

TRINITY EVANGELICAL DIVINITY SCHOOL

THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP:
A PHILOSOPHY OF CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP & ADMINISTRATION

JOEL JUPP

T-1346

DEERFIELD, IL

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Leadership can be defined as inspiring others, through vision and action, towards a unified mission. Related to this, administration is the task of organizing so that the mission can take place. Leadership and administration have often been discussed, but the definitions provided above can be practiced by any organization and do not necessarily result in *Christian* leadership. When we add the adjective *Christian*, we are distinguishing how a Christ-follower leads in a way that is different from other leaders. This paper suggests several values that should be embraced by Christian leaders, along with biblical examples to support each value. In this effort, we will examine what distinguishes Christian leadership from other forms of leadership: contextualization, unified diversity, servanthood, and compassion.

Contextualization

When leading a group of people, leaders must be willing to contextualize. The term “contextualization” is relatively new, but the concept has been around since New Testament times. Basically, contextualization means “the capacity to respond meaningfully to the gospel within the framework of one’s own situation.”¹ In other words, leaders must make their message (the gospel) meaningful to the people who they are leading. If they do not communicate well, they cannot be effective in leadership.

Contextualization should be considered prior to engaging in other leadership activities, which is why we discuss this first. Rather than applying generic techniques, leaders must be willing to continually examine and re-examine their surroundings. As the leader changes, as the group changes, and as culture changes, the proper approaches will change. Leadership lessons

¹ A. Scott Moreau et al., *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions* (, Baker Reference Library Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Baker Books; A. Scott Moreau, 2000), 225.

learned in the classroom must be practically applied in the real-world. To do this effectively, leaders must read and interpret their context.

Leadership activity does not occur within a vacuum. Whether leading a profitable company like Starbucks or coaching a Little League Baseball team, leaders must read their context and adjust accordingly. Just as it would be silly to wear a baseball jersey while selling coffee, it would also be inappropriate to fire a child from a Little League baseball team. While these examples are quite silly, we see that Jesus takes contextualization seriously. He did not respond the same way to every person, but differed his approach based on whom He was speaking with. Sometimes Jesus overturned tables, other times He told stories, and other times He withdrew from the crowd. Based on Jesus' example, leaders must interpret their surroundings and be flexible.

Throughout Scripture, Christian leaders contextualize their message. This does not mean that they compromise, syncretize, or "blend in," but that they recognize their context and lead in a way that will make sense to the people that they are leading. The Apostle Paul, for example, recognized that Christian ministry must be contextualized for different contexts. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 9, "Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible... I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings." The central message remained the same, but he changed his style of leadership depending on who he was leading. Although this is not an easy task, Christian leaders would do well to follow this example of contextualization.

Jesus and Paul should be reason enough, but we also see other Christian leaders engage in contextualization. Even the writers of the New Testament took into consideration who they were writing to, and they made sure that they were communicating in an effective way to their

audience. As Köstenberger points out, “John’s use of the term *logos* (‘Word’) with reference to Jesus also serves to contextualize the Christian message in the evangelist’s culture.”² John could have used any terms, but because He was writing to Jews in a Greek-influenced culture, *logos* held significant meaning. If the writers of the New Testament practiced contextualization, then it would be wise for Christian leaders to do the same.

Leaders can learn generic principles from other leaders, but they must avoid the temptation to apply cookie-cutter approaches to leadership. Some approaches will work in some settings, but not in another setting. This is easily forgotten, but leaders must be willing to learn and re-learn how to lead. Good leaders know how to engage in cyclical evaluation of their context – moving from planning to practice to assessment to planning to practice. For the effective Christian leader, this process never ends.

When contextualizing, a leader should determine his/her spiritual gifting and leadership style. Rather than trying to lead like someone else, leaders should see how God has made them to lead. To help in this process, Bill Hybels, pastor at Willow Creek, suggests several types of leaders: visionary, directional, strategic, managing, shepherding, team-building, entrepreneurial, reengineering, and bridge-building.³ These categories may be overly specific (e.g., shepherding leaders also need vision), but they can help a person observe their own tendencies. Recognizing how a person leads is important, so that that person can effectively lead in a specific context.

While this paper is focused on Christian leadership and administration in general, those who are called to pastoral ministry will tend towards a shepherding style of leadership.

Sometimes pastors are hired without any desire to shepherd, but this usually leads to short and

² T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner, *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* (electronic ed.; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

³ For more on this topic, see *Courageous Leadership* by Bill Hybels.

ill-fated ministries. Pastors are not called to “drive” the flock, but to guide them like shepherds. By considering spiritual gifting and leadership style prior to leading, leaders can be more effective, avoid burnout, and prevent hurting the people they lead. These are some of the practical benefits of contextualizing.

Unified Diversity

All successful organizations require some degree of unity, but Christian leaders must also recognize diversity that exists within such unity. The overall message of the Bible shows how God’s working is not limited to a specific cultural group (e.g., the Israelites), but that He embraces all nations (Matthew 28:19; Acts 1:8). Because of this, Christian leaders should never be content with complete homogeneity, but actively seek to become more diverse in terms of race, culture, personality types, family backgrounds, and economics.

Ultimately, Christian ministry is a team effort. Christian ministry is not a collection of silos that exist in near proximity to one another. Rather, ministry involves interaction and interdependence between various members of the church. Leaders cannot stand alone, nor should ministries exist independently from one another. It is poor leadership to allow for cliques and overlook the dangers of fragmentation. For that reason, Christian leaders should focus on unifying the people that they lead.

Administration helps bring people together, both through delegating tasks and providing coherence. Leaders cannot lead without purpose or direction, and administration is basically the task of guiding others in a similar direction. It should be recognized that disorganized persons cannot lead well because a “disorganized leader” is an oxymoron. A disorganized person is not leading, but misleading. For that reason, leaders need to be able to administrate tasks within the

church. Indeed, some believers are specifically designated to help administrate (1 Corinthians 12:28), so that there can be organization amidst the diversity within the church. While various ministries occur simultaneously, everyone needs to be headed in the same direction.

When it comes to organization, we see overlap between leadership and administration. Leaders must be organized, and administration can be thought of as a centralized or focused effort to organize. The gift of administration is only mentioned once in Scripture (1 Corinthians 12:28), but administration is practiced whenever organization was needed to oversee ministries, such as in Mark 6:7-13 and Acts 6:1-7.

According to Scripture, local churches are comprised of a wide diversity of people, but churches must maintain order. Of course, such order requires healthy leadership and administration. God is not a God of disorder or confusion, so we must ensure that the Church is orderly and harmonious. For example, 1 Corinthians 14 teaches that even with the diversity of people and their abilities, leaders must ensure that there is order whenever Christians gather together for worship. Even though this passage deals with spiritual gifts, the overall principle applies to all areas of Christian ministry: leaders must ensure order.

Servanthood

Outside of the Christian church, leadership styles vary from autocratic to democratic, from individualistic to participatory. In the business world, many companies use a “top down” model and workers compete against co-workers for promotions. In the local church, however, hierarchy and competition have no place. According to Scripture, Christian leaders should not exalt themselves, but seek the benefit of others.

We learn how to lead from Jesus Christ because He was the perfect leader, and when we look at his life, we see that leaders can and should sacrifice. Jesus Christ modeled the ultimate example of sacrifice – not only washing his disciples’ feet, but dying for our sins on the cross. Jesus told his disciples to follow his act of service (John 13:15), and because of Jesus, Christians are called to be “servant leaders.” Rather than following the standards of the world – which often values individual success and self-promotion – Christian leaders lay down their own pride to help others. In some cases, this will mean doing jobs that no one else wants to do.

Christian leaders must be able to work with others. When relating with other Christians, it is impossible to lead with a hierarchical attitude. Romans 12 instructs Christians to “think with sober judgment” and to “associate with the lowly.” If this were not enough, Paul refers to body imagery several times (1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12; Eph. 4), which reflects the importance of unity within the church. Leaders should not set themselves apart, or consider themselves more important, but be willing to serve others.

Humility is not merely a religious concept; it has practical benefits for the Christian leader. When a leader looks beyond his or herself, other people will notice and appreciate the leader for caring. Genuine leadership is not about self-fulfillment or self-propagation, but about helping people in their need. For that reason, no one wants to follow a leader who is merely leading for their own benefit. Here we see the beauty of God’s principles – that as we humbly serve others, everyone will ultimately benefit.

Compassion

Most importantly, Christian leaders must be compassionate. Without love, we are only a “clanging gong” in the milieu of worldly leadership. Our guiding principle of Christian living –

1 Corinthians 13 – should also guide us as we lead. Unlike worldly leaders, Christian leaders must be sure to love the people whom they lead. Christian leadership is not a transaction, but *participation* with people who have been created by God.

Though many books have been written on leadership, few authors mention the importance of the two greatest commandments. When asked, Jesus taught that loving God and loving others is the most important task. These principles apply to all Christians, of course, but far too often, we forget these when leading. Ultimately, Christian leaders are not called to build or develop an *institution*, but to love God and to love *people*.

Love takes a variety of forms. Sometimes leaders will love others by providing guidance, feedback, and evaluation. By doing this, leaders are looking out for the wellbeing of the individual, as well as the group at large. In other instances, a leader will need to offer encouragement, support, and forgiveness. The Christian leader does not expect perfection, but recognizes the reality of human fallibility. Each situation will call for an appropriate response. In all situations, however, Christian leaders must be guided by love.

It is not surprising, therefore, that *family* is part of the benchmark for Christian leadership. After the Apostle Paul required that overseers be faithful to one wife and adequately raise their children, he asked the rhetorical question, “If someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?” (1 Tim. 3:5) The point is simple: if a Christian leader does not love his wife or children, then he is not fit to lead. Far too often, however, we forget about the importance of love when it comes to leadership, and few churches include this in their job descriptions of an effective leader.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Christian leaders can learn about leadership from a variety of sources, but should recognize that Christian leadership is different in several aspects. As has been shown above, Christian leaders must be sure to contextualize their leadership style; to embrace diversity within the unity of the church; to be willing to serve others; and to love others while leading. These principles could certainly help in business contexts as well, but the point here is that Christian leadership *must* be markedly different in some essential ways. Ultimately, Christian leaders should not merely build an organization or an institution, but participate in the Kingdom of God. For that reason, Christian leadership must be different from leadership in the rest of the world.

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