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A Trinitarian Perspective of Transformational Leadership

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ABSTRACT

The practice of Christian leadership is influenced by the understanding of who God is and His work. The monistic view of God leads to a monistic leadership approach. With the redevelopment of the doctrine of Trinity, many implications are discussed, including in leadership. Christian leaders are exposed to many leadership theories. One of those is Transformational Leadership which is very appealing to Christian leaders. Yet, Christian leaders must develop their understanding and practice of leadership from what they believe about God and His works. This writing will discuss the trinitarian perspectives in developing a Christian foundation for transformational leadership, using literature review on the topic of leadership based on the Trinitarian perspectives, comparing with the transformational leadership theory. Three suggestions are presented to be considered by Christian leaders in practicing transformational leadership from Trinitarian perspectives, shared leadership, mission-centred, and creating space for the Holy Spirit.

INTRODUCTION

One of the assumptions integral in leadership and management theory nowadays is that humans can control the future effectively if they have the proper techniques (Pattison, 2000). If humans have the right techniques and develop good traits, they can rule the world. Often Christians give little theological insights into the leadership theory and use the concepts without digging deeper into its foundational belief. Christian leaders need to ground their leadership theory on Biblical beliefs and shape their leadership knowledge and practices based on their understanding of God and His reality. This writing is trying to discuss the Trinitarian perspective in developing a Christian foundation for transformational leadership, since monotheistic view of God may lead to authoritarian leadership practice (Zscheile, 2007). In embracing transformational leadership practices, Christian leaders should develop from Trinitarian perspectives and consider the shared leadership, mission-centred, and creating space for the Holy Spirit.

The Need for the Trinitarian Perspective of Transformational Leadership

Zscheile (2007) proposes that the loss of the trinitarian perspective in theological understanding has caused a disproportionate view of God, thus distorting church and ministry leadership practices. While one of the uniqueness of the Christian perspective is the conviction about the Triune God, the Trinitarian perspective has not strongly influenced Christian leadership's foundational understanding and practices. Triune God is not an easy topic to be understood since it is about God, the infinite being, the Creator of humans. It is beyond humans' ability to comprehend. However, Christians who have personally regenerated have experienced the Triune God in action through the gospel, "Christian salvation comes from the Trinity, happens through the Trinity, and brings us home to the Trinity" (Sanders, 2010). Therefore, to discuss Trinitarian perspectives concerning transformational leadership is a further journey of our faith seeking a deeper understanding. It requires a humble demeanor realizing that even with humans' highest intention and ability, it is only by His grace that we may gain a glimpse of a comprehensive understanding of the Trinity. Echoing the quote from Karl Barth, we must confess that there is a mystery in the Trinity (Husbands, 2009).

Bass and Riggio (2006) posit that transformational leadership is currently evolving as a prevalent type of leadership considering the changed nature of Leadership. The world has become more complex with fast-paced changes and thus needs a leadership approach to lead individuals and organizations to change and adapt continuously. Transformational leadership, at the core, is about empowering the process of transformation and change. Leaders nowadays are expected to understand the grass-root problems and embrace the future while navigating changes through empowering the followers. For Christians, transformational leadership seems compatible with Biblical teaching, and some Biblical characters have demonstrated their leadership practices closely related to the transformational leadership model (Burns et al., 2014). However, Christian leaders need to be vigilant in embracing any leadership theories. Biblical perspectives must challenge and inform Christian leaders in developing their leadership understanding and practices (Horsthuis, 2011).

Herewith is a discussion to suggest the Trinitarian perspectives of transformational leadership to inspire Christian leaders to consider the shared leadership, the mission of God, and creating space for the Holy Spirit.

METHODS

This paper was written using the method of literature review (Fink, 2014). The data in this paper are sourced from the literature of books and journals especially related to

transformational leadership theory, as well as leadership issue which are discussed from the foundation of a trinitarian perspective. Then the data were analyzed by the researcher's thoughts. The results of this literature review were then presented in several themes, which are shared leadership, mission-centered, and creating space for the Holy Spirit.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Shared Leadership

Genesis 1:1 lays the foundation: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and earth." Understanding the reality of the created world and everything in it cannot be done detached from the Creator. The Creator is described in the Bible as Trinitarian. "God is one, indivisible, divine substance, yet he subsists as three distinguishable co-divine, co-equal, and co-eternal persons" (Naugle, 2012). One God yet three persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Each person has a distinct attribute, yet all have divine attributes. The three persons participate equally in every act of God, and there is no disharmony in each act (Frame, 2012). God revealed himself throughout history with the involvement of Father, Son, and Spirit. The gospel as the essential credo of Christianity shows Trinity's involvement. Sanders (2010) argues that Trinitarianism should be the 'grounding presuppositions' for Christians to develop their confession framework.

Jenson (in Zscheile, 2007) stated that there had been a "rediscovery and redevelopment of the doctrine of Trinity". A priority of relationality in the Trinity has become the consensus among theologians (Franke, 2009). "There are relationships of origin in the life of the Trinity." (Sanders, 2010). Father, Son, and Holy Spirit flow through each other in the mutual indwelling of one another, described as a type of spirited dance, a *perichoretic* relationship. The mutual relationship within Trinity describes a collaborative and shared action within Trinity. Each person in Trinity is distinct from the others, yet they eternally relate to one another in complete love and cooperation. "Otherness is not to be erased but treasured and enhanced within the pattern of a larger unity and purpose." (Zscheile, 2007).

The implication of a trinitarian relational perspective for leadership is to consider leadership not as a solo leader operating alone, practicing authority in isolation but as "a collaborative, shared, and team-based leadership" (Zscheile, 2007). The opposite leadership approach of a monistic leadership which usually driven by a monistic view of God. Christian leaders should not see a solely top-down and authoritarian leadership as their leadership style. They should develop a leadership team consisting of different people yet guided with loving and dynamic cooperation. Further, there is a reciprocal relationship between leaders and followers, a mutual influence from the leader and the followers. Thus, Christian Leadership should be a shared leadership team.

Franke (2009) explains that within the relational ontology of Trinity, personhood does not separate from the relationships, "By virtue of these relationships, they together constitute the existence or *ousia* of the one God". Relationality is significant for unity as displayed by the Trinity in the loving relationship between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Christian leaders should realize that to lead and facilitate the transformation, developing a relational approach is significant in empowering the followers to grow and directing them to carry out the mission entrusted to them. Christian leaders must realize that they are not self-sufficient and cannot detach themselves from their followers. Their identity and being as leaders are in a mutual relationship with the followers, a reciprocal acknowledgment with the followers, and a shared life that transcends simply fulfilling the tasks (Zscheile, 2007).

Senge (in Zscheile, 2007) proposes the concept of learning in an organization which resonances with the idea of shared Leadership. The members at all levels are encouraged and equipped to resolve the challenges through innovative and collaborative systems thinking.

Christian leaders must embrace a collaborative and interdependence act, a shared leadership, not a monistic one. Thus, for Christian leaders, the four components of transformational leadership such as; idealized influence (II), inspirational motivation (IM), intellectual stimulation (IS), and individualized consideration (IC), are to be practiced with the understanding of the shared-leadership basis that they are in a reciprocal relationship with their followers.

Further, Christian leaders need to understand that they are in the union position with Christ as they practice their leadership, to have the mind, heart, and hand of Christ. They practice their leadership as a participant with God, and their authority never comes on their own but from God. "We do not lead for God, or in light of God, but as participants with God." (Horsthuis, 2011). We are to follow Christ's leading the Church to accomplish the Father's will with the power of the Holy Spirit. Shared Leadership is participative Leadership with God and with the followers. One component of Transformational Leadership is *inspirational motivation*, motivating and inspiring followers. It provides meaning and challenges the followers, leading them to commit to shared goals and vision (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In practice, Christian leaders should be storytellers, joyfully sharing God's story in our midst, framing the past and present, and igniting the imagination for future reality in the light of God's redemptive history and plan. Inspirational motivation for Christian leaders is not only on the level of vision or goals of the organization but goes deeper into the followers' belief of reality.

Further, Horsthuis (2011) suggests that participating with God in Leadership is "a participative movement of grace"; as the leaders experience the movement of grace from God, they become the means of grace for others. Christian leaders are not to show how great they are with the gifts, talents, and accomplishments that they have done, but how weak they are and how great the grace of God is for them. As God heals our wounds, we make our wounds available for the healing of others (Nouwen, 1979).

Mission-centred

Thompson (2007) reasons that the popular approach to leadership is technique-driven as if there is a guarantee that "no matter who you are, you can lead," just following this and that, and you can lead well. For example, *idealized influence* and *intellectual stimulation* are two characteristics of transformational leadership behaviors to give impact and develop a sense of pride and trust in the followers. To stimulate the followers' thinking to be creative and challenge the status quo to think outside the box in solving problems. These are extraordinary approaches. However, Christian leaders cannot rely on those techniques to guarantee followers' transformation. Transformational leadership practices for Christians are not primarily about the right techniques but what God has done and is doing in their institution.

Christian leaders should start with their beliefs about reality, not even with an extraordinary vision (Thompson, 2007). First, they should be passionate and convicted about who God is His character and his purposes. They should grieve, understanding that sins distort the goodness of creation, yet have the courageous hope of redemption and restoration in Christ and the indwelling Spirit among believers. Christian leaders are called to live in communion with God and followers, understand God's mission, and wrestle with the community to accomplish His purposes. The God of the Bible is a God with a mission. The Triune God revealed himself as a missionary God. The Father is the sender, the Son is sent, and the Spirit is the sending who creates and empowers the Church into the world (Seamands, 2005). Thus, Christian leaders must be immersed in the reality of God and His mission.

In accomplishing his mission, each person in Trinity has his role. "The Father is the supreme authority, the Son the executive power, and the Spirit the divine presence who dwells in and with God's people." (Frame, 2012). There is a glad submission and mutual deference between the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Seamands (2005) describes, "each divine person

is always denying himself for the sake of others and deferring to the others". The Son, Jesus Christ, has the pre-eminent position in all things (Col 1:18, ESV) and is always at the center of God's redemptive plan, yet Jesus gladly submitted to his Father to fulfil the will of the Father (John 4:34; 5:19; 6:38, ESV). The Spirit seeks only to glorify the Son and the Father and never gets the glory for himself (John 16:13-15, ESV). Although there is a unity of the divine Trinity with a single mission, there is a different role, glad submission, and mutual deference. Thus, even though shared leadership is suggested for Christian leadership approaches, it does not mean there is no leadership among the followers. Throughout the Bible, God appointed leaders to accomplish God's mission. A leader's appointment has a divine purpose, and each leader has a particular assignment in accomplishing God's mission. Therefore, Beech & Beech (2018) proposes that the virtue described in the Bible is not leadership but followership. Christian Leadership never acts independently from the Trinity; foundationally rooted in Trinity and should end with the Trinity.

Zscheile (2007) describes the community of love in Trinity does "not inward-looking but outward reaching and generative". The Trinity is actively and passionately involved in all creation, and their utmost expression of their love is revealed in the sacrificial life of Jesus Christ. The communion of love of the Trinity invites and draws all creation into the reconciled communion of the divine life in Jesus Christ. For Christian leaders, the ultimate goal of transformational leadership is not to end in themselves or their followers but to participate in God's mission. They must passionately facilitate the whole creation reconciliation and flourishing in the loving communion with the Trinity.

Creating Space for Holy Spirit

In the economy of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit plays a significant role, which unfortunately is often unnoticed and neglected. Only through the Holy Spirit do we understand what the Father and Son are doing (Seamands, 2005). The Son can accomplish His ministry in close cooperation with the Holy Spirit (Luke 3:21–22, Luke 4:1 & 14, Matt 12:28, Mark 1:12, Acts 10:38, ESV). After Jesus' ascension, now the Holy Spirit acts as His agent to continue the life of the Church. For Christians, we can come to the Father and believe in the Son because of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit does everything for Christians in our life with God. The Holy Spirit works among believers as a new community, establishing a spiritual union between believers and the Father through reciprocal indwelling as the body of Christ (Sanders, 2010). The Holy Spirit not only inspires but also illuminates and demonstrates the Word. He dwells in us and takes residence in our lives.

Christian leaders need to open themselves to be led by the Spirit, surrendering their right under the control of the Spirit and in total dependency and availability to the Spirit (Seamands, 2005). Christian leaders need to give space for the Holy Spirit's direction and involvement. Be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's promptings, recognize what the Holy Spirit urges upon us, and encourage the fruit of the Spirit to grow in our lives. Christian leaders are not called to be independent or to have specific strategies and, in their control, to be transformational. Christian leaders should depend on God since they are doing God's mission. Thompson proposes that what is needed today is for the Christian leaders to be empowered and energized by the Holy Spirit (Thompson, 2014).

One of the Transformational Leadership components is *individualized consideration*—support for followers by understanding their struggles and the mentoring process, guiding their development. Followers are challenged to reach higher levels of potential (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Christian leaders must empower their followers with the trust that the Holy Spirit is actively working in the lives of their followers. The Triune God has a bigger and better purpose than themselves. Thus, Christian leaders must allow the space for the Holy Spirit to work in each of their followers. Christian leaders must prayerfully depend on the Holy Spirit since it is

the Spirit that accomplishes God's mission in Christ for the followers. In creating space for the Holy Spirit, Christian leaders are more sensitive and submissive to God's will. They may need to be flexible and accept if their plans fail, but God's plan prevails.

CONCLUSION

Christian leaders are constantly pressured to perform and bombarded with leadership theories to find the right skills or behavior to lead effectively, such as Transformational Leadership. Christian leaders should first find their inspiration in their understanding of who God is. The rediscovery of the theological discussion of the Trinity has inspired further theological understanding of leadership. God is a missional God and has revealed himself in a mutual and reciprocal relationship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Christian leaders are called to continuously experience the transformational love of the Trinity and share their dependency on the Trinity. A continuous conversation is needed to invite Christian leaders further develop their understanding of who God is to inform their leadership understanding and practices. "And God is able to make all grace abound to you so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work." (2 Cor 9:8, ESV).

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