont (2019) asks instructively, "So who is our neighbor?" (p. 118). She then teaches that a leader would need to answer that question by seeking "clarity of context" (p. 118). However, in any context, we can be sure that doing what is right and just, like Jesus did, is not just loving a traditional, homogeneous congregation (Beaumont, 2019); (Rendle, 1998/2014); (Tokunaga, 2003). Loving your neighbor honors differences, such as Jesus did with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4:4-42) and the foreign lepers (Luke 17:14-16).

Adding perspective about the idea of honoring difference, Rendle (1998/2014) speaks about a time to let go of tradition in congregations. He said, "We are in a cultural shift from a time of honoring 'sameness' to a time of honoring 'difference'" (p. 5). Considering this leader's insight, transforming congregations to honoring difference, and loving the neighbor that happens to be different, are important language that operationalizes Christlike leadership competency in today's context. This idea is linked by practitioners to Galatians 3:28, "for all are one in Christ Jesus."

No matter where the neighbor lives or how they are spiritually, mentally, economically, or emotionally challenged; no matter the race, sex, class, or nationality of the neighbor, they are all neighbors to be loved in God's economy, as Jesus commanded. To this point, Blanchard et al. (2016) models "Obeying God and Expressing His Love" at the center of community, grace, forgiveness, and encouragement (p. 210). Also, the resurrected Christ used all his authority in commissioning his disciples to obey his commands and to honor differences by including all nations in the scope of their missional discipleship charge, saying,

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you (Matt. 28:18-20).

**An Obedient Leader is Humble and Passionate.** While obedience to God is a unique, theological leadership term, both humility and passion are common language leadership terminology. The term humble is the adjective equivalent of the noun humility. Humility is identified as an ideal leader-trait among the 21st century research scholars who interviewed secular leaders [Kouzes & Posner (2002, 2017); Coley (2004)], and humility or humbleness was also identified among Christian leadership authors [i.e., Kouzes & Posner (2004, p. 71-72); Mannoia & Walkemeyer (2007, p. 19); Mckenzie (1996/2011, p. 145); and Toknaga (2003, p. 57)] as an ideal leader-trait.

In addition, Mannoia (1996) links humble to obedience saying, “Another step on the downward path to leadership patterned after Christ takes the form of humbling ourselves in obedience” (p. 69). Most Christian leaders would probably agree, and Scripture supports, that humbleness and obedience are intertwined leadership traits, that capture being and doing like Christ. A scriptural support is the much-quoted Philippians 2:8, which reads: “And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death even death on a cross!” However, relating obedience to being and doing like Christ is much more comprehensive and complex than simply being humble. It is also linked to being passionate. The term passionate is the adjective equivalent of the noun passion.

On the one hand, as mentioned earlier, passion is a common leadership word. In the secular context, passion is defined as a strong feeling of enthusiasm or excitement for something or about doing something (Merriam-Webster). Consistent with that common language meaning, citing their research, Kouzes & Posner (2004) informs us that, “People want leaders who are inspiring, upbeat, and energetic” (p. 124). In addition, Ayers (2018) mentions both a leader’s “God-given *passion*” (p. 110); as well as prescribes “full devotion and passion towards things that matter most” as part “of the character of a God-honoring community” (p. 194). In addition, guest letter writer for McKenzie (1996/2011), Rev. Martha Simmons offers African American women in leadership words of wisdom saying, “Those who succeed in ministry are anointed, well prepared and passionate. . . always open to hear and follow the voice of God” (p. 145).

On the other hand, Kouzes & Posner (2004) sees the significance of Christ’s suffering on the cross to save humanity to Christian leadership models saying, “When you look up *passion* in the etymological dictionary, you see that it comes from the Greek word for pain and suffering!” (p. 125). Thus, as to theology, Jesus’ death on the cross captures His passion as pain and suffering. Indeed, passion is captured in the story of Christ’s arrest, trial, and suffering, ending with his crucifixion and Christ’s passion should be remembered in theology of leadership models. Similarly, Christ’s resurrection is part of the theological unique story that should also be remembered in theology of leadership models. Beaumont (2019), referencing Miroslav Volf (2006) reinforces that “to be a Christian [leader] is to remember the death and resurrection of Christ” (p. 96). Beaumont reminds us that “when Christians celebrate Holy Communion through scripture, liturgy and song . . . they . . . recall the Passion of Christ [. . . and] ritually narrate the death and resurrection of Christ as events in which they are personally implicated and redeemed.”

Thus, *humble, passionate leadership obedience* is operationalized at Level-2 of Christlike leadership competency, capturing *being and doing* like Christ in a theological context. As shown, this Level-2 dimension reflects two Level-1 components: (1) *embodying a servant’s persona*, which captures the property of being like Christ, who “took upon him the form of a *servant*” (Phil 2:7 KJV) and (2) *doing what is right and just*, which captures the process of doing like Christ.

### **Level 1: Embodying a Servant's Persona and Doing What is Right and Just**

**Embodying a Servant's Persona.** Servanthood is a Christlike leadership property or attribute. Mannoia and Walemeyer (2007) suggest, "Effective pastors approach every relationship with the mind-set of a servant [like Jesus did]" (p. 81). At Level-1 of Christlike leadership competency, *embodying a servant's persona* is defined as a mind-set associated with emptying and humbling oneself in obedience to God. Notwithstanding, leaders who are called by God are expected to walk obediently and humbly before him. They are servants of God. For example, in the Old Testament Moses (Ex. 14:31), Samuel (1 Sam. 3:10), David (2 Sa 7:19 & 20), Job (Job 1:8), and the remnant of Israel (Isa 49:3) were referred to as servant(s) or else named themselves a servant of the LORD. Also, in Zechariah's fourth night vision, announcing a vision of a future leader that renounces Satan, he heard the words "I'm going to bring my servant, the Branch" (Zech. 3:8). Could this servant, the Branch, be the Messiah – Jesus Christ, who today's chosen Christian leaders say that they follow? Isaiah prophesied about a servant who would bring justice to the nations saying, "Here is My Servant, whom I uphold, My Chosen One, in whom My soul delights. I will put My Spirit on Him, and He will bring justice to the nations" (Isa. 42:1).

In the New Testament, according to Matthew 12:15, Jesus fulfilled the prophecy spoken through Isaiah. Does embodying a servant's persona capture a concept or property of being like Jesus? Yes, it does. Should a chosen servant leader in God's economy today work to bring justice to the nations, like Jesus did? Yes, the chosen leader should. Why? Because doing what is right and just is a multigenerational partnership of trust between God and God's chosen leaders, who called by God to make a difference in this world, today.

**Doing What is Right and Just.** At Level-I of the model, *doing what is right and just* is a holiness process. Being righteous and doing justice is a Christlike leadership process. Holiness denounces social injustice, as commenced by the Holy One (Isa. 5:6-29) and continued by Jesus. Thus, it focuses on continuing the work of bringing justice to the nations like Jesus did. Mannoia and Thorsen (2008) agree that "Holiness requires a response to the world's deepest and starkest needs" (p. 24). Today, the poor and oppressed among us, can "be blessed through [holy leaders, who do what is right and just]" (Gen. 12:3, 18:18, 22:18). Christlike leaders are "only those who actually do the will of God" (Matt. 7:21 NLT). They "love God" and "love neighbor as self" (Matt. 22:37-39). They intentionally follow the precepts of Jesus, "the offspring" of Abraham (Gal. 3:16) and honor Christ's commands in a missional pursuit to ensure multigenerational blessings and justice for all families in the world. This assessment builds from the evidence. Jesus chose to align himself with marginalized and disenfranchised people. He served and advocated for the hungry, the thirsty, the sick, the incarcerated, the oppressed, and those in spiritual, physical, and mental poverty; also, for strangers, such as immigrants.

## Conclusion

Leadership is complex. Jesus is complex. Therefore, operationalizing *Christlike leadership competency* is complex. Even so, the concept was operationalized by adding theologically unique language to a two-dimensional, empirically validated leadership competency model (Coley 2004). And then adding a theologically unique central dimension. The central dimension is labeled *humble, passionate leadership obedience*. The resulting three-level, three-dimensional latent construct captures *being and doing* what is right and just, like Christ did. The complex model was developed by first “exegeting an image of leadership from Scripture” (Huizing 2011). This guidance considered the leadership of Abraham and Jesus.

The model is rooted in Scripture, grounded in decades of leader-trait -style, -skill, and -behavior theory, and informed with insight from Christian practitioners who write about leadership. The model can be used to provide a focus and a framework for understanding, teaching, and demonstrating a theology of leadership based on being and doing what is right and just. According to Blanchard et. al. (2016) “if we want people to believe what we believe, we must behave differently than nonbelievers do” (p. 210). The proposed *Christlike leadership competency* model captures this sentiment.

## Next Steps

Developing a construct, linking it to extant theory, and empirically testing the concept for its effect on a predicted outcome is a multistep process. This article documents the first step in the process, which is the construction of the Christlike leadership competency, by defining the proposed construct. And, with the observables that operationalize the construct clearly identified, the next step in the process will be to develop a measurement instrument, considering the common leadership and unique theological leadership language mentioned in this study. Next, qualitative pre-tests and pilot tests will be conducted. Informed by these tests, data will be collected from a representative sample of church leaders, including lay leaders and members. This data will be analyzed using a statistical method such as factor analysis to assess internal consistency of the measures. The relational and executional leadership competency measures, identified as empirically tested and validated (Figure 1), but respecified in Figure 2 for utility in God’s economy, will be compared to the base model to ensure convergent and discriminant validity.

Once Christlike leadership competency is validated, it will be tested in a network of empirically tested variables using structural equation modeling and/or mixed effects modeling, depending on the level of analysis suggested by the pilot tests (Dionne et. al., 2014). This disciplined approach to construct testing and validity is confirmed by Jum C. Nunnally and Ira Bernstein (1994) who say,



Tests of internal consistency of observables come first and require many studies. The degree of construct validity reflects the extent to which the measures met the theoretical expectations (p. 91).

Christlike leadership competency is envisioned as the antecedent in a multidisciplinary network of expected relationships among variables, towards a Christian social innovation (Jones, 2016) outcome “that yield some benefit to that which matters to God – namely people” (Ayers, p. 5). This “network of expected relationships” thinking is also supported by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994) who say

Any immutable proof of the extent to which a measure defines a construct would have to come from determining how well the measure fit lawfully into a network of expected relationships. This pattern of results is often called a ‘nomological network (Cronbach & Meehl, 1955)’ (p. 91).

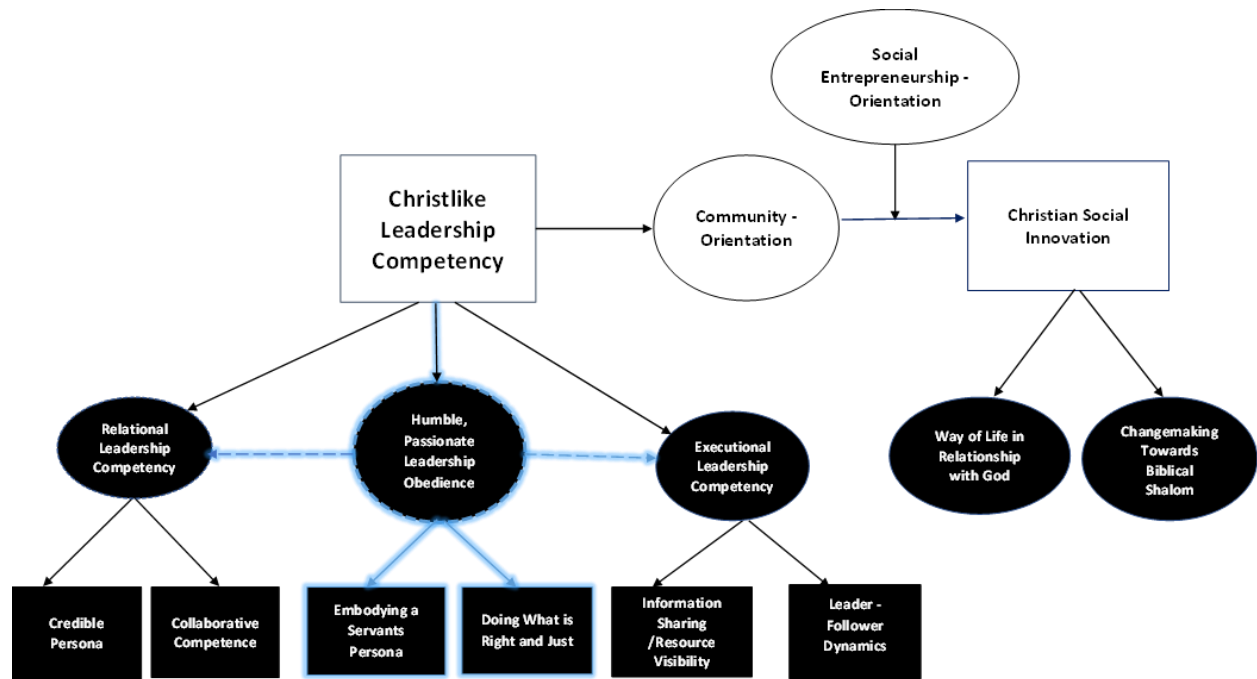
Previewed in the Appendix, the multidisciplinary network of expected relationships shows that an innovation outcome is predicted to be mediated by a community orientation variable (Figure 5). Community orientation was previously operationalized and empirically validated in the healthcare sector by Laura Muldoon et al. (2010). Relevant to this prediction, working with and within community was found in the present study to be an important leadership concept among Christian leadership practitioners. The church has long been an anchor institution in the community, seeking innovative ways to be a positive force in asset-based community economic development and positive social change (Coley et al., 2023). As shown in Figure 5, the relationship between the mediator (community orientation) and the outcome (Christian social innovation) variables is moderated by entrepreneurial orientation, which was linked to a performance outcome in a prior empirical study by G. T. Lumpkin & Gregory Dees (1996). A mediation variable accounts for the relationship between the antecedent and the outcome (Baron & Kenny, 1986). The moderating variable affects the strength of the relationship between the prosed causal link (Baron & Kenny, 1986).

The predicted variable relationships in Figure 5 are informed by the effect of leadership competency (Figure 1) on a brand innovation outcome, when empirically tested in a corporate global supply-chain network. The predicted relationships are also informed by observation and direct involvement of the author with over forty churches across North Carolina, South Carolina, and Virginia, who were/are engaged in developing social innovations towards thriving congregations and communities in their unique contexts

As conceived, Christlike leadership competency is the antecedent in a network of variables driving Christian social innovation, an outcome that matters to God. The relationship is mediated by community-orientation and moderated by social entrepreneurship-orientation.

**Figure 5**

*Christlike Leadership Competency*



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## About the Author

Linda Silver Coley's academic and professional interests' crisscross science, business, and theology. She is passionate about translating Christlike leadership competency, beyond the important and encouraging words heard from the pulpit into action. As executive director of the Ormond Center at Duke Divinity School, she works alongside clergy, congregants, and communities to help create relevant social impact solutions towards thriving congregations and communities.

Coley's leadership competence benefits from time spent in corporate America with the Procter and Gamble Company and Bristol Myers' Drackett; experience within the Academy serving as a visiting professor at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, an assistant professor at Miami University (Ohio) and a tenured associate professor and department chair at North Carolina A&T State University. Coley also owned Coley Marketing Management Company, which under contract with the United States Small Business Administration, helped to develop small businesses throughout the states of Ohio and Michigan. Her practical experience includes product, process, and program development; cross-boundary collaboration; entrepreneurship; and innovation. Coley's academic research employs structural equation modeling to test the effects of relational and executional leadership competency, reputation, tangible (intangible) resource equity (inequity), trust, and fairness on relationship continuity and innovation. She is adapting these business concepts to theology, towards Christian social innovation at the community level of the ecology.

A multidisciplinary scholar, she holds a Bachelor of Science in chemistry from Bennett College, an MS in pharmaceutical chemistry from the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor, an MBA in business administration from Xavier University (Ohio), and an MDiv from Duke University's Divinity School, where she also received certificates in Black Church Studies and Missional Innovation. Her PhD, in business administration, is from the University of Cincinnati. Coley is an ordained minister on staff at the Word of Truth Christian Fellowship church in Goldsboro, NC. Email: lcoley@div.duke.edu

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## **Guidelines and Guardrails for Christian Leaders Seeking to use Artificial Intelligence Ethically: Seeing Technology through the Eyes of Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

Ryan Duhon and Robert M. Kirby

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With history as our guide, tools used in the business world often find their way into being used in the Church, from printing presses to computers. Many expect artificial intelligence (AI) as a tool to be no different. Whereas companies are currently wrestling with questions about the ethical use of AI-focused around topics such as appropriate source attribution, creative and intellectual license, and plagiarism, the Church will naturally be pressed to answer questions about how AI can be used in a biblically informed ethical way. Given the nature of AI, the church will also be asked how this new technology might fit, implicitly or explicitly, into God's redemptive plan. This paper explores how church leaders might use AI and what guidelines and guardrails must be in place to maximize healthy use, minimize implicit and explicit misuse, and reduce or eliminate abuse. To guide our discussion, we draw motivation from the writings of theologian and pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who warned us that “we do not rule; instead are ruled [by technology]”. We seek to extend Bonhoeffer's insights regarding technology to the ethical leadership challenges regarding AI that the Church faces today.

*Key Words:* Leadership Model, Artificial Intelligence, Technology in Church

The world in general, and the Church in particular, has been adapting to technological advancements since the dawn of recorded history. One might argue that “recording history” is an example of one such innovation in a long string of advancements! The business world partitions consumers into five categories based upon their behavioral patterns and values: innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. They often then use these categories to design, for instance, marketing strategies with the goal of eventual “mass” adoption. In the end, most people (or their children) eventually avail themselves of technological advances. The Church is no different. From the codex onward through printed media, to the airwaves with radio and television, and now at the speed of light through the internet, the Church has tried to engage technology to fulfill its mission: “Go therefore and make

disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20).

Today is in some ways no different and in some ways is very different. The difference is not the need to adapt to technology, but instead the rate at which society (and consequently the Church) is being forced to confront and adapt to technological advancement. Futurist Ray Kurzweil, well-known for his commentaries on the exponential growth of technology in our age, has predicted that “the Singularity is near.” Kurzweil (2006) defines “the Singularity” as “a future period during which the pace of technological change will be so rapid, its impact so deep, that human life will be irreversibly transformed.” Although we as Christians would argue that *true transformation* only comes through the work of grace through faith, we might acknowledge that we are reaching another possible paradigm shift in the way we “do business” and “do church.” The technological advancement driving this paradigm shift is, broadly speaking, the rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies. Christian leaders are faced with a technology that, in many ways, is a tool to be used like any other tool God has provided. However, at the same time, AI is in some ways very different from any other tool that the Church has encountered – more like a “trainee” that not only accomplishes our bidding but also seems empowered to make decisions on our behalf. If AI were “yet another tool” in our toolbox to be used to increase our productivity by amplifying and extending what we as humans can do, then many of the ethical frameworks already in place would allow us to reason about its “responsible” or “ethical” use. Furthermore, many people do not feel constrained by the initial intended *telos* (ultimate aim) of a tool, but instead view tools as having characteristics that can be disassembled and reassembled to many possible ends. Viewed in this light, the ethical and societal issues surrounding AI find good company in those discussed about many 20<sup>th</sup>-century creations, from nuclear power to the internet. However, AI has, in some cases, moved beyond being a tool we wield to being an agent with whom we interact. AI now and in the future reflects, mimics, and even impersonates us as humans. When we say that our pets are like us and our children are like us, we are often being equivocal based upon category differences, but what in turn do we mean when we say that an AI

Agent is “like us”? Advances in computer science areas such as computer vision and natural language processing have now equipped AI to see, hear, and speak, but have we in turn also embedded into AI constraints encapsulating the Japanese maxim of the three wise monkeys: “see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil”? How should the Church respond? Given the nature of AI, the Church will also be asked how this new technology might fit, implicitly or explicitly, into God's redemptive plan. In this paper, we explore how church leaders might use AI and what guidelines and guardrails must be in place to maximize healthy use, minimize implicit and explicit misuse, and reduce or eliminate abuse. Our thesis is that the principal feature of ethical and moral leadership in the age of AI is *discernment*, and that Christian leaders are charged with not only considering if and when a tool should be used but also the impact its use might have on the sanctification process of one's followers. Following Kyle Fedler's (2006) outlook stated in his book *Exploring Christian Ethics*, we agree that “To be a truly good person, it is not enough that one simply does the right things; one must also feel the right way



and do the right things with the right motives and intentions. In other words, one must possess a certain kind of character". To guide our discussion, we draw motivation from the writings of theologian and pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who warned us that "we do not rule; instead, are ruled [by technology]" (Bonhoeffer, 2004). We seek to extend Bonhoeffer's insights regarding technology to the ethical leadership challenges regarding AI that the Church faces today.

Our paper is organized as follows: we will first briefly provide some of our theological presuppositions concerning Scripture and technology. We then will give a brief tutorial on the history and terminology associated with artificial intelligence. We highlight how AI is similar to previous technologies, as a tool, and how it is different, as a trainee. We then transition to exploring the goals of Christian leadership in light of technology, focusing on how servant and transformational leadership concern themselves with not only one's actions but also one's character development as we strive towards Christlikeness. We then examine technology through the eyes of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and those who followed after him, summarizing and amplifying Bonhoeffer's warnings about over-reliance on technology. We then seek to provide guidelines and guardrails for the Christian leader seeking to ethically use AI. We subsequently call out anticipated pitfalls and warnings to Christian leaders with the hope of sharpening their eye towards biblical discernment regarding AI. We then conclude with a summary of our work, conclusions that can be drawn, and our thoughts on future areas of exploration on this topic.

### Presuppositions

Regarding the Bible, we hold to the 1987 Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy (CSBI): "Holy Scripture, being God's own Word, written by men prepared and superintended by His Spirit, is of infallible divine authority in all matters upon which it touches: it is to be believed, as God's instruction, in all that it affirms: obeyed, as God's command, in all that it requires; embraced, as God's pledge, in all that it promises." When biblical analysis is required, we will employ the exegetical framework laid out and followed by Sailhamer (1995) in which we view the Bible through the decision-tree labels of *text*, *canon*, and a *confessional approach*. As relates to all the normative ethical statements made to believers, such as "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse" (Rom. 12:14), we hold that Paul is not encouraging human-generated action, but instead God-empowered action. We ground this in Paul's statements such as "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation" (Rom. 1:16) and "'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me," (2 Cor. 12:9) in which Paul grounds his power to act in God. To Paul, even 'self-control' is a "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:23). The necessity of this point will be made clear when we outline, following Kyle Fedler's book *Exploring Christian Ethics*, the outworking of a Christian ethical framework when applied to leadership.

There is a long history of studying the ethics of technology: from life-giving uses of technology (e.g., reproductive technologies) to life-ending technologies (e.g., technologies used in war) (Davis, 2004). The starting point of all these studies is an

acknowledgment that God is the source of innovation and providentially oversees its development and use: “Behold, I have created the smith who blows the fire of coals and produces a weapon for its purpose (Reinke, 2022). I have also created the ravager to destroy.” (Isa. 54:16). We agree with Thacker that “Technology is amoral but acts as a catalyst that expands the opportunities for humanity to pursue. It is not good or evil in itself but can be designed and used for good and evil purposes” (Thacker, 2020). However, counter to the secular humanists who hold that “technology can solve almost any problem,” we know that our fallen condition is a problem that humanity cannot resolve. Only God can atone for sins, only God can raise the dead, and only God can make a new creation. As David Ehrenfeld has said, “deep within ourselves we know that our omnipotence is a sham” and “our knowledge and control of the future is weak and limited” (Geisler, 2010). For the purposes of this study, it is important to appreciate that technologies amplify and channel animated power (Reinke, 2022). Lord Acton is credited with the saying, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” However, a recent study shows that power does not indeed corrupt; it “heightens pre-existing ethical tendencies” (DeCelles et al., 2012). Thus, as we will see, the role of AI in particular and technological change in general raises deeper questions. Following the Christian ethicist Oliver O’Donovan, we hold that “If a moral ‘issue’ has arisen about a new technique, it has arisen not because of questions the technique has put to us, but of questions which we have put to the technique” (Reinke, 2022). The question we are putting to the “technique” of AI is: What are the liberties and boundaries God has set on us when leading through rapid technological change? To start to address this question, we must first turn to discussing technological change.

### **Artificial Intelligence as a Technology**

In this section, we begin by providing a brief history and summary of the field of Artificial Intelligence (AI). Following the framework by, and borrowing text from, Emadi and Kirby (2024), we then present two facets of AI: AI as a tool and AI as a trainee. In the former, AI is similar to many previous technologies wielded by the business world and the church. However, as a trainee, AI is different from tools that have come before – taking on characteristics that are much more akin to a (human) mentee or assistant than previously encountered.

### **Brief Background of AI**

The challenge with any background section is deciding how far back to start the story. For AI, that challenge is no different. Should we start just within the last 100 years, with the advent of computing and post-WWII advances, or do we go further back into history and examine the history of algorithms and how we as humans attempted to encode tasks that we do? Regardless of its particular starting point or starting event, certain characteristics throughout history help guide us to where we are now.

One such origin story is to ground the history of AI and computing in general in the ‘analytical engine’ of Charles Babbage in 1837. Babbage’s ‘machine’ was a form of calculator that incorporated the idea of arithmetic logic units and flow control – the basic

building blocks in early computing. Fast forward 100 years, and we see in the decades prior to WWII, a “computer” was a person who computed. After WWII, a large plethora of research areas emerged, for example: nuclear physics, numerical weather prediction, and digital computing. During this time period, as (digital) computers were able to take on more and more “computing” tasks, the nascent computer science discipline started to ask at what point a computer might “appear” human. Many computer scientists point to Alan Turing’s 1950 paper entitled “Computing Machinery and Intelligence” as the start of AI when he posed the following question: “Can machines think?” The phrase “the Turing test” became known throughout the computer science field as the question of at what point could a human interact with an interface, asking it questions and engaging with it, in which the human could not tell whether he was dealing with a fellow human or a computer.

The field of AI as a subdiscipline arose in this post-WWII era as scientists engaged in an amplifying cycle of computing development, which increased the rate and flexibility of tasks that we could accomplish with computing with developments in our understanding and encoding of how humans think, learn, and interact with the world. In this area, the field of computer science broadly started its partition into specializations: architectures, programming languages, etc., and AI. In terms of computer science, AI is viewed as a technical sub-discipline of the broader computing disciplines. Machine learning is one component of AI but not the only component; in general, artificial intelligence attempts to answer the question of how we can replicate the actions of humans and the intelligence that drives those actions. In this way, we can consider artificial intelligence as a collection of fields within computer science: natural language processing, image processing, computer vision, machine learning, etc. Each of these fields contributes in different ways to the algorithms and techniques that we find under the umbrella of artificial intelligence. In the next two sections, we will discuss concrete examples of AI as a tool and AI as a trainee, and then highlight some of the temptations that arise due to these new technologies.

Reiterating Emadi and Kirby, implicit in the evaluation of many technological advancements of the past has been the view that technology is, at its core, a means of enhancing, extending, augmenting, and/or amplifying the things that we as humans do. The old adage of technology doing a task “better, faster, and cheaper” was in essence a statement measured against how we ourselves might do the task. However, AI is also different. AI also now has the potential to resemble, imitate, and even impersonate the things that we as humans do. There are many tasks that we as humans accomplish that we are willing to delegate to the tools we use. AI, however, has now moved into the realm of doing things that appear more human-like, such as communicating through language (e.g., ChatGPT). In short, the goal has become to “Think humanly, where the aim is to get a machine to think like a human. Think rationally, where the aim is to construct a machine that reasons in the best possible way. Acting rationally, where the aim is to build a machine that performs in the same manner as humans” (Coghill, 2023).

### **Treating AI as a Technological Tool**

The first vantage point from which to consider AI technologies is *as a tool* to be used. This is the category for which the use of AI has become both ubiquitous but yet subterranean. Given AI's ability to sift through data and infer both linear and non-linear patterns, it has found use in personalized medicine (e.g., automatic review and recommendations based on radiology images to find tumors), financial services (e.g., detection of fraudulent credit card activities), driver-assistance (e.g., cars that can now drive and parallel park themselves for you), recommender systems used for music and movies, and virtual assistants that understand and respond to voice commands. This is just a short summary of a long list of places where AI is already being used and benefiting our lives as a tool—something that accomplishes a task on our behalf. Many of these activities fit under the label of ASI: Artificial Specific Intelligence. This is the area of AI research in which we isolate a particular task or set of tasks and create an algorithm to accomplish that task. Over the past 50 years, computer scientists and engineers have made tremendous advances in developing ASI.

### **Treating AI as a Trainee**

The second vantage point from which to consider AI technologies is *as a trainee* to be engaged. These are AI algorithms that start to move beyond tasks that we delegate, but instead start to take on what we might consider attributes of humans, such as communicating. Although we have not reached the pinnacle of success in this area, we are moving towards what is called Artificial General Intelligence (AGI), which is AI that can perform well across a wide range of tasks. The general public was first sensitized to these ideas with the release of OpenAI's ChatGPT. Like with the original

Turing test, we now had an interface in which we could ask questions and it would answer "like a human." However, ChatGPT is not the only instance of this type of 'trainee' intelligence. We see it manifesting itself in tools that help you rewrite (or draft) your emails, and for those that are considered progressive, draft your sermons! If you could ask a good (human) assistant to do a cognitive (and possibly creative) task, there is now potential that it can be done by AI. Of course, how we might use AI in the research process is an ethical question that needs careful attention. Using AI as a research assistant is much different than delivering an AI-generated speech or sermon as though it were your own. Nonetheless, these issues highlight some of the more nuanced challenges and ethical questions we now face as AI moves from being an inanimate tool to a personalized trainee.

Furthermore, one of the challenges this mode of AI usage generates is that AI mimics the data on which it was trained. If that 'training data' contains inaccuracies, then the results predicted by the AI will be inaccurate. From the Christian perspective, if that training data contains biases that are a consequence of sin, then AI will also manifest the consequences of sin in a fallen world.

As we have seen, when we use the term AI, we can mean AI as a tool or AI as a trainee/mentee. In light of AI being both, leaders are now asked to address the following questions: 1) Should I use AI at all? If the answer is yes, 2) how or under what conditions should I use AI? and 3) How should I advise my employees or congregants to use AI? The answers to these questions require us to first review the role of the Christian leader and their obligations in that role, a topic to which we now turn.

### **Christian Leadership through the Lens of Contemporary Theories**

Before answering the questions previously stated, we as Christian leaders need to first step back and acknowledge who we are and what we offer to others. This section will cover two widely accepted Christian leadership models, as well as two ethical theories to help us better understand what type of Christian leaders we are. The two leadership theories covered are Servant Leadership (SL) Theory and Transformational Leadership (TL) Theory. These models are described by Northouse (2019) as the two most closely aligned theories to godly traits observed within Scripture. Theory without an application based on Scripture, though, leads to a secular decision-making process (e.g., Enron) which begs the questions – “So what?” and “Why should I care?” Fedler (2006) provides two Christian ethical frameworks that we can use that are complementary to one another: Decisionist ethics (how we act) and Virtue ethics (how we should be).

As part of a Christian’s journey, sanctification is one of the theological cornerstones of our faith and hence is a very distinct concept that both delineates and separates believers from non-believers. Furthermore, a Christian leader is responsible for enacting their godly leadership traits not only to support their own individual sanctification but the sanctification of other believers. Under this premise, we should be asking the following questions: How will I use AI for *my* sanctification? How will I use AI for my *congregation’s* sanctification? For centuries Christians existed harmoniously, yet distinctly, within the progressiveness of science – showcasing technological evolution through their worship services, community involvement, and communication techniques by utilizing the development of TVs, radios, and today’s digital era.

### **Traits of Servant Leadership (SL) and Transformational Leadership (TL)**

Generally accepted within academia, scholars such as Greenleaf (2002) and van Dierendock (2011) for Servant Leadership and Northouse (2019), Bass (1985), and Burns (1978) for Transformational Leadership encourages a strong foundation that promotes ethical, effective, and sustainable Christian leadership practices. Synergy focused on followers’ needs through ethical practices enables inspiration and motivation that can be traced to biblical examples such as Moses (Stone et al., 2005). Within Ex. (chapters 16-17), Moses shepherds the Israelites, intercedes, provides guidance, and frankly keeps them alive by the godly traits of servant and transformational leadership. Christian leadership theory is relevant to the present discussion and must be considered as a culminating practice that shares reciprocity between the future and the present. Influencing the present with empowerment and ethical decision-making

impacts the future's community, culture, and visionary traits. This, in turn, inversely affects the immediate decision-making culture of the future, creating an unbroken cycle of growth and ethical Christian leadership.

As an example of SL and TL in 2020, Chick-fil-A (2020) released its annual report announcing its commitment to this loose model through the investment of its team members. Truett Cathy, the founder of Chick-fil-A, integrated biblical principles of Servant and Transformational Leadership, which enabled leaders to nurture a leadership culture that is ethical, biblical, and forward-looking. He demonstrated Groysberg & Connolly's (2013) model of investing upfront in leaders which would pay later dividends to their company and its shareholders. Strategic leaders who foster innovative organizations cultivated in opportunity (technology revolution) will stand fast to the predictive current rate of change bolstering success in a rapidly changing business model.

### **Deploying SL and TL in Decisionist Ethics**

Church leaders find themselves in distinct scenarios within their daily lives. Arguably viewed as having a higher level of responsibility and expectations, church leaders must conduct themselves based on firm moral principles and scriptural doctrine. Rom. 12:2 encourages us to avoid conforming to the world but rather to transform our minds so that we might better discern what is the will of God. Moral perplexities faced by Christian leaders generally force two branches of a decision tree: the sinful nature of the world or God's will. Naturally, church leaders must navigate the quandaries of ethics (moral quandaries & dilemmas) that directly influence the sanctification of themselves and their congregation (Burns, 1978). As depicted in the film *The Butterfly Effect*, the influence of one (present) action impacts the entire ethical decision tree of sanctification. Being a leader, simply stated, is difficult: God's placement of those discerning the present should not be considered lightly yet can be accomplished with biblical principles. Mastering decisionist ethics enables God's will to work in growing your and your congregation's sanctification (Smith, 2003).

### **Deploying SL and TL in Virtue Ethics**

Before the clear delineation of church and state around the 1840s, historical figures such as Catholic priests, scholars, and figureheads all shared commonalities in their faith-based leadership methodologies. With this shift, society witnessed a shift from WWJD (what would Jesus do) to "I want to be like Mike" (Michael Jordan) – making the virtuous leadership practices within Christian leadership that much more important. Christian virtues as outlined in Gal. 5:22-23 (love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control) are not simply "good ideas", but instead they are essential manifestations of spiritual growth and discipleship, e.g. what it means to be a Christian and a leader (Wright, 2010). To dig deeper, Christian virtues, fostered by the Holy Spirit, aim to shape us into the likeness of Christ, a goal which remains paramount as sanctification shapes our daily lives (Fry, 2003). Leadership virtues enable Christians to bridge the gap between faith and life by influencing our decisions, actions, and interactions. As leaders grow through their sanctification with

Christ, they gain the tools and experience needed to serve and transform others in their walk with Christ. Then, as leaders, we should be asking ourselves:

1. How will the use of AI affect my sanctification?
2. How will AI influence my congregation's sanctification?
3. Should we assume technology, as a tool, is a gift? If yes, how can we best leverage it to fulfill His will?

By implementing these holistic methods and asking these questions, Christian leaders are inspiring others while utilizing biblically-based virtue ethics. Not only does this support individuals, but also the long-term health of the Christian community. Finally, we should heed Bonhoeffer's warnings that technology should not be used in lieu of studying the Bible for our sanctification but can be used as a tool to support the sanctification process.

### **Technology Through Bonhoeffer and Those That Followed After Him**

In this section, we will provide a theological perspective on technology that we might correspondingly use to build our case for ethical leadership in the age of AI. We start by summarizing Bonhoeffer's views on technology and drawing from it critical warnings about technology's role, either aiding or hindering, in our sanctification. We then step back from Bonhoeffer to show that his views are not 'new' *per se*, but part of a longer tradition within Christendom regarding the use of technology and our God-mandated roles and responsibilities. We then turn back to modern warnings about AI, showing that they align with the longstanding warnings elevated by Bonhoeffer.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor and theologian living in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Bonhoeffer is revered by many for his call away from "cheap grace", his emphasis on Christian community, and his stand against the Nazis which led to his execution on April 9, 1945. Bonhoeffer is relevant to our topic because of his piercing analysis of the state of modernity and its impact on the Church. Bonhoeffer lived, arguably, in the most technologically advanced civilization in the world: Germany. Many hear 'Germany' and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and think of the two World Wars; however, a quick inspection of the history of science shows that Germany was leading the way in medicine, physics, chemistry, mathematics, and engineering during that era. Hence we look to Bonhoeffer for insights and warnings concerning technology and the Church.

Although Bonhoeffer did not write any focused work on technology, the topic comes up in various places throughout his writings. In particular, we see Bonhoeffer discussing in his letters from prison the role of technology in modern life and its potential to both aid and hinder human freedom and ethical decision-making. At the core of Bonhoeffer's thinking was that technology can either be an aid or a hindrance to our God-dictated charge: "Bonhoeffer did not view technology as the root cause of man's separation from God, but rather as a facilitator" (Godsey, 1960). In Bonhoeffer's view, our God-mandated charge (Gen. 1:27) was not meant to be God either delegating or

abdicated to humans a role, but rather God providing us a purpose in creation to “tend the garden” (Gen. 2:15) while he walked amidst it (Gen. 3:8). After the Fall, we moved from interaction with God to interaction with technology as our way of fulfilling our role (Treier, 2013). Bonhoeffer accused his generation of “putting its hope in technology” (Marsh, 2014) as a means of controlling the external world, therefore removing our dependence on God to fulfill our dominion mandate (Genesis 1:28). In one of his earlier works, Bonhoeffer gives a stinging rebuke to those who have transferred their hopes to technology:

We do not rule; instead we are ruled. The thing, the world, rules humankind; humankind is a prisoner, a slave, of the world, and its dominion is an illusion. Technology is the power with which the earth seizes hold of humankind and masters it. And because we no longer rule, we lose the ground so that the earth no longer remains our earth, and we become estranged from the earth. The reason why we fail to rule, however, is because we do not know the world as God’s creation and do not accept the dominion we have as God-given but seize hold of it for ourselves...There is no dominion without serving God; in losing the one humankind necessarily loses the other. Without God, without their brothers and sisters, human beings lose the earth (Bonhoeffer, 2004).

Lest we consider Bonhoeffer and his colleagues’ warnings about technology as only being a “modern technology” problem, consider a technology we often consider instrumental to the Church’s reformation: the printing press. Some view the technology of the printing press as a move of the “center of gravity” of Christianity from the heart to the head. Commenting on how technology-enabled this transformation, O’Leary (1996) (reminds us that “...writing made it possible to divorce the production of a communicative act from its reception. This made it possible to address audiences remote in time and space and turned communication from a public act requiring the presence of others into a private, solipsistic activity of writing and reading. ... the religious implications were profound.” This transition from heart to head has not gone unchallenged. In his book *Analog Church: Why We Need Real People, Places and Things in the Digital Age*, Jay Y. Kim highlights three aspects of the return to the “analog church”: human connection, character formation, and worship. Regarding connection, Kim states that “True human connection is fueled by empathy – the God-given ability to step into another’s shoes and open ourselves up to another’s story, not to compare and contrast, but to be overwhelmed by compassion, to ‘rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn (Rom.12:15)” (Kim, 2020). For Kim, this can only be done in physical proximity to others. Secondly, on character formation, Kim quoting Dallas Willard reminds us that “‘character is formed through action, and it is transformed through action, including carefully planned and grace-sustained disciplines.’ Carefully planned and grace-sustained disciplines. This is intentional, methodical, slow, and steady work. It’s why Jesus uses metaphors like vines and branches to describe the life of discipleship” (Kim, 2020). Character formation, a part of sanctification, is indeed an earthly thing. Lastly, on worship, Kim advocates that “Worship explicitly communicates a whole-body participation in reverent response to God. Worship implies bowing down, falling prostrate, kneeling low with heads to the



ground, drawing near and kissing the hand, etc. – all acts of adoration and allegiance, all acts that required participation with one’s entire body.” James Smith (2009) reiterates this point when, channeling his inner Heidegger, he states:

In contrast, Heidegger argued that primarily, and for the most part, we don't think about a world of objects; rather, we are involved with the world as traditional actors. The world is the environment in which we swim, not a picture that we look at as distant observers.... With this, Heidegger made a critical move: he shifted the center of gravity of the human person from the cognitive to the noncognitive – from the head to something like the heart, from the cerebral regions of the mind to the more effective region of the body. For Heidegger, we might say that I don't think my way through the world, I feel my way through the world (Smith, 2009).

To Smith (2013), “... the way to the heart is through the body, and the way into the body is through story.” Hence the issue that Bonhoeffer highlights is much larger than questions of what we do but questions of who we are and are becoming. In our modern age and with the rise of AI, there is a call to appreciate that “we need to understand and affirm what makes us distinctive in the creative order and also understand how freeing us up will allow us to pursue higher goods and purposes or fall to the level of our basal desires (Burdett, 2023). This is where, in part, leadership comes to the forefront. Leaders certainly are influencers, but also leaders are often deciders. However, if part of our role as leaders is to participate not only in what people do but who they are becoming, then we must understand the consequences of people ‘offloading’ their decisions to AI: “If we increasingly rely on AI to make important judgments in our place because the AI can better weigh up the different variables needed to make a judgment in perhaps a more cost-effective way (or perhaps more egregiously because it is a way to obfuscate who is being held accountable), what will become of our moral characters that won’t be exercised as often, if at all?” We will now turn to a collection of guidelines and guardrails that we think are important to a leader’s discerning use of technology.

### **Effective Discernment of Technology as a Tool**

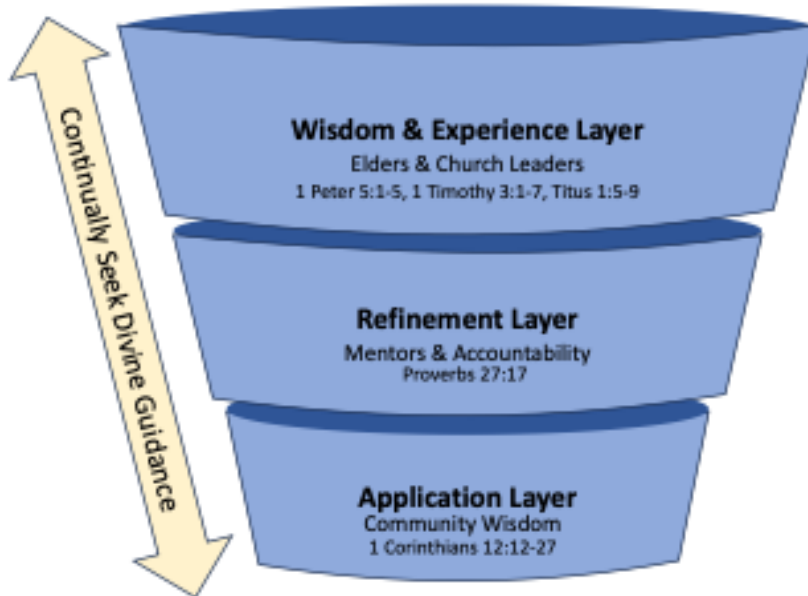
In the early 2000s, the United States Air Force revolutionized their learning and training models to adapt and implement the groundbreaking technological advancements of the GPS (Global Positioning System), thus significantly shifting into the digital era. In doing so, the onset of the technology modifications continued with the adoption of wireless EUDs (End-User Devices), which would seemingly replace the outdated map and compass function of any land-based navigation. However, an outright replacement of the former technology did not happen; the acceleration and adoption of moving map displays and relatively accurate location readings were excellent but were not based on a core capability. Similarly, for modern-day churches, technology as a tool enhances capabilities but should never supplant foundational biblical practices and ethical values. Church leaders, like military strategists, must encompass a core framework of tools (technology) to support the problematic ethical and theological dilemmas based on modernization efforts. *The GPS revolution* gives us insight into the

transformational impacts on benefactors (churches) of technology: showing how unknown use groups might possibly be saddled with unidentified and unintended consequences of their choices. As church leaders, *discernment* is paramount with any change that may affect or influence the sanctification or influence church leaders with new adoption practices. A loose framework supports a level of discernment and flexibility, bolstering essential checks and balances to aid church leaders in supporting their missions without losing sight of their core spiritual and ethical obligations.

Frameworks (guidelines and guardrails) are not a new concept; they are illustrated in many facets of church teachings and operational functions. To build a generally substantiating model, we must first emphasize biblical truth (Jas. 1:5, Phil. 1:9-10, Heb. 5:14) to ensure that church leaders are grounded in core beliefs pointing to a future-proofed concept. Prominent theologian Leonardo Boff was ahead of his time (1985) when he professed a robust framework for integrating AI ethically into a faith-based framework. Boff focused on *empowerment through education* based on a community-oriented faith framework. Similar to Bonhoeffer's logic that technology usage should serve the betterment of the holistic church, support through community involvement provides one potential model church leaders could follow.

As AI development and deployment have radically accelerated within the last 19 years, a refined approach must be considered in adopting best practices from Boff using Bonhoeffer as a guide; a deeper, more holistic approach encompassing elders, mentors, accountability partners, and godly talents from the congregation provides the best future-proof solution for church leader adoption. Using an "if/then" decision tree model, the adoption of best practices should follow the general church organizational makeup, passing through a series of pressure tests to ensure the adoption is (1) practical, (2) biblically founded, (3) ethically sound; and (4) accentuates sanctification.

**Figure 1**  
*AI Discernment Model (ADM)*



The proposed model (see Figure 1) ensures that a congregation has a robust sounding board with a multi-faceted approach for input and adoption across the entire church organization, starting with the most senior (elders) members refining the concept towards application. Within each layer of discernment, every step should be considered a gating function for the continued refinement and adoption of this methodology while continuously seeking His divine guidance.

### **Wisdom & Experience Layer**

The selection and adoption process with most churches is vetted through the most qualified church body members: *elders*, and *leaders*. 1 Pet. 5:1-5 (Shepherding the Flock), 1 Tim. 3:1-7 (Qualifications for Overseers), and Tit. 1:5-9 (Qualification for Elders) provide guidance and expectations for church leaders to guide and influence the congregation accordingly. In this, the AI Discernment Model (ADM) leverages trust, knowledge, and godly talents at the initiating point of filtration. Mirroring a hierarchical concept, this layer is functional to ensure the overall intent and usage of the tool remain intentional and biblical. This layer provides ethical vigilance to ensure that the potential technology not only serves a purpose but ensures it is not at the expense of core Christian beliefs. This layer is vital to Fedler's Servant and Transformational Leadership practices, emphasizing the role of AI within the church's strategic growth plan.

### **Refinement Layer**

Throughout the intricacies of Paul's life, he lived out his faith, and in doing so two traits surfaced: his commitment to mentoring others and maintaining steadfast

accountability (Epistles) in his ministry. Just like Paul, Christians are told that where two gather in my name, I will be there (Matt.18:20). Stated simply, God is with us when we share time with others. In doing so, we can engage in iron sharpening iron (Prov. 27:17). Nearly all Christians can relate to this as they share in sounding boards, community groups, and those we can rely upon to “shoot straight” with sound biblical advice. This middle layer provides that “sniff test” to filter through the good idea fairies and allow vulnerability and openness to our successes and failures.

### **Application Layer**

Paul's metaphor (1 Cor. 12:12-27) of the church as the body of Christ demonstrates that each member has a unique set of gifts that help and support the overall health of the body. The wisdom of the community is an untapped resource of knowledge and experience that churches may overlook for concepts such as discernment of strategic initiatives. This layer suggests the final gate for church leaders to bounce ideas and practical use cases from where members regularly hold positions of importance outside the church walls. The members' expertise (engineers, scholars, business officials) makes them a unique subset to run through, avoiding pitfalls or anything that may not have been considered previously. Utilizing an “outside” source, leaders can round off a holistic approach in discerning the usage of AI within daily church operations.

The ADM provides a sound, navigable, and faith-based approach to a chaotic and ever-changing technology world. It provides guidelines and guardrails for how church leaders should maintain checks and balances throughout their discernment decision-making process.

### **Tech Trap: Navigating the Pitfalls of Overreliance in Modern Ministry**

In 2018, the Church of England faced immense amounts of backlash for launching a chatbot named “The Church of England Alexa Skill” to provide in-depth church knowledge to embrace digital innovation. The 12th-century William Shakespeare slogan, “All that glitters is not gold,” describes a timeless concept of humanity’s attraction to the next shiny thing. Since the Old Testament golden calves (1 Kgs 5:22-33) to technological revolutions (AI), the attraction of change and simplification has and will always continue to resonate with the progressive nature of society today. As with The Church of England, a tool (provided by God) is leveraged in a capacity not biblically based on impacted areas that were not originally intended. The continued misinformation, lack of sensitivity (pastoral care), privacy concerns, and overdependence on technology exposed the gaps in AI within a faith setting. The downstream effects observed within the church’s efforts created immeasurable fallout between the congregation and church leadership, leading to a loss of trust and faith in shepherding. The overemphasis on technology (AI) usage plagued privacy and security concerns and a lack of transparency with the congregation about what AI can do. The

cause for concern with Christian ethical practices partnered with no oversight of tool (AI) adoption leads us to Paul's suggestion that you can do anything, but not everything is beneficial (1 Cor. 6:12).

To better understand the opportunity, we must first realize the root cause of the potential risks involved with two general assumptions. Technology is a derivative of man (learning biases); it is only the benefactor of man's input and usage, and secondly, technology has no soul. Therefore, it cannot act, think, or create faith-based results from a provided set list of "rules." If both of these hold, we must now address the other side of the input and usage equation: man. Humans have developed a propensity for technology and pursuit beyond God's planned boundaries since the fall of man (Gen. 3) and the tower of Babel (Gen. 11). Forwarding ~4,200 years, the same dilemma presents itself, with the onset of AI making its way into faith-based scenarios. AI (features) is perceived as a relatively simple thing that allows you to ask a prompt, and it spits out an answer faster and far beyond what Google may offer. The false sense of reality is a trap for those unknowingly finding themselves at the mercy of what an algorithm *thinks* is the best solution. The concern with this idea is partly due to the person querying and the AI model itself. As AI has no soul, it cannot understand or predict ethical decision-making practices supported by discernment. Fundamentally, AI is a byproduct of the reinforcement and environment to which it is exposed, meaning that a secular-based model embedded with worldview points has a finite understanding of Christian ethics and cannot solve ethically charged dilemmas. Lastly, the belief that AI will make our lives *faster* and more *productive* is untrue. In a sense, there is a place where AI has its upsides (e.g., research, administration, marketing, communications), but it can come at a cost. The overreliance on technology fosters complacency and can lead to abdicating our roles to technology, again opening the opportunity for secular models to shape the church. The level of discernment begins to diminish, giving way to a lax of discernment, which then the model, once reliant on people for modeling, becomes the solution for people to model.

Technology is a godly gift and should be treated as such. Like many other tools, it must be revered for the purpose for which it was created. Core beliefs, pastoral care, sermon writing, privacy and data misuse, and spiritual discernment should never come at the cost of convenience. The ethical dilemmas surrounding AI are real and will continue to grow; however, should Christians choose to adopt a practical faith-based framework, the tool in itself will prove spiritually fruitful, offering new opportunities for growth and understanding.

### Conclusion

Bonhoeffer is arguably quite prescient in his views on technology; his warnings in the 1930s are even more relevant today. With technological advancement has come "techno-optimism" – the belief that technology will be the solution to all our problems. The rapid change of technology has correspondingly placed Christian leaders in a perplexed position when considering the adoption and usage of AI (tool) within a church setting. Using time as a reference, the rate of change within contemporary leadership theory debatably has gaps that the modern theologian within a position of power simply

cannot fill. Strategic leadership frameworks must continually evolve to support ethical implementations of technology based on Scripture and which provide the best opportunity for ensuring discernment success. The ADM model we propose serves as one example that Christian leaders can quickly adopt which provides a fundamental biblical solution to navigating AI tools that will continuously evolve with the rapid onset of the data era.

The rate of change in technology being faster than the rate of change in leadership theories will continue, requiring leaders to be nimble, agile, and discerning. Extensions of this work in the future should focus on the creation of new adaptive models for leadership which are designed to accommodate the rapid rate of change of technologies.

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## **Lessons from the CEO of the First Learning Organization: Jesus and the Early Church**

Tara K. Lalonde

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Learning organizations are an increasingly popular concept that leaders employ to remain competitive in today's complex environment. However, there is also a growing demand for organizations to act ethically and not abandon values in the process. Senge (1990) identified five pillars for a learning organization: individual mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking. Fry (2003) suggested learning organizations require spiritual leadership. This paper offers a conceptual analysis, demonstrating how Jesus, the ultimate example of spiritual leadership, implemented learning organization principles to successfully transform his disciples into change agents for Christianity. Using Senge's five learning organization pillars as the framework, this analysis draws examples from the gospels to showcase the example Jesus provided. From this analysis, several implications for contemporary leaders become apparent. Leaders must model an example of mastery, seeking a continuous journey of uncovering the truth and encouraging others to do the same. They must create forums that engage learners through questions and storytelling that challenge individuals to examine their underlying beliefs. Leaders must embody courage in setting lofty visions that engage others to push beyond the status quo and inspire learning. They should review existing policies and other tacit norms to remove barriers to the learning needed to achieve the vision, providing collaborative opportunities for teams to develop shared meanings. Last, leaders must empower individuals with the agency to affect change and overcome systemic impediments.

*Keywords:* organizational learning, systems thinking, mastery, mental models, leadership

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With his book *The Fifth Discipline*, Senge (1990) popularized the idea of learning organizations as a means of remaining competitive amidst a dynamic and interconnected environment. Senge articulated five learning pillars that organizations must embrace: individual mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking. Senge distinguished learning from the all-too-familiar concept of passively acquiring information. According to Senge, a fundamental mindset shift to a deeper meaning of learning is required. Senge compared this shift to "metanoia" or a type of spiritual rebirth, stating,

Real learning gets to the heart of what it means to be human. Through learning we re-create ourselves. Through learning we become able to do something we never were able to do. Through learning we re-perceive the world and our relationship to it. Through learning we extend our capacity to create, to be part of the generative process of life. (p. 13-14)

As the environment becomes progressively more complex, organizations are under significant pressure to adapt to change; however, there are also increasing expectations for organizations to act ethically rather than implement learning organization principles in a value-free vacuum (Rowley & Gibbs, 2008). Fry (2003) argued that learning organizations require spiritual leadership, comprising the values that intrinsically motivate followers through hope and faith. This involves inspiring a vision that satisfies follower needs to make a difference and to feel that their life has meaning, while enacting behaviors that embody altruistic love, such as forgiveness, kindness, integrity, empathy, compassion, honesty, patience, courage, trust, loyalty and humility (Fry, 2003, p.695). However, limited research exists connecting spiritual leadership with learning organizations.

This paper offers a conceptual analysis, demonstrating how Jesus, the ultimate example of spiritual leadership, implemented learning organization principles to successfully transform his disciples into change agents for Christianity. Using Senge's (1990) five learning organization pillars as the framework, this analysis draws examples from the gospels to showcase the example Jesus provided, which is followed by a discussion of lessons today's organizational leaders can apply.

### **Learning Organization Pillars**

According to Senge (1990), organizations seeking a learning approach must account for five principles: individual mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking. This paper contends that Jesus led the transformation of the early Church by enacting each of these learning disciplines. Jesus encouraged the disciples to seek the truth, challenge assumptions and beliefs, unify toward a shared vision, engage in a community of learning, and recognize the systemic influences and impacts. The following sections dive deeper into each area before summarizing critical takeaways for contemporary leaders who wish to actuate change through learning.

## Individual Mastery

According to Senge (1990), personal mastery is a fundamental requirement for organizations to learn. Individual mastery is not a destination but a lifelong journey. Brown et al. (2014) noted that mastery involves gradually accruing knowledge, conceptual understanding, judgment, and skill over time and with continued practice and reflection. Marquardt (2002) defined personal mastery as a demonstrated high degree of proficiency within a particular area. Jesus modeled mastery at a very young age, when his parents found him studying in the temple, "sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers" (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001/2016, Luke 2:46-47) and "Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man" (Luke 2:52).

However, beyond just increasing levels of competence, Senge (1990) underscored that mastery involves continually clarifying what is essential to oneself. According to Senge, it is easy to become preoccupied with the day-to-day minutiae, losing sight of one's purpose but individuals seeking personal mastery desire to shed light on reality and regain a sense of direction toward their vision. Senge highlighted that individuals with high levels of mastery are aware of their shortcomings and are in a continuous learning mode to discover the limitations that prevent them from seeing the truth. Personal mastery requires increasing awareness of underlying beliefs that may deceive perceptions of reality (Senge, 1990). Throughout the gospels, numerous examples exist of Jesus' leadership to encourage personal mastery in others.

Jesus denounced superficial Pharisaic teachings that did not seek to incite genuine understanding (Lee, 2006). For example, when confronted by the Pharisees about the disciples' breaking the hand-washing tradition, Jesus scolded them by reciting Isaiah, "This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001/2016, Matt. 15:8-9). On numerous other occasions when the Pharisees questioned Jesus' acts, he rebuked them as hypocrites (Matt. 23:23, 25, 27, 29) for allowing their interpretation of the law, steeped in tradition, to supersede the spirit of the law (Wilson, 2011).

Jesus challenged the purported experts in their understanding of the scriptures and what they believed to be truths. Upon being questioned by Pontius Pilate, he stated, "For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I have come into the world – to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice" (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001/2016, John 18:37). It is not that Jesus dismissed the Torah; instead, he provided a new and different perspective that placed human need above religious observance (Wilson, 2011).

In John 14:6 (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001/2016), Jesus declared, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." Jesus did not just speak the truth; he embodied the truth (Alexander, 2018). However, there was a rising tension between the glory of God's vision that Jesus represented and the existing climate, even resulting in the rejection by

his hometown of Nazareth (Legg, 2020). According to Senge (1990), individuals with mastery leverage the tension between their visions and current reality to motivate change in a quest for truth. Senge highlighted that people are often overcome with a sense of powerlessness that hinders their ability to achieve their vision. Jesus understood that to affect change, he would need to engage his followers to challenge the embedded assumptions that rendered them with a feeling of unworthiness, updating their mental models to reflect revised theories of redemption for which they were empowered to achieve.

### **Mental Models**

Mental models reflect the deeply entrenched assumptions of how the world works that shape people's thinking and acting (Senge, 1990). According to Johnson-Laird (1983), learning entails unconscious processes. The human brain evolved to maximize efficiencies by categorizing information based on presuppositions derived from past experiences and social input (Berns, 2008). Individuals construct these working models to discern better how the world works (Johnson-Laird, 1983). Embedded mental models enable individuals to judge similar situations and make an educated response (Brown et al., 2014).

However, these models are far simpler than reality; they are incomplete and, as such, do not represent truth (Johnson-Laird, 1983). It is common for individuals to be "misled by illusions, cognitive biases, and the stories we construct to explain the world around us" (Brown et al., 2014, p.104). These belief systems are ingrained early on and influenced by cultural norms, relationships, and expectations, making it difficult to recognize or change them (Hofstede et al., 2010). Senge (1990) highlighted that because the human brain cannot process vast quantities of information, the tendency to make leaps of abstraction derived from these mental models often inhibits learning. Assumptions form the basis of these generalizations, and though they frequently go untested, people treat them as fact (Senge, 1990). Hence, individuals must understand how mental models influence what they see and close the gaps between how they act and the theories they espouse about how they desire to be (Argyris & Schon, 1996).

The culture of the early Christian church held instrumental values that significantly influenced perceptions of acceptable behaviors. These value systems included purity versus pollution, honor and shame, and patronage and reciprocity (deSilva, 2018). Jewish heritage derived from the Hebrew scriptures delineated what constituted purity lines, which correlated to holiness (deSilva, 2018). Any actions that violated cleanliness codes were seen as polluting the holy land and threatened disaster for Israel (deSilva, 2018). Not only was purity a means of staying in God's favor, but it also created a social boundary around Israel as the holy people (deSilva, 2018).

A second significant influence was the idea of honor versus shame. Individuals were taught from a very young age that, to obtain or maintain honor, society must deem them virtuous (deSilva, 2018). The values considered honorable included qualities such as piety, courage in battle, reliability, agreement, and unity; females, specifically, were expected to exhibit modesty, quietness, and chastity (deSilva, 2018). The threat of

shaming one's family or group by displaying dishonorable qualities was a strong motivator for conformity (deSilva, 2018).

A third central viewpoint involves the relationship between patronage and reciprocity. First-century Judea represented significant social stratifications, creating the need for those considered inferior to seek patronage from someone of more significant influence (deSilva, 2018). A patron's favor resulted in a debt of gratitude and created a cyclical relationship (deSilva, 2018). The Jewish relationship with God demonstrated this perspective, with the Hebrew scriptures depicting God as the Patron of Israel, serving as their protector and provider and necessitating honor, obedience, and loyalty in return (deSilva, 2018). Failure to reciprocate could result in punishment and shame (deSilva, 2018).

Each of the above value systems represented the deeply entrenched mental models guiding the behaviors within the setting of Jesus' teachings. According to Argyris (2008), organizations often face learning dilemmas because they fail to recognize that deep learning requires critical internal reflection to uncover the cognitive reasoning that provides the rulesets for one's actions. Senge (1990) highlighted that personal mastery requires uncovering these mental models and challenging these embedded beliefs. Understanding the cognitive maps that drive one's actions leads to updated assumptions, which Argyris and Schon (1996) call double-loop learning. Unfortunately, many people resist this type of learning and tend to defend their existing mental models (Argyris, 2008).

Jesus constantly sought to open the eyes of others and encourage the rethinking of their beliefs so that they could move closer to the truth. Whereas traditional methods of teaching embraced by Jewish religious leaders focused on repetition and memorization, Jesus asked questions and spoke in parables intended to elicit deep reflection about the underlying principles (Lee, 2006). Jesus did not often provide explicit answers; instead, he inspired his listeners to confront their beliefs and grapple with new insights (Lee, 2006).

A few examples of Jesus challenging accepted wisdom include observing the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1-14), washing hands before eating (Matt. 15:1-20), eating with sinners (Mark 2:14-17), and questions about fasting (Mark 2:18-22). When asked why he spoke in parables, Jesus stated, "...because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand" (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001/2016, Matt. 13:13). According to Snodgrass (2004), Jesus employed parables as a means of sensemaking. Jesus used familiar examples and visual imagery to connect to his audience and paint a picture they could relate to, such as seeds, taxes, fish, boats, children, and wineskins (Lee, 2006).

Jesus understood that learning requires surfacing previous assumptions and forming new mental frameworks (Lee, 2006). Jesus' methods prompted the learners to engage in the inquiry process using stories and questions that evoked reflection on existing schemas (Lee, 2006). Rather than simply reciting truths, his teaching

techniques forced listeners to discover the truth by unlearning previous beliefs and shaping new mental models, thereby changing behaviors (Lee, 2006).

### Shared Vision

According to Senge (1990), a shared vision that builds on personal ambitions is vital to a learning organization's success because it provides the inspiration and focus for learning. A shared vision provides the drive to overcome the status quo and energizes learning (Marquardt, 2002). This shared vision creates a collective sense of identity that motivates action (Marquardt, 2002). Many organizations promote a vision that evokes a culture of compliance, but for individuals to truly commit to the vision, it must embody their needs and desires (Senge, 1990). An inspiring vision evokes an emotional response that creates shared meaning and purpose (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

Barna (2018) contended that a "vision for ministry is a clear mental image of a preferable future imparted by God to His chosen servants to advance His kingdom and is based on an accurate understanding of God, self, and circumstances" (p. 28). More generally, a vision looks to the possibilities of the forthcoming time that considers current circumstances and builds on the wisdom of the past (Barna, 2018). A vision paints a clear mental picture of the preferred change (Barna, 2018).

In Mark 1:15, Jesus announced that the kingdom of God was approaching. He called people to a renewed covenant with God and to establish communities typified by service (Bylor, 2008) and founded by the love for God and one another (Matt. 22:34-40). Jesus' message ignited action by instilling a sense of purpose in people of all walks of life (Bylor, 2008). In Nazareth, he announced,

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001/2016, Luke 4:18-19)

Jesus was able to motivate a movement because the fulfillment of God's vision was a shared desire that created a sense of belonging. It was not restricted to the wealthy or the elite; it included the impoverished and marginalized as well. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus asserted that the blessed are those poor in spirit, the mournful, those who are meek, the righteous, those who show mercy, the pure in heart, peacemakers, and the persecuted (Matt. 5:3-10). His actions would continue to embody these principles, eliciting an emotional response and drawing in disciples, regardless of their status, gender, or ethnicity, who all shared a desire for his vision.

In what is frequently termed the Great Commission, Jesus instructed his disciples to "make disciples of all nations" (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001/2016, Matt. 28:19). This revolutionary community would cross social, political, and economic barriers (Bylor, 2008). "Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and

uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all" (*English Standard Version Bible*, 2001/2016, Col. 3:11). Hence, God's vision enacted by Jesus invoked a shared calling to long-term revolutionary change (Bylor, 2008), where each person could make a difference.

### **Team Learning**

According to Argyris and Schon (1996), learning organizations seek to transform learning into something more significant than the aggregate of individual knowledge. Senge (1990) indicated that learning organizations require more than individual mastery; they require collective teams that maximize efficiencies through synergized alignment. Organizations must account for the significance of "learning people," necessitating the understanding of how individuals collectively construct reality within their organizations (Antonacopoulou, 1999). More than just a collection of knowledge, organizational learning involves the context of shared meaning that provides the framework for action (Ayas, 1999).

Jesus often engaged crowds in learning and healing their sick, such as during the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1-7:29), teaching in parables (Matt. 13), feeding the five thousand (Matt. 14:13-21), and feeding the four thousand (Matt. 15:29-31). He recognized that learning is a social activity where people adopt new behaviors by observing, modeling, and imitating the practices and attitudes of others (Bandura, 1977). As Elkjaer (1999) stated, "The individual is not an isolated entity who encounters society, but a social being, shaped by and shaping society" (p. 82). According to Berger and Luckman (1966), the dialectical relationship between individuals and their social locations forms the basis of one's reality. This duality of learning is a crucial concept that learning organization leaders must recognize and embrace.

Jesus understood that to achieve God's vision, he would need to develop a team of leaders who could then develop other leaders (Garrot, 1941). Legg (2020) highlighted that Jesus employed a pluralistic leadership model where his disciples were given the authority as change agents to participate in the team-centric vision. Jesus specifically called twelve disciples to share in the daily activities of his ministry (Garrot, 1941). These individuals could bear witness to Jesus' public works but also had access to private instruction and inquiry (Garrot, 1941). They could observe his actions and deeds but they could also fully experience his discernments and attitudes that shaped the expected norms of behavior for them as they carried out the vision (Garrot, 1941).

From this opportunity to engage in a profoundly saturated and constant learning experience, the disciples uncovered more than what is expressed in mere lectures; they developed a community of shared meaning of the truth of what it meant to live out the principle of love (Garrot, 1941). Jesus provided these immersive learning experiences of his character before sending the disciples out in teams of two to practice their newly formed beliefs (Mark 6:7-12).

Organizations transfer knowledge through explicit policies, procedures, and rulesets but can also convey expectations through tacit norms (Argyris & Schon, 1996).

Individuals within organizations continuously engage in sensemaking, attempting to reconcile past experiences with new contextual perceptions (Weick, 1995). Cultural behaviors reflect collective perceptions, ways of thinking, and feelings about things (Schein, 2017). When members engage with one another in a dialectic process that uncovers hidden assumptions and reconstructs their mental framework, they co-create knowledge (Yeo & Gold, 2011) and generate shared meaning (Weick, 1995). In this way, organizations can learn to learn, much like the disciples and early Christian church.

## Systems Thinking

According to Senge (1990), systems thinking is a process that allows one to see cause and effect from a more holistic perspective. Organizations are like dynamic organisms as opposed to static entities (Argyris & Schon, 1996). Systems thinking addresses the fact that many interdependencies create non-linear consequences (Meadows, 2008). A systems perspective enables one to better understand the big picture as opposed to reacting to singular events (Senge, 1990). This system includes the complex nodes of inputs, outputs, and feedback loops that serve to intensify or stabilize behaviors (Meadows, 2008).

The behavior of Jesus' audience reflected the systemic effects of the various social, political, economic, and religious ideologies at play. The historical persecution of the Jews, demolition of their temple, and occupancy by first the Greeks and then the Romans led to a conviction to preserve the well-being of the Jewish people and their place in God's covenant (deSilva, 2018). According to deSilva, the Jews approached their situation by utilizing three strategies: embracing some degree of assimilation within the dominant Gentile culture, political independence, and spiritual purification that attempted to renew covenantal promises.

At the time of Jesus, Judea was an imperial province of the Roman empire, and though the Jews were allowed to continue practicing their ancestral laws, such as Sabbath observance, Roman legions were stationed there (deSilva, 2018). This political system resulted in the payment of harsh taxes from a predominantly agrarian society and oppressive suffering, where the price of resistance appeared too high (Bylor, 2008). The Roman ideology placed significant value on maintaining order and respect for authority; however, they were content leaving the local government, the high priest who presided over the Sanhedrin, to regulate internal affairs (deSilva, 2018). As can be seen in John 11:48-50, the high priest Caiaphas made attempts to forestall disturbances arising from Jesus' teachings, preferring to handle the matter internally rather than risk Roman authorities intervening with potentially disastrous consequences for the entire Jewish community (deSilva, 2018).

Although first-century Judaism represented multiple different sects, such as the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes, the keeping of the Torah was a unifying principle that demonstrated commitment to the covenant made with God and the means of remaining in God's favor (deSilva, 2018). In a similar vein, the temple served as a focal point for Jews as the place where God would hear their prayers and accept their



sacrifices, renewing their connection with Israel as the chosen holy people (deSilva, 2018). Each of these aspects contributed to a rationality in which the actors became objects of ideologies that dictated their behaviors. Senge (1990) highlighted that from a systems vantage point,

We give up the assumption that there is an individual, or individual agent, responsible. The feedback perspective suggests that everyone shares responsibility for problems generated by a system. That doesn't necessarily imply that everyone involved can exert equal leverage in changing the system. (p. 78)

Systems thinking cautions leaders to remove limiting factors rather than force change and to beware of addressing the symptomatic behaviors instead of the root issues (Senge, 1990).

Jesus' teachings considered his listener's environment to create a radical systemic intervention whereby redemption was a matter of self-agency. Jesus was able to reshape outcomes without changing the entire system, at least initially; instead, he removed the limitation imposed on the system by updating the mental models of the constituents. Where in the past, they believed salvation was awarded based on keeping the Mosaic covenant, Jesus challenged the underlying beliefs so that listeners no longer saw themselves as objects; instead, they became the subjects (Branson, 2016).

Senge (1990) stated that systems thinking is the cornerstone of the learning disciplines because it shifts the mindset of the participants, whereby they no longer see themselves as helpless reactors; rather, they become sanctioned influencers of their reality, creators of their future. Through Jesus' transformative learning techniques, he changed his followers' philosophy to one of empowerment, enabling them to become agents of the glory of God through their commitment to the truth.

### **Implications for Contemporary Leaders**

According to Northouse (2022), leadership is a process of influencing people to accomplish a shared goal. Today's environment makes it highly challenging to keep abreast of dynamic complexities that require near-constant change, necessitating learning at all levels of the organization (Senge, 1990). So, how can a leader influence the learning process? While Senge (1990) provided a framework for learning organizations, Jesus provided authentic examples from which contemporary leaders can take heed.

Fry (2003) articulated a theory of leadership that conflates spirituality with the learning organization paradigm by addressing intrinsic motivation that satisfies follower needs to fulfill a sense of calling and membership. According to Fry, followers experience a realized sense of calling when leaders create a vision where members feel they can make a difference, and that their contribution has meaning. Followers' sense of membership results when they feel understood and appreciated because the leader expresses altruistic love through behaviors exemplifying values such as forgiveness, kindness, integrity, empathy, compassion, honesty, patience, courage, trust, loyalty, and

humility (Fry, 2003, p. 695). Fry argued that spiritual leadership is not separate from, rather inclusive of, more mainstream intrinsic motivation leadership theories such as transformational leadership and servant leadership as well as values-based and ethical leadership approaches.

Jesus exemplified this type of leadership while simultaneously demonstrating the positive impact of creating a learning organization. Although frequently associated with religion, spirituality represents a fundamental human need to fulfill a greater purpose and feel connected to something beyond oneself, hence offering a viable leadership solution in today's secular organizations, and not limited to religious organizations (Fry, 2003). As such, Jesus' example can provide useful lessons for today's contemporary leaders in all industries seeking to transform their organizations to a learning orientation. The following sections discuss some key takeaways for leaders of both religious and secular entities.

### **Model Courageous Learning Behaviors**

It is of fundamental importance that leaders recognize their influence as role models for learning behaviors. Leaders must demonstrate commitment to transforming into a learning organization (Marquardt, 2002). Organizational members observe what is essential to leaders through their behaviors (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Just as Jesus did, today's organizational leaders must also lead by example and strive for personal mastery. Leaders play a critical role in establishing an organization's culture (Schein, 2017), and, like Jesus, contemporary leaders must orchestrate forums for learning where participants are encouraged to question underlying beliefs through critical inquiry and reflection (Marquardt, 2002).

As evidenced by Jesus, building a learning organization requires abundant courage. The scriptures depicted Jesus as courageous in all he did up until the moment of his crucifixion. Similarly, courage was crucial for the disciples and other members of the early church as they made great leaps of faith and overcame resistance to their ministry. Today's leaders also require courage to earn the trust and commitment of followers regardless of how daunting the changing landscape may seem (Beer, 2020). Courageous leaders do not let fear impede actions and, even in unfavorable circumstances, speak the truth and do what is right (Everett, 2021). It takes courage for leaders to push their organizations to reach lofty visions that move beyond the status quo (Beer, 2020). According to Barna (2018), a vision requires change, which inevitably involves risks that include the possibility of failure; however, leaders must embrace the faith necessary to overcome that fear, replacing it with energy, hope, and assurance.

## **Establish Learning Congruency with Tacit Norms**

Leaders desiring to develop a learning culture should look to uncover any incongruencies with practices and espoused intentions. Just as Jesus criticized the Pharisees for giving precedence to canonical traditions over spiritual intention, leaders should evaluate current policies to ensure they elicit the intended systemic results. As policies dictate the conversion process of information to decisions, leaders must be aware of their impact on learning actions (Forrester, 1994). This evaluation should not be limited to formal policies but should also examine informal decision-making frameworks that result from "habit, conformity, social pressures, ingrained concepts of goals, awareness of power centers within the organization and personal interest" (Forrester, 1994, p. 58).

Jesus' approach to teaching highlights that learning may be best achieved by asking questions and telling stories that require deep reflection. According to Mezirow (1991), transformational learning is necessary to uncover hidden assumptions and update mental models. Preskill and Torres (1999) indicated the necessity for "evaluative inquiry," which consists of asking questions, dialogue, and reflection to preempt revised actions. Schein (2017) emphasized that learning cultures commit to inquiry to reveal truth through a dialogic process that reveals embedded assumptions. Critical reflection involves understanding why these beliefs exist and challenging their validity (Mezirow, 1998).

Unfortunately, organizations often miss profound learning opportunities because of environments enveloped with hubris, where leaders do not value asking questions because they see it as a challenge to authority or a means of displacing judgment or blame (Preskill & Torres, 1999), not unlike the culture in Jesus' time. Organizations can also create barriers to reflection when performance goals prioritize action over thinking (Preskill & Torres, 1999). These obstacles reinforce that, for organizations to transform into learning cultures, they must embody a commitment to "learning to learn" (Schein, 2017).

## **Empower Others to Affect Change**

Leaders seeking radical change must recognize the need to trust and empower individuals within the organization. Jesus understood that systemic change would require the actions of the collective. He taught his disciples so they could fulfill the Great Commission. As Fryar (2007) points out, Jesus developed a mentality of "we" (p. 162). Similarly, today's successful learning organizations recognize that they must empower employees with trust and authority to contribute optimally to the organization's vision (Marquardt, 2002). Kouzes and Posner (2017) highlighted that extraordinary performance is only possible when there is a shared sense of responsibility, stressing collaboration as a critical ingredient for high performance. Great things cannot happen from the work of just one person (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Collective leadership creates amplified results (Anderson & Adams, 2016).

As the teachings of Jesus highlighted, developing a sense of self-agency plays a crucial role. The work of Dweck and Leggett (1988) indicated that developing a growth mindset can play a critical role in how one sees their ability to influence outcomes. When people have a fixed mindset, they believe that their abilities are predetermined and, hence, feel the need to prove their worth continuously; contrastingly, people with a growth mindset believe their capabilities are malleable and seek learning opportunities that influence their growth (Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

This dichotomy of perspectives marks a distinction between believing someone is inherently an expert versus the understanding that one possesses the potential to become great, given the proper training and opportunities (Dweck, 2016). The gospels demonstrated this pivotal divergence of mindsets: the Pharisees, who were thought to be the experts, resisted learning while the commoners who followed Jesus were more willing to embrace new ideas and challenge assumptions. Hence, change does not necessarily come from those who may seem to know everything, and so it behooves leaders to develop a growth mindset within their constituents and develop the potential in others.

### **Conclusion**

The nature of today's increasingly complex and dynamic environment, characterized by aspects such as global competition, geographically dispersed supply chains, diverse workforce demographics, technological disruptions, escalating political and social unrest, and universal threats such as climate change, increasingly necessitates that organizations rely on the knowledge and talents of their employees (Hughes et al., 2014). As a result, there is a widespread focus on creating learning organizations. Senge (1990) identified five pillars: personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking. Leaders seeking to build learning organizations must understand how each of these principles relate to learning, but perhaps more importantly, they must understand what leadership behaviors to employ.

Fortunately, contemporary leaders can draw lessons from the leadership of Jesus. As the transformational leader of the Christian church, and the exemplar of spiritual leadership, Jesus demonstrated how to create a learning organization. As a leader, he understood mastery as a journey to discover the truth. Jesus embodied the truth and helped his followers uncover their mental models that presented barriers to seeing the truth. He courageously engaged them in active learning through inquiry and stories that prompted critical reflection on their hidden assumptions and beliefs. Jesus motivated learning by inspiring listeners toward a shared vision of redemption for anyone who practiced core values of service and love for others. This vision would be achieved through a community of shared learning where people became empowered to affect change. Followers learned they could be the agents of their destinies rather than passive actors within the prevalent systems.

The twenty-first century demands this type of leadership. In this modern era of corporate scandal, political tension, and social stratification, the global community requires learning organizations led by people who provide hope, and a means by which

people feel they can contribute to a greater calling as part of an organizational environment that values one another. Jesus provided a model that today's leaders can follow to enact this kind of change at a global level. Though this list of lessons learned from Jesus' example is not exhaustive, it creates a launching pad for tangible actions today's leaders can enact. Contemporary leaders seeking to increase their organization's learning capacity can draw from these examples Jesus supplied as the founder of the Christian church and an early pioneer of the learning organization model.

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