



Authentic Christological Leadership Revealed through Sacred Texture Analysis of the Philippians Hymn (2:5-11)

Sharon E. Norris

In the 21st century, the call for effective leadership can be heard in various settings including educational, industrial, religious, political, social and economic organizations and determining what constitutes effective leadership oftentimes concludes with a list of personality traits or behavioral characteristics necessary for individuals pursuing leadership positions. Yet, viewing leadership as merely a set of personality traits or a series of behaviors falls short because outward behaviors may not match intentions, convictions and preferences; therefore, a model of effective leadership in which behavior represents a reflection of something much deeper within the person is necessary (Fernandez, 2004).

Leadership from the Confucian system of thought represents an emergent quality of character that originates from within as a result of conscious effort, self-cultivation and continual learning (Fernandez, 2004). From the Christian perspective the conscious effort, self-cultivation and continual learning occurs through the power of unselfish self-giving, and effective leadership emerges as an integration and balance of mercy, grace and justice (Charry, 1999). The surprising mercy and the seemingly outrageous injustice of God's actions portrayed in New Testament writings provide the early Christian community the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the paradoxical nature of the greatest mercy and justice of all in Jesus Christ (Brueggemann, Cousar, Gaventa & Newsome, 1995). One such example of the paradoxical nature of God is the action of Jesus Christ in the Letter to the Philippians.

In the Letter to the Philippians, the Apostle Paul addresses the believers in Roman Philippi most likely during his captivity in prison (Lightfoot, 1994). Paul's letter serves as both a private letter and public document

read in worship settings, and modern lectionaries utilize almost fifty percent of the Letter of the Philippians in the present age (Craddock, 1985). Paul's Letter to the Philippians made an appeal to early Christian community members on the basis of mutuality and friendship using invitational rhetoric to persuade them with a moral exhortation to develop a mindset in keeping with the Gospel (Fee, 1999). The particular passage that serves as the focus for this study is the Philippians hymn (2:5-11), and sacred texture analysis (Robbins, 1996) serves as the method for analysis and interpretation of the text for the purpose of exploring the Christological model of leadership of Jesus Christ.

Sacred texture analysis is a form of socio-rhetorical criticism (Robbins, 1996), and socio-cultural criticism moves biblical study into an interactive engagement through textual rhetorical exploration (Tite, 2004). Sacred texture analysis describes a systemic and creative study of scripture that provides insights regarding the nature of the relationship between divine life and human life (Robbins, 1996). Shillington (2002) indicates sacred texture refers to biblical text "from a religious community to a religious community" (p. 279), and sacred texture analysis that is complemented with theological interpretation yields valuable results (Fowl, 1998; Shillington, 2002).

Robbins' (1996) socio-cultural criticism method of studying scripture is "welcomed and refreshing" because it provides an interdisciplinary approach where different perspectives of the texture of the text provide both balance and enlightenment (Tite, 2004, p. 48). The sacred texture analysis method explores aspects of deity, holy person, divine history, human redemption, human commitment, religious community and ethics (Robbins, 1995). Using sacred texture analysis, the research questions guiding the study ask how does the model of Jesus' leadership that was revealed to believers in Roman Philippi through the Philippians hymn compare with contemporaries leadership theories, and how does the Christological model of leadership of Jesus Christ enlighten the modern age in gaining a better understanding of what it means to be an ethical leader in the 21st century.

Sacred Texture Analysis

Deity

Robbins (1996) states identifying God's presence and describing the nature of God provides a starting point for analyzing and interpreting the sacred texture of a text. For the study of the Philippians hymn (2:5-11), God is mentioned three times in the passage at the beginning (Phil. 2:6), in the middle (Phil. 2:9), and at the end of the text (Phil. 2:11), but God does not enter the story in an open manner by speaking as God might in Old Testament scriptures (Robbins, 1996). Rather, God works behind the scenes in the text, and Martin

(1997) states “the hymn begins with God in eternity and concludes with the same thought” (p. 26).

The deity of Jesus Christ and the call to imitate Christ represent the focuses of the beginning of the hymn (Phil. 2:5-6), and Martin (1997) declares the Philippians hymn represents a liturgical composition in which Jesus Christ is hailed and confessed as pre-existent and sharing equality with God. Additionally, Paul encourages members of the community to imitate Jesus. “Have this same attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped” (Phil. 2:5-6, NASB). Jesus is shown as divine; therefore, a call to imitate Christ is a call to imitate God (Bekker, 2006). O’Boyle (2003) states “Jesus is not merely a good likeness of God but in fact God in God’s final self-expression” (p. 86). The hymn declares Jesus Christ in term of His pre-existence (Elwell & Comfort, 2001) and as the pre-existent one, Jesus Christ expresses His deity and divine power through self-emptying rather than self-aggrandizing (Gorman, 2001).

Lucien (1997) believes the Philippians hymn “presents Jesus as recognizing that being equal with God means most profoundly to be ‘not grasping.’ The self-emptying of Jesus unto death-and death on a cross-is the revelation that to be God is to be unselfishness itself” (p. 22). The unselfish mindset of Jesus reveals that God is unselfishness itself, and the self-emptying of Christ reveals that God’s nature is also self-emptying (Cummings, 2004).

Holy Person

Jesus Christ represents the holy person of focus in the Philippians hymn. A special relationship exists between Jesus Christ and God in that Jesus was “in the form of God” (Phil. 2:6) and pre-existent with God, but Christ embodies a “radical reversal of honor values” (Bartchy, 1999, p. 71). Christ does not attempt to possess his equality with God nor does He pursue honor and power from the Father (Gorman, 2001). “Although he existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a bond-servant and being made in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2: 6-7, NASB). By his actions, Christ undermines the Roman Philippi understanding of deity and divine power as self-aggrandizing (Gorman, 2001). Cummings (2004) points out a seeming oddness in this line of reasoning. The early Christians are challenged with the knowledge that the nature of God’s omnipotence and power is not limited to containment even within himself, and the nature of God is not self-aggrandizing but self-giving.

Kenosis is the Greek word for emptying, and the self-gift, self-donation and self-emptying of Christ. Jesus takes the “form of a bond-servant” (Phil. 2:7), and Christ spends himself on behalf of others representing self-emptying love and service (Cummings, 2004; Keating, 2006). Jesus Christ reveals self-emptying service

represents another element of the divine nature and one to be imitated in authentic leadership. By his actions, Jesus models truly religious behavior and represents “the holy person par excellence” (Robbins, 1996, p. 121).

Divine History

Cummings (2004) suggests creation may represent one of the first acts of the self-emptying service of God, and the self-emptying act of the Word becoming flesh another. Both creation and incarnation reveal God’s presence and action in divine history. The sacred texture analysis of the hymn reveals how historical events such as creation and the incarnation represent purposeful steps in the coming of the kingdom of God, and God’s actions behind the scenes of history gradually guides humanity through the centuries with a plan established by God (Robbins, 1996). God cannot keep existence to himself and Christ cannot keep self-emptying service to himself (Cummings, 2004).

The wisdom of God operates throughout history, and there is a reason for the pre-existent Jesus to take on the form of bond-servant, and Jesus’ self-sacrifice does not cause him to lose but to gain and renew. “Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name” (Phil. 2:8-9, NASB).

Similar to the Wisdom literature in the Old Testament, O’Boyle (2003) points out the servant, humility and exaltation language in the hymn expresses divine wisdom and power, and self-giving pouring out does not diminish but perdures. Wisdom pours forth and “renews everything while herself perduring; and passing into holy souls from age to age, she produces friends of God” (Wisdom 7:27, NASB). Wisdom is the outpouring of God’s glory, and O’Boyle (2003) indicates the outpouring of divine wisdom is similar to the incarnate Jesus Christ who represents the outpouring of God’s being. Paradoxically, all is not lost when Jesus Christ takes on the form of a bond-servant and suffers death on the cross; instead, all is gained by this self-giving. The cross reveals the power of divine wisdom and divine love (Cousar, 1990).

The text also reveals a glimpse of the future. “For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:9-11). The realm of eschatology explains how history moves toward last things (Robbins, 1996), and the event where every knee will bend and every mouth confess provides a revelation of an apocalyptic event. Robbins (1996) explains end-time events are oftentimes revealed through sacred texts before they occur. Through these passages, it becomes evident God is intimately

involved in the unfolding of history from the beginning, from eternity and into eternity.

Human Redemption

Jesus comes in human likeness and provides the means by which divine life more intimately joins human life in order to transform humanity (Robbins, 1996). Barton and Comfort (1995) indicate a master may offer an equivalent or superior slave in exchange or in order to redeem or buy back a slave, and God utilizes this method for buying back sinful people. “He offered his son in exchange for us” (Barton & Comfort, 1995, p. 130). Paul uses the Philippians hymn to underscore the pre-existence of Jesus with God the Father, his incarnation as Jesus Christ the Son, and the redeemer of mankind through his resurrection and exaltation (Marrow, 1986). For this reason, it becomes evident why some biblical scholars (e.g. Fowl, 2005) refer to the Philippians hymn as one of “the most theologically significant passages in the New Testament” (p. 89). Dodd (2003) states redemption brings people back together; therefore, the Christological leadership of Jesus demonstrates a radical self-giving in order to bring people back together with God the Father. Harrington (2001) refers to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the manifestation of the servant-leadership of Jesus.

Human Commitment

Paul encourages Jesus’ followers to “have the same attitude of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2.6). The model Jesus presents includes detachment and mortification necessary for taking up the cross and following Jesus (Robbins, 1996). Paul reveals what it takes to be a faithful follower (Robbins, 1996). Bekker (2006) indicates the hymn contains strong paradigmatic appeals (Stagg, 1980) to early Christian community members to imitate the model of conduct of Christ. The first verse of the hymn exhorts the believing Christian community members to imitate the ethical behavior modeled by Jesus Christ (Bekker, 2006; Black, 1995).

Bekker (2006) explains the sacred text of Philippians 2:5-11 traditionally represented a hymn (Gloer, 1984) with liturgical setting origins (Briggs, 1989) utilized in the early Christian community for teaching converts (Bruce & Simpson, 1957), conducting theological training (Selwyn, 1969) and providing spiritual formation of community members (Guthrie, 1970). He further indicates the early Christian community experienced “values conflict between the Christian call for humble service and the Philippians’ cultural values of pursuing public social honor” (Bekker, 2006, p. 3; Hellerman, 2003). Bekker (2006) further asserts the Philippians hymn is an ethical call (Cousar, 1998) for believers to emulate the values and leadership behavior of Christ (Peterlin, 1995).

Religious Community

Robbins (1996) explains religious commitment as the forming and nurturing of the religious community therefore formation activities go beyond individual focus and include participation with others. Paul encourages the Philippians both individually and as a community when he exhorts “Have among yourselves the same attitude that is also yours in Christ Jesus (Phil. 2:5). The group is being addressed and encouraged to imitate Christ and thus form a social common bond through social group action.

In the Philippians community, Paul founded the religious communities but it seems that Paul recognizes how individual community members contribute to the establishment of the social rules and norms of the group through their social interactions. In Philippians 1:27 Paul tells the community to live “worthy of the gospel” thereby serving as both a source of encouragement and exhortation (Ascough, 2003). DeSilva (2004) points out the Letter to the Philippians instructs the people of Roman Philippi to live in a spirit of harmony, unity and solidarity in Christ-centered relationship with one another (Brockmuehl, 2006). The Letter to the Philippians as a friendship letter (DeSilva, 2004; Fee, 1995) provides an opportunity for Paul to share his concerns for the people and also gratitude toward them for their support.

Ethics

Just as religious community focuses on social interactions by individuals in group formation so does ethical behavior relate to both individual and group action, and Robbins (1996) indicates ethical behavior is motivated by commitment to God. He states it is the responsibility of people to think and act in ethical ways in both ordinary and extraordinary circumstances (Robbins, 1996). Fee (1995) states the letter to the Philippians, in addition to being a letter of friendship, represents a letter of moral exhortation, and he explains “moral instruction often took place in the context of friendship” (p. 11) in Greco-Roman history. In order to provide a model of behavior, Paul presents Jesus Christ as the perfect exemplar. Christ provides a perfect example for imitation in terms of thinking and behaving in keeping with the gospel (Fee, 1995).

Authentic Christological Leadership of Jesus Christ

The leadership of Jesus Christ differs from some modern leadership theories such as transformational leadership or charismatic leadership. Bass (1985) states the transformational leader has been described by followers as a benevolent father, friendly and knowledgeable who models integrity and fairness. Yet, scholars question whether there is universality in the transformational leadership paradigm (e.g. Bass, 1997). Transformational leaders may provide energizing purpose and role model ethical conduct (Bass, 1995, 1997),

but the way leaders provide their influence and example may vary. Bass (1997) acknowledges cultural beliefs, values and norms influence leader-follower relationships. While transformational leadership (Bass, 1995) may refer to a leadership style that focuses on bringing out the best in followers, the leader and the leader's interactions with followers are believed to persuade followers to act beyond self-interest for the good of the organization (Bass, 1985). While followers of Christ may extend themselves beyond self-interest, the reason why Christians go beyond selfishness is not fully explained by transformational leadership theory. Transformational leadership theory does not provide a method that fully explains the leader's behaviors, and even the multifactor leadership questionnaire does not necessarily effectively and consistently differentiate between transformational leadership and other leadership styles such as contingent reward behaviors associated with the transactional leadership style (e.g. Antonakis, Avolio, & Sivasubramaniam, 2003).

Likewise, some scholars argue the charisma of the leader helps to get the attention of followers and inspires them to work toward the leader's vision, but charismatic leadership theory does not go far enough in explaining the behavior of Jesus. Conger and Kanungo (1987) state "charisma is a Greek word meaning gift" and used by Paul in the New Testament "to describe the holy spirit" (p. 637). They indicate charisma was influential in the roles that individual members served within the early Christian community. Yet, Willner (1984) later used the word charisma to describe a leadership style based on perceptions of followers regarding the relational nature of a leader. House and Baetz (1979) later more fully described charismatic leadership as a set of behaviors that inspired followers in willing obedience, emulation and emotional involvement with the leader (Conger & Kanungo, 1987). In other words, the modern description of a charismatic leader refers to the way followers perceive the leader rather than a true representation of the traits, personality or behaviors of the leader (e.g. Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Willner, 1984). One way the leader persuades follower perceptions is through the use of rhetoric (Avolio & Gardner, 2005) yet Jesus was influential by his actions more so than mere words; therefore, charismatic leadership theory cannot fully explain the leadership of Jesus.

Servant leadership may come closer to describing the leadership characteristics of Jesus. Servant leadership was introduced by Greenleaf (1977) to describe a leader who puts other people's interests before self-interests with a motivation to serve-first rather than lead-first in order to transform followers into more autonomous and healthy servants. Sendjaya and Sarros (2002) refer to the passage of scripture in Mark 10 and explain that leadership greatness according to Jesus is defined as commitment to serve others.

While commitment to service represents a characteristic that Jesus identifies as more important than

self-interest, service alone does not fully describe Jesus' actions in the Philippians hymn. Levering and Moskowitz (2000) reduce servant leadership characteristics to openness, fairness, friendliness, pride in work, and security. Graham (1991) reports servant leaders place follower needs before their own, and Ford (1991) suggests that Jesus' strong self-image is what allows him to put follower needs before his own. In these examples, a servant-leader might be an exemplar servant of community with noble beliefs in the common good and provide inspiration to other to serve. Yet does this same leader self-give or self-sacrifice in order to engage in such activities? Servant leadership, while a good example of positive leadership, on its own does not fully describe Jesus' actions and motives in the Philippians' hymn.

Figure 1 displays the authentic Christological leadership model that most closely resembles the leadership that Jesus provides as an example in the Philippians hymn discovered through sacred texture analysis of Philippians 2:5-11.

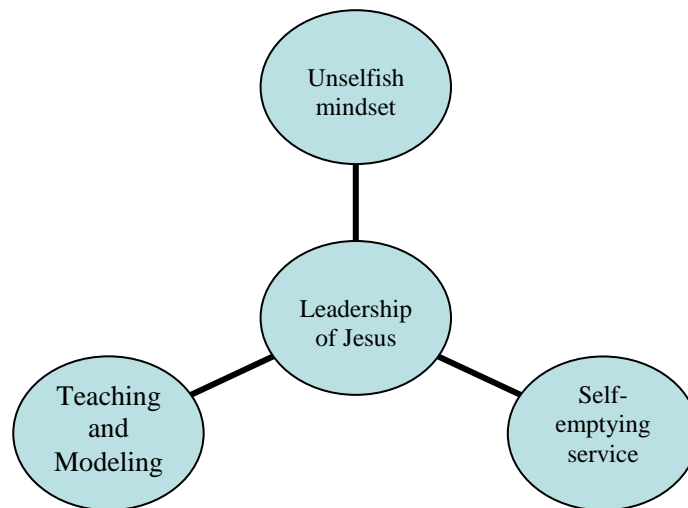


Figure 1. Authentic Christological Leadership Model of Jesus Christ

Authentic leadership theory may represent a theory that closely resembles the leadership of Jesus as describe in the Philippians hymn. Avolio and Gardner (2005) indicate in today's challenging and turbulent world, there is a call for genuine leadership, and they further suggest the development of both authentic leadership and authentic followership is necessary in the 21st century. They posit the development of authentic leaders will foster the development of authentic followers (Avolio & Gardner, 2005).

There are four core elements of authenticity namely self-awareness, balanced processing, relational transparency and authentic behavioral action (Kernis, 2003; Avolio & Gardner, 2005). Authenticity then refers

to the basic nature of an individual as someone who is accurately in tune with self and unencumbered by others' expectations so that the person makes sound personal choices that fit with personal values. The authentic person does not mean a sincere person whose self presented to others is represented accurately and honestly (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Erickson, 1995; Trilling, 1972). Rather, the authentic individual knows self and acts in accordance with the true self (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Harter, 2002). Christ demonstrates knowledge of self and with this knowledge of self he did not attempt to think and behave the way he ought or the way others' expected. Because of this authenticity, Christ takes action with an unselfish mindset. He does not need to defend or protect an image of self because he is aware of his true self.

There may be a mutuality of self-giving in this leadership style and follower response. Christ displayed an unselfish mindset by being "in the form of God" (Phil. 2:6) but not grasping this equality with God. Rather the 'not grasping' nature of this equality with God gave Jesus an unselfish mindset manifesting itself through self-giving action rather than self-aggrandizing actions (e.g. Lucien, 1997; Cummings, 2004; Gorman, 2001). The sacred texture analysis of Philippians 2:5-11 reveals the authentic Christological leadership model of Jesus Christ consists of an unselfish mindset, self-emptying service and teaching and modeling of the authentic leader in order to develop authentic followership.

The unselfish mindset of Christ permits his self-emptying service by taking the form of a slave and becoming obedient even unto death on a cross for the sake of others. It may be argued that many contemporary leaders lack effective leadership because they are seduced by money and power, and Doherty (2003) argues the same temptations exist for Christians. He states if the Christians were really leading people they would do so by "giving up power and authority. The power of God working in the world is through God emptying God's self in kenosis" (p. 109).

When the Word became flesh, Jesus Christ became the perfect leadership exemplar and demonstrated that in order to follow ethical and moral rules of leading others, the power level of all parties needs to be reduced to zero (Kirkeby, 2008). Doherty (2003) indicates the cross of Jesus unites humanity to God, and it represents the ideal love affair, the ideal relationship, the ideal leader-follower interaction where there is an intimacy that is established on differences but those differences do not divide (Kirkeby, 2008). The incarnate Jesus remained God, but "it was by the kenosis of Jesus as God with us that brought the power of new life" (p. 110). God begins working through leaders when they empty themselves of power and authority (Doherty, 2003).

This self-giving and unselfish mindset of Christ results in self-emptying service. Jesus took on the “form of a bond servant” (Phil. 2:6-7). In this action, Paul holds Christ up as the perfect exemplar for believers. He both encourages and challenges the community in Roman Philippi to continue for the present and continue in the future behaving in a manner worthy of the gospel (Phil 1:27). Kenosis leadership refers to self-emptying, and the self-emptying of Christ was an expression of presence. Jesus the incarnate, through his presence in the world, represents God’s gift to humanity (Kirkeby, 2008). Kirkeby (2008) explains presence defines the meeting of eternity in time as a direct experience, and the meeting between eternity and time in Jesus Christ places God in time. The depth and length of divine love is revealed through the self-emptying of Christ Jesus (Anderson, 1999), and the example of Christ presents a suitable model of authentic leadership for the 21st century.

The 21st century requires leadership who will not only represent good leadership but who will both teach and model authentic leadership for others for the purpose of inspiring followers to engage in similar behaviors. Drago-Severson (2004) points out leadership and teaching are both about dedication and profound caring. When transformational leaders provide individualized consideration meaning the attention given to followers’ needs and then acting as a mentor or coach, Bass and Riggio (2006) indicates the leader represents a teacher. Together, the unselfish mindset, the self-emptying service and the teaching and modeling method of Jesus Christ as the perfect exemplar or an authentic Christological leadership model of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

The perfect exemplar of Jesus Christ in the Philippians hymn represents a model by which the believers in Roman Philippi could imitate in order to make themselves worthy of the gospel of Christ. Today, while scholars attempt to define positive forms of leadership through transformational leadership theory, charismatic leadership theory, and even servant leadership theory, it seems that each model falls short of the perfect example set by Christ in the Philippians hymn. While authentic leadership theory may closest resemble the leadership of Jesus due to the reciprocal nature of interaction between self-giving authentic leadership and authentic followership, the authentic Christological model of leadership exemplified by Jesus Christ goes further still. Christ reveals the authentic Christian leader with an unselfish mindset, life of self-giving service, and teachable spirit that provides a model of learning for followers represent the type of leadership that is necessary in the 21st century. It is by this authentic Christological model of leadership that leaders and followers in the 21st century may most effectively put conscious effort, self-cultivation attempt and continual

learning activities to the best use.

About the Author

Sharon Norris is an instructor of business and the director of graduate studies at Spring Arbor University. She earned a B.A. in management and organizational development and M.B.A. from Spring Arbor University. She is pursuing a Ph.D. in organizational leadership at Regent University's School of Global Leadership and Entrepreneurship.

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