THEOCENTRIC LEADERSHIP:
A NEW APPROACH TO GOD-HONORING LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Leadership research has focused primarily on questions of who leaders are and/or what they do. More development is necessary regarding what motivates and guides the leader to act and what guides specific leadership behavior. This conceptual paper provides foundational thought and construct development for a powerful internal motivation to leadership. This motivation builds on the concept of servant leadership and followership, but shifts the focus to leading in order to honor God and to act universally according to His character and design. "Theocentric leadership" takes the approach that many leaders feel an obligation and desire to put God in the center of everything they do, and servant leadership is a natural outgrowth of this adherence to God's will. God-centered leaders experience a powerful obligation to serve, mentor, develop, and nurture their followers and others around them. The Bible and other religious teachings provide well-developed guidance on the practice and virtue of leadership. While this particular paper addresses Theocentric leadership from the Christian perspective, it is certainly likely that adherents to the world's other great religions (and perhaps even agnostic or atheist non-believers) are motivated similarly to service, nurturing, and development of followers. Implications for future research and practical application in modern organizations are proposed.

Keywords: Theocentric leadership, servant leadership, religion, values, God-centered

INTRODUCTION

Considerable research has been done in the field of leadership over the years attempting to define what leadership is and to understand successful examples of leadership. Many definitions, approaches, models, and theories of leadership have developed and have been helpful in refining our understanding. While these useful explanations have together formed a very successful field of inquiry, many of the past leadership studies have addressed relatively limited aspects or applications of leadership (Northouse, 2013). In a recent overview of the field, for example, Northouse (2013) reviews four approaches to leadership, three theories of leadership, and five models of leadership. His comprehensive work effectively illustrates the many approaches to leadership, but concludes that the thought process behind leadership and the influences that motivate leadership behavior from within are still being explored and understood.

While most of this very helpful and successful leadership research has focused on what leadership is and what effective leadership "looks like," there has been little written in terms of the compelling

motivations to lead and specific influences on leader behavior (Blanchard, 2007; Parris & Peachey, 2013). It has been assumed that leadership is valuable because it enhances performance and development of the individual, the group, and the organization, and psychological and economic assets and benefits no doubt accrue as a result of positive leadership (Northouse, 2013). This paper proposes that many leaders feel an obligation and desire to put God in the center of everything they do, and leadership is a natural outgrowth of this adherence to God's will. We argue that God-centered leaders experience a powerful obligation to serve, mentor, develop, and nurture their followers and others around them. We look into very genuine and persuasive internal motivations for why leadership is undertaken in the first place: to serve others and to serve, honor, and venerate God. Clearly, what internally stimulates and compels fervent and fruitful leadership can be of great value in the overall leadership discussion.

Recent surveys suggest that the majority of Americans identify themselves as "Christian," with one poll suggesting 71% (Cohn, 2015) and another 83% (Langer, 2015). The Bible and other Christian teachings are replete with appeals to serve, mentor, develop, nurture, and facilitate, and many or most of this majority are no doubt aware of these mandates. Langer's survey and others suggest that about half of these respondents are fervent, passionate, or even evangelical in their faith. It is argued that for these people who profess an understanding and devotion to the the character and will of God, spirituality, religious values, and honoring God are potentially very important and compelling motivations or "calling" to take on leadership roles and to serve others. For these people, the positive influence they can have on others is likely viewed as being a very important part of their purpose in life.

Leadership behavior from this perspective is a type of "calling" to the leader, but perhaps more importantly, it affirms and is in keeping with the will of God. In this work, we focus more on the motivations and guidance to lead from the perspective of Christianity, the religion and faith to which both authors belong and to whom teachings are most familiar. Further work will be needed to validate this construct and to explore the notion from the perspective of the world's other great religions, many of which extol the virtues of leadership, selfless giving for the benefit of others, moral goal-driven behavior, improved personal and collective outcomes, and righteous development of others. Moreover, while agnostics and atheists would not act altruistically because God compels them to do so, many of them would likely believe that these serving and nurturing behaviors are simply the right thing to do and beneficial to human relations and welfare. Certainly understanding this compelling internal motivation of leaders will be of importance to future research, leadership practice, and education.

In this paper, we will build primarily upon servant leadership, which succeeds in explaining beneficial leadership behavior from the standpoint of how followers are influenced and respond. In this work, we explore the concept of leadership not as something that we control or influence in a proactive way, but rather as a response from individuals to persuasive and inspirational spiritual and religious influences. We will summarize some of the motivational aspects of previous leadership work (such as servant leadership), review and explain how religious values have an impact on organizations and management, and offer additional explanation to the study of leadership that focuses not on outcomes or methods, but on motivations that compel individuals to lead and behave in a God-centered manner.

LEADERSHIP'S FOCUS ON OTHERS

Early theories and approaches to leadership focused almost exclusively on the effectiveness and personal success of leaders, mainly looking inward to traits, skills, and abilities that made one person a better or more natural leader than someone else. In more recent work, the focus has shifted to external situations and elements, such as followers, team behavior and circumstances, and the organization. Researchers as well as practitioners have become interested in how leaders enhance and build the organization and others, rather than strictly their personal characteristics, or effectiveness (Northouse, 2013). For example, transformational leadership looked at how the leader instills vision and ideals and transforms the culture, values, people, and commitment within the organization. Likewise, followership has focused on the leader's efforts to develop mutual trust and respect in the organization in an effort to develop active, engaged, independent, and pro-active members (Northouse.2013).

Servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1970) suggests that leaders are more effective at motivating their followers when they base their actions on the needs and growth of those followers. Leaders are compelled to direct their energies away from personal interests and goals and toward the interests and goals of their followers. The initial motivation of leaders is the success and development of others, even if this conflicts with their own personal short-term success, because it often leads to personal and organizational success for the leaders in the long term. These leaders recognize that their success and the success of the overall organization will likely follow when the success of followers is ensured (Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004).

Blanchard (2007) discusses the impact that a servant leader can have on staff morale. He describes the basic appreciation and enthusiasm of those who have a leader who listens to them, understands them, and treats them with respect. But he also mentions the likely discouragement and demoralization of those who have a leader who "uses" them and refuses to include them in the daily processes. He notes the change in demeanor that often occurs, both negatively and positively, when leadership shifts from one who is an effective servant leader to one who is not, and vice-versa.

Liden, Wayne, Liao, and Meuser (2013) suggest that while servant leadership is a highly effective form of leadership and the altruistic and developmental behaviors have merit, it is a very difficult undertaking for many as the natural instinct and human nature for many leaders is personal success, self-interest, and self-advancement. The servant leadership literature implies that some managers will have a much easier time embracing and living out this outward-focused leadership perspective than will others (Peterson, Galvin, & Lange, 2012). Russell (2001) indicates that the reason is rooted in the personal values of the individual manager or leader and that these values of "others over self" may distinguish and separate those who can live out servant leadership versus those who cannot. McDonald (2003) suggests that leaders will tend to be driven either by their natural human ambitions for success or by some higher calling and purpose to serve others. Blanchard (2007) argues that servant leadership is "an inside job," a passion and a way of life for people and a natural extension of who they are, and not just a technique or gimmick that can be learned and used to boost short-term success.

Patterson and Stone (2003) identify seven key attributes that seem to be consistent throughout servant leader behaviors: altruism, empowerment, humility, genuine love, a customer service orientation, trust cultivation, and an inspired vision. Chan and Mak (2014) add that this trust helps to improve employee or follower job satisfaction and has a significant impact in the short-term.

A key factor driving this natural, internal propensity and compelling motivation to serve others is traditional faith, spirituality, and religious values that mirror those values, attitudes, and behaviors required to be a servant leader. Although it is likely that many or most religions espouse very important values that would influence a leader's ability to serve followers, we focus in this paper on Christian values and morals and utilize the Bible as a source of Christian teachings that could powerfully compel servant leaders to passionately serve others. Jesus Christ, for example, said "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many people" (Mark 10:45 – this and all following Bible passages taken from the New International Version). The "Fruits of the Holy Spirit" are viewed as a definitive description of the sacrificial and other-serving demeanor and behavior demanded of Christians as a result of their belief and faith in Christ. Galatians 5:22-23 reveals that "The Fruits of the Spirit are love, joy, peace, forbearance (patience), kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

As we consider the example of servant leadership and how these leaders sacrifice their own interests for the greater interests of others, we should consider how closely this mirrors the example of how Christ lived out this service to others within the framework of submission to God. Christian principles, values, teachings, and behaviors suggest powerful internal motivation of servant leaders, and play a critical role in the natural and successful practice of the servant leader's attentive and selfless style and other-focused behaviors.

RELIGIOUS VALUES IN ORGANIZATIONS AND MANAGEMENT

Religion and its impact on people has always been a challenging avenue of scholarly inquiry. We have recently seen more research into spirituality and religion in business and the workplace (Biberman & Altman, 2004), but there is a great need for more studies that look at the influences of religion and spirituality in the practice of management (Fornaciari & Dean, 2009; Kniss & Campbell, 1997). As noted previously, most Americans identify themselves as Christians, although much fewer are devoted adherents to Christian teachings. Still, many Americans subscribe very passionately and faithfully to Christ's principles and teachings, and these guide much of their life in terms of values, beliefs, attitudes, and most importantly, behavior (Blau & Ryan, 1997; Vasconcelos, 2010). Neal, Lichtenstein, and Banner (2009) suggest that it is a natural progression of events for people who undergo spiritual changes to attempt to apply these changes to other areas of their lives, including work, and this tends to make them more engaged and happier.

Research over the years indicates that religious values (Christian as well as those of other religions) can influence very positive personal and organizational outcomes. Values can enhance decision-making processes (Vasconcelos, 2009), heighten the perception of non-ethical behavior (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003), improve moral reasoning (Sapp & Jones, 1986), create stronger organizational citizenship behaviors (Madison & Kellermanns, 2013), and lead to lower levels of prejudice and discrimination (Allen & Spilka, 1967). Religious values that are incorporated into

the workplace can provide meaning for workers, which in turn can contribute to personal happiness and good health and well-being (Gavin & Mason, 2004). Dyck and Schroeder (2005) found that these personal moral values impact our choices, work, and behavior in management settings, and Nash (1995) determined that these religious beliefs and values heavily influence decisions made by business leaders. Davidson and Caddell (1994) suggested that these values can actually cause individuals to see work as a divine calling, and this places increased significance on living out these values daily and impacting the lives of others. Angelidis and Ibrahim (2004), Kennedy and Lawton (1998), and McNichols and Zimmerer (1985) found that these religious values can have a very positive impact on ethics and ethical behavior.

Several studies found that religion-influenced approaches can have a number of very positive impacts on the practice of leadership, and include enhancements related to ethics and trust and credibility. One study indicated that individuals who put a high value on religion in their daily decision making were less likely to engage in questionable ethical practices (Smith & Oakley, 1996). Another study reached a similar conclusion that individuals who place a moderate or high importance on religion had superior ethical judgment than those who had low or no importance (Longnecker, McKinney, & Moore, 2004). Likewise, Rawwas, Swaidan, and Al-Khatib (2006) determined that religion had a large impact on reducing unethical responses to situations, and Worden (2005) found that religious components might enrich leadership activities, including ethics and credibility. Rodgers and Gago (2006) indicate that man has tried for centuries to use religiosity and religious values in influencing ethical considerations.

While some leaders certainly desire to allow their Christian beliefs to influence their leadership activities in the business world, Campbell (1957) has suggested that the reality of that business world is not conducive to this alignment, as a wall has been constructed between the two and most insist that the two be separate and distinct. Campbell found, even more than half a century ago, that businesses were making moves to minimize the expression of faith-based values in the workplace. He argues, however, that religious values should create the best outcomes for all for mankind, and that Christianity and religious values are not in opposition to capitalistic ideals.

One problem that has certainly limited this type of study in the past is that religious and spiritual adherence and beliefs are very closely-held and personal and can be very difficult to distinguish, characterize, and study. Also, many individuals maintain and exhibit a large gulf between their "religious life" and their "everyday life." For example, the linkage between religious values and the workplace is not always so clear and is not always so easy to ascertain, because some business people are very active in their religious pursuits but their workplace actions (and actions elsewhere) show little hard evidence of their faith or values (Weaver & Agle, 2002). Those who study leadership certainly do not have to look far to find a number of "Christian" leaders who have made very unethical decisions. Under no circumstances is hypocrisy viewed as a positive leadership behavior.

Other researchers discount the impact of religious values completely, suggesting that ethical values and training by itself never seems to do a complete job of influencing good behaviors or preventing bad ones (Conroy & Emerson, 2004; Sternberg, 2011). It has been argued that people have developed their own individual codes of right and wrong and their own values, and frequently deceive themselves as to how appropriate their actions are (Von Hippel & Trivers, 2011). Some

observe that there is no relationship or possibly a negative relationship between religious orientation and ethics (Clark & Dawson, 1996; Hegarty & Sims, 1978; Hegarty & Sims, 1979). Many reveal that people are good at self-justification and regularly fool themselves into thinking that their personal behavior, that actually is unethical or illegal, really is not wrong at all (Anand, Ashforth, & Joshi, 2004; Banaji, Bazerman, & Chugyh, 2003; Vanderveen, 2004). Smith, Wheeler, and Dierner (1975) concluded that there is no difference between religious and non-religious people in terms of dishonesty and cheating, and Kidwell, Stevens, and Bethke (1987) concluded that there was no relationship between religiosity and ethical judgments. Further, we are all familiar with scenarios where religion and faith have obscured and clouded solid evidence and hampered the decision making process entirely, leading to sub-optimal and dysfunctional outcomes.

So it is unclear even after many years of research and such an exhaustive course of scholarly inquiry, what the true influence of these values are on organizational and personal outcomes. Again, we argue in this paper that better definition and more refined descriptions of the functioning and mechanics of faith-influenced leadership behavior, namely from the perspective of influence on others, will help to clarify this important relationship.

THE PROBLEM OF POOR DEFINITION

Parris and Peachey (2013) conclude that there is no real consensus on an accepted definition of servant leadership, that there is no common context in which servant leadership is measured, and that there is no common measurement standard for research. They do suggest, however, that servant leadership is a valid theory that can help organizations and that can ultimately improve the well-being of followers. There seems to be little doubt that the internal values and motivations positively influence this selfless and serving practice of leadership (Blanchard, 2007). Other researchers reach similar conclusions, but note that it is difficult to accurately measure some parts of spirituality such as soul, spirit, and faith (Fornaciari & Dean, 2001). An additional obstacle is that there are widely varying definitions and measures of religiosity which are based on things such as church attendance and giving (Weaver & Agle, 2002), participation in public worship or private devotions (Agle & Van Buren, 1999), or based on the results of a test (Senger, 1970). Simply put, how we choose to define or measure "spirituality" or "religiosity" can significantly impact the results of a study by including people who realistically should not be considered "religious" in these contexts because they don't "practice what they preach."

In the absence of a commonly accepted definition of what religiosity is, some researchers have shifted the focus to how deeply these beliefs are held, regardless of what they are. For example, a person who holds religious beliefs internally to the degree that he or she treats those beliefs as an end rather than as a means to an end (Allport, 1966) is categorized as religious, regardless of what religion is identified. Likewise, a deep conviction that a creed or belief is supremely true (Allport & Ross, 1967) is another means of identifying someone who is religious. Satija (2009) contributes to our construct development with the suggestion that the religious person is the one who consistently applies spiritual principles and values to everyday activities and who allows these principles and values to play a strong role in decision-making and behavior, even though the particular religion that espouses those convictions is less relevant.

This approach to defining "religiosity" could help expand any research on servant leadership since treating others with respect (one outcome of "religiosity") can be held as a deep-seated belief even in those who do not consider themselves to be "religious." Maxwell (2003) builds on this idea when he presents the idea that most of the world's cultures have a concept similar to the "Golden Rule" in the Bible that "in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you" (Matthew 7:12).

A number of studies by Wimberly (1978; 1984; 1989) concluded that two people who follow the same religion and generally follow the same religious beliefs can act differently because of the level to which they hold those beliefs; one holds them to a level of self-identification and the other holds them as surface traits. They further found that the more deeply held these beliefs are, the more discomfort arises when the holder is forced to violate them. Weaver and Agle (2002) suggest that researchers should not simply measure "religiosity" but rather those particular beliefs that people hold closely within their religious stance. There is a difference between religion and spirituality, according to Mirtoff and Denton (1999), and approximately 60% of respondents in a survey had positive reactions to "spirituality" but negative reactions to "religion." One of their conclusions was that people seem to feel that religion does not necessarily belong in the workplace, but spirituality does.

This vagueness of what "religiosity" or "spirituality" means remains a troubling aspect of value-focused leadership motivations in general, and religiously-motivated, outwardly focused leadership behavior in particular, and makes it difficult to establish a framework for consistency among further studies. Simply put, it is difficult to the point of impossibility to accurately measure how religious or how spiritual someone is. Even in the absence of a good tool to measure such a quality, a discussion of how that quality could be implemented in leadership roles to produce excellent human outcomes is justified. In other words, even if we have limitations in measuring a worthwhile construct, building a plan around how we would use that construct has value.

A NEW LEADERSHIP MODEL – THEOCENTRIC LEADERSHIP

"Calling" is one of the primary components of spiritual well-being, and is defined by individuals as a sense that their work has meaning and purpose and that they have that work for a reason (Fry, 2003). Many in the workplace seem to believe that a balanced, well-rounded life is what secures happiness, and that means carrying faith-based views into a workplace that is often more concerned with financial goals and personal achievements. In order for these individuals to maintain a strong and balanced faith in all aspects of their lives, it is critical for them to be able to carry their religious beliefs and practices into the workplace and to allow these behaviors to influence the daily activities in all areas of their lives (Morgan, 2004).

Maciariello (2003) noted that Christ approached every situation with a firm desire to bring God glory in everything and to meet the needs of others, and He taught this approach to His followers. Likewise, Nehemiah and others in the Old Testament acted for Godly ends rather than personal goals, and made decisions based on what would honor God, seeking God's character and pursuing an intimate relationship with Him. This impacted Nehemiah's leadership style in everything from motivating people and delegating assignments, to dealing with adversity. Maciariello's (2003) conclusion was that steering servant leadership towards Biblical models would make them even

more effective. This had led us to a new model of leadership, based on putting God at the center of everything we do, which we will designate henceforth as "Theocentric Leadership."

We propose that Christian leaders desire to honor God by being great leaders, rather than by simply being good leaders, and argue that a definite, consistent internal motivation and guide to behavior will turn good servant leaders into great ones. Using Biblical vernacular, we argue that the Christian servant leaders will consistently put the needs of colleagues above their own, thereby fulfilling what Christ defined as the "second greatest commandment," to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39). While this is an admirable position to take in life and in one's leadership role, it seems to still discount what Christ gave as the greatest commandment in the law, which was "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matthew 22:37).

Therefore, we hold that servant leadership effectively addresses what Christ indicates is the second best thing that we can do, but falls short of the first. For Christians, a different approach to leadership, which loves the Lord with all our heart and soul and mind, would address the first. We argue that when a leader's actions seek first to love God and honor Him, that all other relationships reap the resulting benefits. Not only will leadership be characterized by selfless, other-serving, other-loving development of people, but all stakeholders will be treated better, scandals and unscrupulous temptations will be less likely, and the organization will be above reproach.

King Solomon says that "whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might" (Ecclesiastes 9:10), and Paul adds that "whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving" (Colossians 3:23-24).

Paul indicated that "we speak as those approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel. We are not trying to please people but God, who tests our hearts" (I Thessalonians 2:4). He also stated that "whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God" (I Corinthians 10:31). It seems from Scripture that this God-centered approach to life is what God had in mind, and it has applicability to all of life, including the workplace and the leadership relationship.

A number of years ago, a popular cultural approach to decision-making was embodied in the acronym "WWJD" found on bracelets worn primarily by young people, which compelled people to ask in any situation "What Would Jesus Do?" before making any decisions or taking any actions. We attempt to use this as a foundation by considering first which potential action or decision would truly honor God, and which would be the decision that He would make in this position. If God Himself were in this spot making this decision, He would generally act out of concern for others and in a way that built up others. Christ actively lived out this concept of theocentric leadership while He lived on the earth. His decisions were always about selfless honoring of God, and those decisions tended to lift up others in the process. Further, Christ was focused on those who were in the greatest need of altruism and self-sacrifice, saying in Matthew 25 that "whatever you did for the least of these brothers and sisters, you also did for Me… and whatever you did not do for the least of these, you also did not do for Me."

The concept of God-centered, theocentric leadership is fundamentally simple, and one with which most committed and practicing Christians would likely not disagree. But how do Christian leaders actually put such a concept into practice? How do they effectively and consistently put God in the center of everything that they do? What does such an approach look like, or not look like, in terms of behavior? How does it manifest itself in practical actions, and what common activities should people refrain from doing in the future? People have varying and independent concepts of what God "wills" for humanity and personal lives, and there is often disagreement on what Christianity should look like in daily living.

Because of this, the questions posed above are not easy to answer. However, as stated earlier, any decision that is made within the framework of loving and serving God foremost, and loving others radically, is seemingly in keeping with these principles. The common denominator with these two ideas is that theocentric leaders are not acting with themselves in mind, and they are not seeking to better themselves at the expense of their relationship with God or other people. Instead, these theocentric leaders are seeking God's welfare and the welfare of others, and if they are benefitted or are honored as a result, that is a bonus. Beyond that, a knowledge that God is watching, and is ready to either say "Well done, thou good and faithful servant" (Matthew 25:21) or "Truly I tell you, I don't know you" (Matthew 25:12) helps frame their motivations, decisions, and daily behaviors and actions.

Theocentric leadership would, ideally, seek personal recognition, advancement, and glory only when it could be pointed or redirected to honor God or others for the gifts and abilities that He has given. Collins (2001) talks about the "window and the mirror" and expresses that the great leaders quickly look in the mirror when assessing blame, taking the brunt of the bad personally, and they look out the window when assessing credit and praise, deferring that to others. Leaders who put God at the center of all decisions and actions, and especially in leadership opportunities, consistently redirect praise and accolades to others and seek to develop their self-esteem, confidence, and positive perceptions by others.

In a similar logic, theocentric leadership would also cause leaders to shy away from the personal spotlight and the receiving of individual accolades for organizational accomplishments, preferring instead to let others stand in the light when it is favorable. In far too many circumstances today, we see leaders who are drawn to the center stage when praise is being handed out, even when those leaders deserve no more of the attention than anyone else who contributed to the success. The theocentric leader would instead be constantly looking to stay in the background, helping to orchestrate activities and goals, but not seeking credit when those goals were achieved. Leaders who put God at the center of everything that they do, and especially in leadership opportunities, realize that personal recognition simply means that other deserving individuals are missing opportunities to grow and receive recognition for the good things that they do, which oftentimes go unnoticed or overlooked by outsiders.

Additionally, theocentric leadership should cause leaders to rethink the structure of salaries, benefits, bonuses, and "perks" in a way that frees up more organizational resources for those less-glorified team members who deserve additional rewards but who rarely receive them. The American way of life stresses that individuals have a primary duty to provide for their families' needs, and certainly receiving more economic benefits allows leaders to share those benefits with

others through giving. But it can also be argued that in our modern world of economic plenty, there is a point where additional benefits only create marginal value, and additional dollars in the form of annual salary and bonuses only provide an incremental, and perhaps unnecessary, extra cushion. Theocentric leadership would compel leaders to reassess "wants" and focus more on "needs" in such a way as to assist others in meeting their "needs." An excellent example of how this might look in practice lies in a recent decision by the Board of Directors at Parkland Health and Hospital System in Dallas, Texas to take between three and four million dollars from a pool of money that traditionally had been used to pay executive bonuses and use it instead to improve the hourly wages of over 200 lower-paid workers. While we cannot be sure that this was prompted by a motive in line with theocentric leadership, the end results certainly provide an excellent picture of what this motivation and guidance looks like in real-world application. Leaders who put God at the center of everything that they do, and especially in leadership opportunities, realize that compensation and benefits that go beyond that which is "needed" and that are instead shared with colleagues at a lower hierarchical level can honor God by putting others first in a self-sacrificial way.

Finally, theocentric leadership would compel leaders to use information in a way that benefits others, unlike what we saw so often in the 1990s in companies like Enron, WorldCom, and Tyco, where leaders took information and used it for personal gain at the expense of their workers and stakeholders, many of whom lost nearly everything while their greedy corporate leaders retired to extravagant settings. Leaders who put God at the center of everything that they do, and especially in leadership opportunities, realize that providing others with critical information enhances the lives of everyone and prevents the select few from benefitting disproportionally.

In essence, theocentric leadership compels the leader to rethink every aspect of organizational leadership activities and to look at actions and decisions in light of what brings ultimate honor and glory to God, and to what improves the livelihood and well-being of others, even if it means that the leaders could possibly miss out on those same honors, benefits and rewards.

Some might legitimately ask why leaders in this modern "dog-eat-dog" world would even be interested in such a selfless approach to leadership. Why would anyone sacrifice self-interest so completely for the good of others? For Christians, there is a very compelling and powerful motivation for such behavior. Second Corinthians 5:9-10 says "So we make it our goal to please Him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." Simply put, theocentric leaders can gain reward here on earth in the form of those things viewed as tangible, perishable, and purely temporal, or they can gain future reward in heaven in the form of those things viewed as intangible and eternal. The Bible teaches in this and other passages that one day, everyone will answer directly to God for their decisions and behaviors. For Christians, it makes sense to adopt a leadership philosophy now that addresses the critical problems so that the judgment to come is more in their favor.

Making it a highest priority to have God at the center of decisions, whether those decisions are related to work, family, relationships, finances, or whatever else one's "hands find to do," should make more of the ethical gray areas turn to black and white, and there seems to be evidence that this focus on God is beneficial and advantageous.

LITERATURE SUPPORT FOR THEOCENTRIC LEADERSHIP

Many writers over the years seem to have argued for a God-centered, virtuous professional and work life, even when they did not use that specific terminology. Vanderveen (2004) argued that Christians should strive to be like God, and that involves being holy, just, and loving. Martinez (2003) reasoned that God has to be included in a proper understanding of business and interactions, and that there is true value in incorporating the Christian faith into business processes. He concludes that this partnership of Christian faith and business life motivates workers better and improves ethics overall. While society does not mandate this partnership, and sometimes actively discourages it, the Christian should be striving for a higher standard than that for which the world strives. Economic success, hard work, integrity, efficiency, and cooperation are associated with Christian values, according to Ibrahim and Angelidis (2005). Worden (2003) concludes that when a leader's religiosity is tied to his identity, his ethical perspective is not genuine without incorporating those religious components into that ethical view. We could suggest that people who are wholeheartedly committed to Christian values would discover a major inner-conflict and disconnect if these values were not part of their overall life, to include their working hours.

Dyck and Schroeder (2005) believed that leadership should be an outward illustration by the manager through actions that reflect Godly behavior, since love is the essence of His character, and since He calls people in business and management to illustrate this character. Because people are driven by a sense of a higher calling (Sendjaya, Sarros, & Santora, 2008), placing God at the center of their perspective would help them become what they long to be and to live according to such a higher purpose.

Additional streams of research indicate that, in addition to the benefits to the individual leader and the organization, there are benefits to the followers when a leader adopts such a perspective. Sosik and Godshalk (2000), for example, argue that followers often look at their leaders as mentors and attempt to emulate their actions and approaches to situations, adding to the responsibility of leaders to do it right, because people are watching and learning. Lankau and Scandura (2002) agree with this concept, finding that people who are younger or newer to professional situations tend to develop their professional behaviors for the future by modeling what those in authority over them do. When leaders act with a God-centered approach to life, and when those activities are viewed as an integral part of who those leaders really are, rather than who those leaders believe that they are "supposed" to be, followers are more likely to do the same. Also, when followers believe that leaders possess and behave with positive qualities, there is added incentive to act like they do (Hannah, Walumbwa, & Fry, 2011; Mayer, Aquino, Greenbaum, & Kuenzi, 2012). It is ultimately the upper leadership in organizations that establishes the patterns for those below them (Peterson, et al., 2012), and people have higher levels of trust for good leaders than they do for bad or poor leaders (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002), so it is critical that leaders establish the proper style as they influence followers.

Thus, although leadership literature has never studied "theocentric leadership" exactly as we have proposed it, this concept seems to be in keeping with what other writers have concluded in relation to personal beliefs and how they impact others, and would seem to have numerous benefits for the leader, the organization, and the followers. Future research will need to address the measurement of these constructs and behaviors and seek to extend this powerful guiding motivation to other

world religions. Christians and adherents to other religions would likely agree that there is great value in seeking God's ultimate will in the practice of leadership. There is likely great motivation and powerful guidance associated with approaching life the way that God designed for it to be lived, within the scope of relationships and actions that seeks ultimately to honor God.

CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS TO RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

Both of the authors have spent many years as the leaders of rather large and complex business organizations. Both are Christians, and both relied incessantly as leaders on the consistency of faith-based motivation that compels us to serve others and glorify God as an extension of our Christianity. We have observed many Christians over the years that seem to subscribe to the same concepts we have discussed in this paper. Further study is needed to investigate just how pervasive and important Christian-based theocentric leadership is in modern organizations. The literature seems to support its existence but little work has been done to investigate just how meaningful it is in motivating servant leaders.

From a practical standpoint, leaders need a strong compass for making important leadership decisions and choosing appropriate leadership behaviors. Future development of this construct and similar constructs in other religions will no doubt provide a consistent understanding of the motivation and types of behaviors needed for other-serving leadership. Further, development of this construct will allow Christian and other religious business leaders to see more concretely the types of leader behaviors (and motivations behind them) that are fruitful in business settings and solidify their understanding of how to practice their faith in secular settings.

It should be emphasized that it is not the intent of this paper nor the authors to insist that God-centered leadership is the sole or superior means of leading. Nor do we intend to proselytize or induce readers, researchers, or leaders to convert to Christianity because it somehow promotes and motivates a superior form of leadership practice. We do believe that this is a very real motivation for many leaders, and the motivation likely extends beyond the Christian faith and experience. Learning more about theocentric leadership should be very beneficial to leadership pedagogy, though this is certainly not intended as a normative model that suggests this to be a singular or superior approach. There are programs of study (and research) that intentionally seek to incorporate God and religious ideas into leadership practice, but we view the greater contribution of this research to be the suggestion that God provides potentially powerful motivation and guidance to a large percentage of leaders in the world. Researchers and teachers of leadership should be intent on finding other powerful motivations that make leaders more effective, more consistent, and more ethical.

Likewise, it has been our experience that leaders adopting a theocentric leadership approach are compatible with Christian as well as non-Christian followers. It is argued that while theocentric leaders can certainly influence their followers to behave in certain ways, it is not a priority of these leaders to "push" their Christian beliefs or demand certain beliefs from their followers. The major motivation for these leaders is to serve and develop followers as productive people, and their deeply held Christian beliefs drive this pursuit. But proselytizing and converting followers is not

believed to be the primary motivation. This is certainly another avenue for future researchers to pursue.

Finally, an argument could be made that people can be virtuous and altruistic servant leaders even when they do not include God among their motivators. We argue, however, that when God is part of the equation, there is a stronger and more thorough level of accountability for consistency and enthusiasm. We argue that the Christian faith can provide a clear and powerful motivation for leadership behaviors that are selfless, philanthropic, self-sacrificing, humane, and that serve, develop, and glorify others in the organization. These behaviors are a natural extension and visible outcome of the duty as Christians to glorify God in all that we do. Clearly, many of the world's other great religions teach similar humanistic, God-serving and other-serving altruistic behaviors. Further development of this work would explore application of this concept to other world religions. It is also likely that non-believers and non-religious individuals would be compelled by a strong internal sense of compassion, benevolence, and humanity to actively pursue these same sorts of other-serving behaviors. Overall this paper has taken a step back from the behaviors exhibited by servant leaders in an attempt to understand the internal motivations that are deemed so necessary by the servant leadership literature. A logical next step in research would be to develop and validate a measure of theocentric motivations to lead, and then to attempt to find correlation with consistent and effective servant leadership behavior in organizations.

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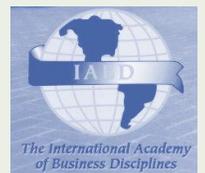
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