

Title	A Practical Philosophy of Christian Leadership
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Citation	聖学院大学総合研究所紀要, No.40, 2008.2 : 55-83
URL	http://serve.seigakuin-univ.ac.jp/reps/modules/xoonips/detail.php?item_id=4015
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A Practical Philosophy of Christian Leadership

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Abstract

After a working definition of leadership is offered, a worldview of Christian leadership is propounded. The relationship of each person of the Triune Godhead to leadership is articulated, as are the biblical concepts of the duties of both leaders and the community of the led, in addition to the role of the Church in leadership development. The primary model of leadership as exemplified by Jesus Christ is found to be that of Rardin's (2001) servant-shepherd leader. An attempt is then made to determine the leadership philosophy of Abraham Lincoln, with the conclusion being that he possessed and demonstrated the eight functional attributes of servant leadership as well as the primary characteristics of the leader as shepherd.

Introduction

Over two decades ago Yukl (1981) observed that nearly ten thousand books and articles had been published on the subject of leadership, and certainly thousands more have been added since then. The sheer volume of material is an indication of the recognition of the relevance of leadership as an issue.

However, in spite of the obvious importance being placed on the study of leadership, there is a lack of consensus on a variety of matters, including determining just what leadership is. In fact, Bennis (1995) noted that there are more than 350 definitions of leadership, and it has been maintained by at least one scholar that "there are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept"

(Bass, 1990, p. 11).

This notwithstanding, Fiedler and Chemers (1974) pointed out that two threads tend to run through the majority of definitions of leadership, viz., that “leadership is a relationship between people in which influence and power are unevenly distributed on a legitimate basis,” and that “there can be no leaders in isolation” (p. 4). In the same vein, Yukl (1981) asserted that a common characteristic of most definitions of leadership is that it is a group phenomenon which involves an influence process of leaders over followers.

It seems, then, that leadership fundamentally involves relationships and influence. Personal values are critical to leadership as well, since it is one’s values which determine what is desirable and which serve as the basis for one’s actions (Williams, 1979), meaning that the leader’s goals are intertwined with his or her personal values (cf. Phillips, 1998).

In offering a practical definition of leadership, then, it is critical that this writer be true to his conservative, evangelical Christian worldview while at the same time incorporating the generally agreed upon essential components of leadership. With this in mind, leadership may be defined as “the ability to influence others, through caring, inspiration, and persuasion to act toward accomplishing goals in alignment with a divine sense of purpose.”

It may be noted that fundamental to a leader’s ability to lead is the degree to which s/he cares for, inspires, and is thus able to persuade followers to achieve worthwhile goals. Just what these goals should be, however, is dependent upon the degree to which the leader is in submission to, and thus in tune with, the Lord. Furthermore, a special relationship between leader and follower is implied in the working definition of leadership offered. Thus, it appears that a Christian definition of leadership will naturally focus on two relationships: that between the leader and his leader, God; and that between leader and led.

What follows is an exposition of these relationships from a biblical perspective, as the writer is of the conviction that the Bible, in its original autographs, is the inspired, inerrant Word of God (Jn. 14:26; 2 Cor. 2:12-13; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Pet. 1:20-21) and is therefore crucial to the understanding of leadership from the stance of Christianity. A worldview of Christian leadership based upon the Bible will be explored, with seven elements interwoven in the discussion: the roles of God the Father, God the Son, God the

Holy Spirit, the Bible, man, the Church, and society. This discussion is followed by a brief exposition of the leadership philosophy of Abraham Lincoln, with an ensuing summary of how Lincoln's philosophy of leadership aligns with that from a Christian worldview and the working definition of leadership used herein.

A Worldview of Christian Leadership

The starting point for a worldview of Christian leadership is God the Father, who is the source of *all* authority. Jesus, Himself equal to the Father in essence (Jn. 1:1; 10:30; Phil. 2:5-8; Col. 1:15-17; Heb. 1:1-4, 8; Rev. 1:4-8), acknowledged "I also have received authority from My Father" (Rev. 2:27, New American Standard Version). The Scriptures indicate that God the Father has authority over 1) all mankind (Jn. 17:1-2); 2) all civil governments and leaders (Dan. 4:17; Jn. 19:10-11; Rom. 13:1, 6); 3) time (Dan. 2:21); and, in fact, 4) all authorities and powers, including those which are spiritual (1 Cor. 15:24; Eph. 4:6).

It is critical, then, for any leader to acknowledge that whatever authority he has is not his own, but that it has been granted to him by God the Father (cf. Jn. 19:11) and that he is, therefore, answerable to God in how he wields his authority (Col. 4:1). In this sense, then, leadership is a partnership with God in that it entails the proper use of whatever authority the Lord has entrusted to him.

In addition, leadership is a partnership in the establishment of ultimate goals. Biblical models of leadership (e.g., Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, Jesus, Paul) were all called for the goal of furthering the establishment of God's kingdom. In fact, Rardin (2001) asserts that "leaders have always been chosen by God to join Him in accomplishing His purposes" (p. 33).

Thus, both in the manner in which authority is wielded and in the final goals that are established, leadership is intricately linked with God the Father as the ultimate source of authority. As for whom God selects for leadership, often in contrast to man's criteria, the crucial matter is the person's *inner character*. This is made explicit in the biblical account of the prophet Samuel's selection and anointing of David, Saul's successor as the

next king of Israel: “for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). The same point was made nearly one thousand years later when the disciples were searching for Judas Iscariot’s replacement (Acts 1:23-26).

It may be deduced from this that, in God’s eyes, leadership is what Rardin (2001) calls “an inside-out phenomenon” (p. 36). Character and values are seen as the most important elements in a potential leader, as it is from these that all other aspects of leadership flow (cf. Mk. 7:15, 20-23; Lk. 11:33-36).

Now, in relation to what a leader is specifically called upon to do, the Bible indicates that, among other things which will be written of below, Christian leadership is a spiritual gift (Rom. 12:8; 1 Cor. 12:28; Eph. 4:11) which entails *working diligently on others’ behalf, providing care and support, giving direction, and engaging in good deeds*. These elements of leadership are implied in the eight verses in the New Testament which use the Greek word *proistemi*, sometimes translated as “leadership” (Rom. 12:8; 1 Thes. 5:12; 1 Tim. 3:4, 5, 12; 5:17; Titus 3:8, 14). In fact, giving guidance and direction in particular are key elements of leadership in the Bible, as the usage of words translated as “lead” indicates in a number of references (e.g., 2 Chr. 23:13; Psa. 23:2; 25: 5, 9; Matt. 6:13; 15:14; Acts 13:11).

Another point which must be made concerning the biblical use of words related to leadership concerns *community*. As Kittel (1964) notes, *hageomai*, “to lead, think, believe, regard as”, is utilized in the New Testament for leaders of the community, with the community being divided between those who lead and those who are led. The primary example of such usage may be found in Hebrews 13:7 (“Remember those who led you, who spoke the Word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.”) and 13:17 (“Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.”).

One may observe in these verses in Hebrews that Christian leaders “are responsible to God. God has entrusted the other members of the community to them, and therefore these owe them obedience” (Kittel, 1964, p. 907). One may also note here that leadership *involves teaching, being good examples of faith, protecting the led, and maintaining a positive attitude in the dispen-*

sation of one's duties. In return for leading the community in such a manner as one who is responsible both to God and it, the community is exhorted to submit to their leaders' authority and obey them, though never if doing so is in conflict with God's explicit commands (Acts 4:19; 5:28).

It may be seen from this brief account of the biblical use of leadership terminology that Christian leaders certainly do not work in a vacuum. Christian leadership is intimately connected to the community, which reciprocates by submitting to its leaders for the common good of all concerned, with the goal of advancing God's kingdom through the positive transformation of individuals and, ultimately, society as a whole.

Of course, the Church is closely involved in the development of leaders, as it is the instrument in which the spiritual gifts are exercised and strengthened and through which society will ideally be transformed. Ephesians 4:11-13a reads, "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith." All spiritual gifts are for the good of the Church as a whole (1 Cor. 12:12-31; 1 Pet. 4:10-11), but it can be seen in these verses from Ephesians that the explicit purpose of the leadership gifts is "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service." Of course, the Church must first identify those with the gifts of leadership. Then, it must be willing to allow the leaders to exercise their gifts. Finally, the Church should allow itself to be transformed by these gifts in such a way that it can truly serve both those in the Christian community and in society as a whole.

Naturally and inextricably linked to all of this is that there must be a Holy Spirit from whom the spiritual gifts are granted in the first place and who empowers those who have the gifts to utilize them properly (1 Cor. 12:7-11). The third person of the Triune God in Christianity, functionally distinct yet one in essence, is the Holy Spirit (cf. Matt. 28:19; 2 Cor. 13:14), who is Himself equated with God (Acts 5:3-4; 1 Cor. 6:11; 2 Cor. 3:18).

In connection with biblical leaders, the Holy Spirit was in Moses and was placed upon seventy elders of Israel (Num. 11:17, 25); was in Joshua (Num. 27:18); came upon David when he was anointed by Samuel (1 Sam. 16:13); descended upon Christ at His baptism (Matt. 3:16; Mk. 1:9-11; Lk.

3:21-22; Jn. 1:32-33); and fell upon the disciples on the day of Pentecost after Christ's resurrection and ascension (Acts 2:4ff). Though by no means exhaustive, this list illustrates the point that the empowering of the Holy Spirit is closely associated with leadership in the Bible.

The clearest expression of this, and the finest example of Christian leadership in the Scriptures, is found in Jesus Christ, whose two primary illustrations of leadership are 1) the leader as servant, and 2) the leader as shepherd (cf. Ford, 1991; Rardin, 2001). It is to Jesus' teaching and these models that attention is now focused.

The leader as servant.

In response to his disciples' argument over who would be greatest in the kingdom of heaven, Jesus commented as follows:

You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many. (Mk. 10:42-45)

This is paralleled by His words in Luke 22:25-26,

And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those who have authority over them are called 'Benefactors.' But not so with you, but let him who is greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as the servant."

In the "but not so with you" phrase, Jesus made it very clear that the manifestation of Christian leadership is in direct contrast to the prevailing philosophy of leadership common throughout history. In fact, the very combination of the words "servant leader" is an apparent oxymoron. Yet, that is precisely the style of leadership that Christ modeled Himself and which He exhorted Christian leaders to accept as their leadership paradigm.

Jesus' footwashing of His disciples (Jn. 13:1-17) on the night of the Last

Supper is a powerful illustration of the kind of leadership Christians are expected to exemplify. At the end of the footwashing Jesus remarked, “If I, then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I gave you an example that you should do as I did to you” (Jn. 13:14-15). It appears to be clear, then, that *Christian leadership entails humble acts of self-less service on behalf of followers.*

Implicit in this fundamental concept is the seemingly paradoxical notion that “everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Lk. 14:11; 18:14; cf. Matt. 23:10-12; James 4:10; 1 Pet. 5:6). Jesus Himself is the perfect example of this, of course, as can be seen in Philippians 2:5-9a:

Have this 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, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him . . .

From these statements and the examples provided by Jesus in the Incarnation, in His teaching to His disciples, and in His substitutionary, atoning death on the cross (1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18; 2 Cor. 5:21), it may be concluded that the leader as servant is a model of leadership that Jesus explicitly lived and taught. This was not lost on the apostles, as Peter indicates when he implored, “As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another” (1 Pet. 4:10). Paul, undisputedly one of the key leaders of the early church, commented, “For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:5).

In fact, the idea of “servanthood” is found throughout the Scriptures. For instance, Israel was considered to be the chosen servant of God (Isa. 41:8; 43:10; 44:1-5; Jer. 30:10); King Solomon three times refers to himself as a servant of God (1 Kngs. 3:7-9); and Christians are variously referred to as servants of Christ (Jn. 13:26; 2 Cor. 11:23; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:7), servants of God

(2 Cor. 6:4; 1 Thes. 3:2), servants of the church (1 Cor. 3:5; Rom. 16:1; Col. 1:25), and servants of the Gospel (Col. 1:23).

Furthermore, in commenting on the use of *diakonos* (“servant”) in the New Testament (29 occurrences), Kittel (1964) concludes, “The Christian is a servant of Christ (Jn. 12:26). It is part of his task, however, to serve his fellows” (p. 88). Thus, one may readily surmise that service to others is part and parcel of being a Christian, and that this extends to the realm of leadership as well. When Jesus said, “And do not be called leader; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. But the greatest among you shall be your servant” (Matt. 23:10-11), it was a clarion call for the servant leadership paradigm. Consequently, this writer is in agreement with Ford (1991), who asserts, “If the kingdom is Jesus’ master thought, then servant leadership is His master principle” (p. 154).

As for how this is specifically applied, the writer is of the opinion that the theory of servant leadership as propounded by Greenleaf (1970/1991; 1977; cf. Frick & Spears, 1996) provides practical guidelines for leaders. Though he does not openly promote any particular religion, Greenleaf’s Quaker background undoubtedly at least subconsciously played an important role in the development of the theory, and it is certainly compatible with the teaching of Christ on the servant as leader.

The essentials of the theory of servant leadership are found in the following statement:

The servant-leader is servant first . . . It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. . . . The leader-first and servant-first are two extreme types. . . . The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant-first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is: do those served grow as persons; do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? *And*, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will he benefit, or, at least, will he not be further deprived? [emphases in original] (Greenleaf, 1970/1991, p. 7; 1977, pp. 13-14)

According to this, the distinguishing marks of the servant leader are primarily the desire to serve first, the desire to meet people's higher order needs, and the desire to make real contributions to one's community. Such a leader is characterized by 1) receptive listening; 2) empathetic listening; 3) healing; 4) awareness; 5) persuasion; 6) conceptualization; 7) foresight; 8) stewardship; 9) commitment to the people's growth; and 10) a desire to build community (Greenleaf, 1970/1991; 1977; Spears, 1995).

The hallmarks and characteristics of servant leaders are, of course, rooted in their basic values. Tucker, Stone, Russell, and Franz (n.d.) emphasize this, stating, "Values are the core elements of servant leadership; they are the independent variables that actuate servant leader behavior" (p. 7). Therefore, since servant leadership is seen as emerging from the leader's values and beliefs (cf. Greenleaf, 1977; Russell, 2000; Russell, 2001), it may be regarded as a values-based leadership paradigm (Farling, Stone, & Winston, 1999).

In further detailing how servant leadership manifests itself in the real world, Russell (2001) posits that the functional attributes of the leader as servant are 1) vision; 2) credibility; 3) trust; 4) service; 5) modeling; 6) pioneering; 7) appreciation of others; and 8) empowerment (cf. Farling et al., 1999). Perusal of these and of the general characteristics and fundamental beliefs of servant leadership as espoused by Greenleaf has led this writer to conclude that the paradigm in general is indeed consistent and compatible with the type of leadership modeled by Jesus Christ as outlined above.

However, servant leadership is but one of the two primary models proffered by Jesus. Not only did He exhort those who would lead others to become servant leaders, but He also deemed it essential for leaders to serve as shepherds of the flock of their followers. It is to this model of leadership that the discussion now turns.

The leader as shepherd.

The Bible is rich with the imagery of the leader as shepherd and his followers as the flock. Unger (1966) points out that the figurative use of the "sheep-flock" image extends to 1) God the Father as the leader of Israel (Psa. 23:1-6; 77:20; 80:1); 2) Kings as leaders of the people (Isa. 44:28; Jer. 6:3; 49:19); 3) Other civil leaders (Isa. 56:11; Jer. 10:21; 23:1-4; 50:6; Zech.

11:8, 15-17); and 4) Christ as the Good Shepherd (Isa. 40:11; Ezek. 34:11-31; Mic. 5:4-5; Zech. 13:7; Jn. 10:11, 14; Heb. 13:20; Rev. 7:17).

When King David, himself a former shepherd (1 Sam. 16:11), wrote of God the Father, "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want" (Psa. 23:1), he was using a metaphor for leadership which was common in the agrarian societies of antiquity, both inside and outside of Mesopotamia and Egypt. The Hebrews of the Old Testament were very familiar with the "sheep-flock" figure of speech, of course, as Kittel and Friedrich (1968) indicate:

The application of the shepherd image to Yahweh is embedded in the living piety of Israel. This may be seen from the great number of passages which use the rich shepherd vocabulary for Yahweh and depict God in new and vivid developments of the metaphor as the Shepherd who goes before the flock (Psa. 68:7), who guides it (Psa. 23:3), who leads it to pastures (Jer. 50:19) and to places where it may rest by the waters (Psa. 23:2; 80:1; Isa. 44:10), who protects it with his staff (Psa. 23:4), who whistles to the dispersed (Zech. 10:8) and gathers them (Isa. 56:8), who carries the lambs in his bosom and leads the mother sheep (Isa. 40:11). (p. 487)

One may see from this that the primary duties of the shepherd in the Old Testament were to *guide*, *care for*, and *protect* the sheep. These functions of the shepherd were carried over into the New Testament and applied by Jesus and, primarily, Peter to Christian leaders.

The most extended account of Jesus' use of the "sheep-flock" imagery is found in John 10:1-18. In these verses Jesus refers to Himself as "the good shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep" (v. 11), who knows His sheep intimately (v. 14), and who calls and gathers His sheep together (v. 16). It is important to note here that Jesus extends the duty of the shepherd to protect his sheep to the point of sacrificial death on their behalf (vv. 11, 15) because of his great concern for them (v. 12-15).

Of some importance here is the recognition that the flock of sheep Jesus refers to is a metaphor for community, which is the meaning of the image in both the Old and New Testaments. Kittel and Friedrich (1968) indicate that, in relation to the early Church, comparing the people of God

with a flock is a common figure of speech, with “a mark of the members of the flock [being] that they know the Good Shepherd (Jn. 10:11-14), believe in Him (v. 26), and hear His voice and follow Him (v. 27)” (p. 501).

That the “sheep-flock” imagery was to be applied to Christian leadership was a point not lost on the Apostle Peter. Just prior to His ascension, Christ implored Peter, “Tend my lambs,” “Shepherd My sheep,” and “Tend my sheep” (Jn. 21:15, 16, 17). After the filling of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost a month later (Acts 2:1ff), Peter did indeed become one of the key leaders of the early Church (Acts 2:14ff; 10:1-11:18; 15:6-14; Gal. 2:9), “tending and shepherding the sheep.”

He later refers to believers as sheep and the Lord Jesus as the shepherd in 1 Peter 2:25: “For you were continually straying like sheep, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Guardian of your souls” (cf. Isa. 53:6). In the same letter, he specifically applies the “sheep-flock” metaphor to the realm of Christian leadership. He exhorts the elders of the Church,

Shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (1 Pet. 5:2-4)

The reader will note that Peter’s focus here is upon the manner in which Christian leaders are to accept their responsibilities and to conduct themselves as “shepherds.” It is apparent here that *a leader’s motives and attitude are as important as his actions.*

Another important point to be made concerning the Christian leader as shepherd is that he receives his commission as a leader from the Holy Spirit. Paul made this clear while speaking to the leaders of the church at Ephesus when he commented, “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). From this it may be surmised that leadership from a Christian worldview is a gift granted by God the Holy Spirit.

In summarizing the leader as shepherd metaphor as it is used in the New Testament, Kittel and Friedrich (1968) make the following comment:

The shepherd is never judged adversely in the N. T. In the Gospels his sacrificial loyalty to his calling is depicted with loving sympathy in true-to-life pictures. He knows each of his animals, calls them by name (Jn. 10:3, 14, 27), seeks the lost sheep, is happy when he finds it (Lk. 15:4-6), and is prepared to hazard his life to protect the sheep from the wolf (Jn. 10:11-13). Jesus does not hesitate to use the shepherd as a figure for God in his parables. (p. 490)

Thus, the biblical image of the shepherd leader is one who, with pure motives and a positive attitude, loyally serves the community of followers, guiding, caring for, and literally guarding them with his life. The relationship between the shepherd leader and his sheep is such that they *want* to be led by him, confidently entrusting their well-being and their lives to him as it is he who empowers them to live as they do (cf. Ford, 1991).

The reader will note that there are parallels between the shepherd leader and the servant leader. In fact, they are complementary to one another. This writer is in agreement with Rardin (2001), who concludes that the leadership model of Jesus Christ was as a servant-shepherd leader. Of this model he writes,

The work of serving is best understood as serving the purposes of God in the lives of individuals we lead. The work of shepherding is best understood as tending to the flock or taking care of organizational issues by calling the group to courageously pursue the vision of God for that group. The servant demonstrates interpersonal sensitivity and is skilled in care giving. The shepherd demonstrates organizational sensitivity and is skilled in using authority for the benefit of the group. (Rardin, 2001, p. 114)

Thus, the servant leader is seen as one whose primary focus is upon individuals and who humbly serves the purpose of God in their lives, whereas the shepherd leader's focus is on the community of followers,

which he boldly leads in advancing the kingdom of God.

Synopsis of a worldview of Christian leadership.

The writer's worldview of leadership is one in which God the Father is the source of all authority. Leadership is seen to be in partnership with God, with the leader dependent upon and answerable to Him for his position and conduct. The leader's ultimate goals must, therefore, be in alignment with the Lord's purposes for the particular individuals or groups being served.

Christian leadership is a gift bestowed upon the leader by God the Holy Spirit, with the inner character of the leader being of primary importance in God's selection of him. The exercise of leadership involves working diligently, providing care and support, giving guidance and direction, teaching, protecting, and engaging in good deeds on behalf of the led as an example of faith. This is to be done with a positive attitude from the purest of motives.

In return for godly leadership, the community being led is to reciprocate by submitting to and obeying its leaders for the common good of the group, with the Church being the conduit in which Christian leaders are identified and cultivated and through which they can impact society as a whole. This, too, is to be done through the enabling and working of the Holy Spirit.

The best example of leadership in the Scriptures is Jesus Christ, whose primary model was a servant-shepherd leader. As a servant leader focusing on individuals, one is to perform humble acts of self-less service on behalf of followers, taking pains to meet their higher order needs through receptive and empathetic listening, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to people's growth and a desire to build community that characterize servant leadership. As a shepherd leader focusing on the community of followers, one is compelled to guide, care for, and protect with his life the group being led while pursuing the vision of God that He has for it. Of course, the servant-shepherd leader ideally performs as both servant and shepherd as he works with individuals and with the community of followers.

Now, it must be pointed out that the view of Christian leadership described herein is idealistic in that only Jesus Christ is the perfect model of

it. This notwithstanding, throughout the course of history there have been those world-class leaders who have, rather consciously or unconsciously and few though they may be, led in a manner commensurate with what has been delineated here. One such leader is Abraham Lincoln, whose key writings and speeches are briefly reviewed below as a means of determining his basic leadership philosophy and showing that it is in alignment with that of leadership from a Christian worldview.

The Leadership Philosophy of Abraham Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865), though only acting president for four years (March 1861-April 1865), undisputedly had a tremendous impact on the United States of America, and some would say the world. Gienapp (1995) confidently asserts that he was a superior president in every regard in that he was an extraordinary politician with a keen sense of timing, knew how to assess men's character, was a master of organization, was tolerant and forbearing in building teamwork, had strategic insight and wisdom, had a strong sense of responsibility, and believed in himself. Lincoln was a well-balanced president in that "he was a politician without being corrupted, calm without being lethargic, pliant without being opportunistic, tough but gentle, resolute without being arbitrary, and pious without being doctrinaire" (Cuomo & Holzer, 1990).

One might add that he was a great communicator as well, with over a million of his words being preserved for posterity, more than the total number of words in either the Bible or in the complete works of Shakespeare (Sandburg, noted in Van Doren Stern, 1940/1999). However, in spite of this, he did not feel the need (nor have the time, one suspects) to produce a formal treatise on just what his specific philosophy of leadership was. He simply lived out his inner convictions on the subject.

Yet, a perusal of Lincoln's key writings and speeches leaves one with the sense that he certainly had a clear philosophy of leadership, unarticulated though it may be. Thus, it is the intent of this writer to review some of these writings in order to determine just what that philosophy may have been. This will be approached from the viewpoint of Lincoln as a servant

leader who displayed each of the eight functional attributes of servant leadership listed earlier, namely, 1) vision; 2) credibility; 3) trust; 4) service; 5) modeling; 6) pioneering; 7) appreciation of others; and 8) empowerment (cf. Russell, 2001; Farling et al., 1999).

Vision.

On the subject of vision one may say that Abraham Lincoln was unquestionably far-sighted. Phillips (1992) remarks that during the Civil War (April 12, 1861-April 9, 1865) Lincoln “preached a vision of America that has never been equaled in the course of American history” (p. 163). Oates (1985) is in agreement, stating, “[Lincoln] had the gift of vision that let him see things few others ever see” (p. 146).

For example, in what Oates (1985) calls “the central idea of the war” (p. 91), Lincoln in his Independence Day message to a special session of Congress at the beginning of the Civil War in 1861, made the following statement:

This is essentially a people’s contest. On the side of the Union it is a struggle for maintaining in the world that form and substance of government whose leading object is to elevate the condition of men . . . to afford all . . . a fair chance in the race of life. . . . And having thus chosen our course, without guile and with pure purpose, let us renew our trust in God, and go forward without fear and with manly hearts.
(in Van Doren Stern, 1940/1999, pp. 674, 677)

One will note that in this brief statement a vision for the nation (and the world) was articulated, one in which government is meant to empower its citizens by providing them all an equal opportunity in life. This necessarily requires that all of the citizens first be free, of course, a vision espoused by Lincoln on numerous occasions, perhaps none as unique or as poignant as in the example below from his April 18, 1864 address in Baltimore.

The world never has had a good definition of the word liberty, and the American people, just now, are much in want of one. We all declare liberty; but in using the same word, we do not all mean the same

thing. . . . The shepherd drives the wolf from the sheep's throat, for which the sheep thanks the shepherd as his liberator, while the wolf denounces him for the same act, as the destroyer of liberty, especially as the sheep was a black one.

In this reference to slavery Lincoln made it clear that he was on the side of emancipation, having earlier made his initial Emancipation Proclamation on September 22, 1862 (which went into effect the following January).

Important as this was for the nation, though, the central vision which guided Lincoln throughout the Civil War was to preserve the United States and its constitutional government (McPherson, 1991). This was expressed most eloquently in the 267-word Gettysburg Address on November 19, 1863. The opening and closing statements alone suffice to articulate Lincoln's vision for the country.

Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. . . . that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth" (in Van Doren Stern, 1940/1999, p. 788)

Here again, as in speeches and writings both before and after this, Lincoln expressed his vision of a nation in which freedom and equality for the people are the hallmark. His entire handling of the Civil War bore this in mind.

In articulating his vision so concisely in the Gettysburg Address, Lincoln used three parallel sets of three images that are intricately interwoven: past, present, future; continent, nation, battlefield; and birth, death, rebirth. Thus, he effected renewal by calling on the past, relating it to the present, and then using them to provide a link to the future (McPherson, 1991, pp. 111, 167-168). Clearly, not only did Lincoln have a grand vision for the nation, but he also possessed an inspired ability to articulate it.

Credibility.

Though initially greatly underestimated by many upon his arrival in Washington as the president, Lincoln quickly established his credibility. The simple fact that he determined to resolutely resist the South upon the attack on Fort Sumter only one month after his inauguration bears testimony to this. As early as five years before the Civil War began and long before he was president, in a speech made on July 23, 1856 Lincoln warned the South that any attempt at dissolving the Union would be met by armed force (Van Doren Stern, 1940/1999).

During his First Inaugural Address (March 4, 1861), as president he again menacingly warned the South again, “You have no oath registered in heaven to destroy the government, while I shall have the most solemn one to ‘preserve, protect, and defend it’ “ (in Van Doren Stern, 1940/1999, p. 657). Of course, the leaders of the South quickly learned that Lincoln would do exactly what he had said he would.

As Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces of the North, Lincoln also demonstrated an acute sense of military strategy. Though it took him three years to find a general-in -chief (Grant) he could rely on, Gienapp (1995) concludes that, “on the whole, Lincoln was an excellent military leader . . . throughout most of the war Lincoln served as the Union’s chief military strategist” (p. 77).

Furthermore, as alluded to above, Lincoln quickly proved himself to be without equal in articulating his thoughts, showing that he was a first-class communicator of his grand vision. The eloquence of his pen (all of his speeches being written out) is a testament to his credibility as a leader who could communicate effectively.

Perhaps most importantly, Lincoln was credible because of his unwavering commitment to his most cherished beliefs and principles. He was a firm believer that “the principles of Jefferson [in the Declaration of Independence] are the definitions and axioms of a free society” (Letter to H. L. Pierce & Others, April 6, 1859; in Van Doren Stern, 1940/1999, p. 540). Although not openly Christian, Lincoln certainly believed in God and made numerous references to both Him and His Word in his public speeches. For example, he referred to God, the Almighty, or the Lord no less than 14 times

in his Second Inaugural Address on March 4, 1865 (cf. Gingrich, 1998), the same speech in which direct quotations from Psalm 19:9, Matthew 7:1, and Matthew 18:7 were made (cf. Van Doren Stern, 1940/1999, pp. 840-842). In fact, he acknowledged in this speech that the people of the North and South “both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God” (p. 841).

In light of all this, one may state with confidence that Lincoln was certainly a leader with great credibility. The fact that this was not the case when he first took office but quickly became so afterwards, though begrudgingly in some instances, simply lends strength to the argument for Lincoln as a credible leader.

Trust.

Oates (1985) observes that “Lincoln was as honest in real life as in the legend. Even his enemies conceded that he was incorruptible” (p. 52). Indeed, Harriet Beecher Stowe interviewed him in 1864 and “thought him the most trusted leader the country could have in war” (Oates, 1985, p. 125).

Perhaps the “Honest Abe” moniker under which he campaigned for the presidency in 1860 came from instances such as when he made notes for a law lecture (July 1, 1850?) in which he exhorted young lawyers to “resolve to be honest at all events; and if, in your own judgment, you can not be an honest lawyer, resolve to be honest without being a lawyer” (Cuomo & Halzer, 1990, p. 46).

Attendant to Lincoln’s credibility as a leader was his ability to engender trust among the people. As Phillips (1992) notes, he listened, paid attention to people, and established trust, at least partially the reason for which was the fact that he was full of compassion, often overlooking wrongs and granting pardons during the Civil War. As Phillips (1992) observes, “Lincoln was a kind and caring human being. But people are much more likely to trust a leader if they know he is compassionate and forgiving of mistakes” (p. 35).

Perhaps no better example of his compassion and magnanimity on a grand scale exists than the famous concluding sentence of his Second Inaugural Address (called Lincoln’s “Sermon on the Mount” [Phillips, 1992, p. 62]) made just one month before the surrender of the South, when the victory of the North was no longer in doubt.

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations. (in Van Doren Stern, 1940/1999, p. 842)

As Phillips (1992) posits, lack of malice and genuine caring on the part of a leader naturally inspires trust among followers. This being the case, there can be little doubt but that both those most closely associated with Abraham Lincoln and many of the people of a grateful nation felt that they could trust him.

Service.

While on the train en route to Washington to be sworn in as the next president, Lincoln reflected, “I as already intimated, am but an accidental instrument, temporary, and to serve but for a limited time” (in Cuomo & Halzer, 1990). It thereby appears that Lincoln was conscious of the fact that while he was president, he was in the service of the people. He was certainly cognizant that he was doing the Lord’s work on behalf of the nation, confessing that he was “deeply sensible of his need of Divine assistance” and that “he might be an instrument in God’s hands of accomplishing a great work” (Lincoln to Quakers, June 20, 1862; in Donald, 1995, p. 354).

It is perhaps not in the great works performed for the nation that one gets the truest sense of Lincoln’s dedication to the service of his fellow man, however, but in his acts on behalf of the weak, the needy, and the bereaved. From his request for the release of a sick soldier (Letter to E. M. Stanton in June 1862) to his orders to properly treat prisoners of war (Letter to Secretary [of War] Stanton on March 18, 1864) and words of comfort to a bereaved Boston widow who had lost five sons in the war (the most celebrated of all his letters, the Letter to Mrs. Bixby of Boston, Mass. on November 21, 1864), Abraham Lincoln demonstrated that he could and would take the time and make the effort to help the helpless. [Note:

Regarding the Bixby letter of *Saving Private Ryan* fame, Lincoln did, in fact, write to Lydia Bixby at the request of Governor Andrew of Massachusetts thinking she had lost five sons. Actually, two had died in battle at Fredericksburg and Petersburg, two were taken prisoner, and one had deserted. (Van Doren Stern, 1940/1999, p. 829)]

None were needier than the slaves, of course, and Lincoln was determined to help them if possible, too. He once commented, “I want every man to have the chance—and I believe the black man is entitled to it—in which he can better his condition . . . when he may look forward and hope” (in Cuomo & Holzer, 1990, p. 177). His conviction of the principle of equality was so deep that it ran to the point of being self-sacrificial, as is evident in the following comments from the President-elect in a speech made at Independence Hall in Philadelphia on February 22, 1861:

I have never had a feeling, politically, that did not spring from the sentiments embodied in the Declaration of Independence. . . . It was that which gave promise that in due time the weights would be lifted from the shoulders of men, and that all should have an equal chance Now, my friends, can this country be saved on that basis? But if this country cannot be saved without giving up that principle, I was about to say I would rather be assassinated on this spot than surrender it. . . . I have said nothing but what I am willing to live by, and, if it be the pleasure of Almighty God, to die by. (in Van Doren Stern, 1940/1999, pp. 644-645)

It seems clear that Lincoln was a highly principled leader who sought to do the greatest good for the greatest number of people that he could. He acted out his convictions and served his fellow man both on an individual and on a grand scale. In fact, Gingrich (1998) posits that “Lincoln’s greatness comes from his subordination to two things, the truth and the American people” (paragraph 5). Lincoln was great not because he led the American people, but because he let the American people lead him, so that “in Lincoln you have the servant as leader in an extraordinarily self-aware way” (Gingrich, 1998, paragraph 5).

Modeling.

During difficult times Theodore Roosevelt, himself generally recognized as one of America's greatest presidents (Mt. Rushmore), would look up at the portrait of Lincoln above his desk and ask himself, "What would Lincoln do if he were in my shoes? How would he solve this problem?" (Carnegie, 1936/1981) Though this researcher is not aware that Lincoln consciously set out to be a role model, there is little doubt that he has become one for many.

One example of this is his personal treatment of blacks during his presidency. As a white leader who consistently spoke for freedom and equality for all men, Lincoln himself "opened the White House doors to black visitors as no other President had ever done before and as few would do after" (Oates, 1985, p. 119).

Another example of him modeling the way as the leader of a free nation may be found in his consideration toward immigrants, in spite of the calls by some to counter the influx of foreigners. In his Address to the Germans at Cincinnati on his 52nd birthday, Lincoln remarked,

It is not my nature, when I see a people borne down by the weight of their shackles—the oppression of tyranny—to make their life more bitter by heaping upon them greater burdens; but rather would I do all in my power to raise the yoke than to add anything that would tend to crush them. . . . if there are any abroad who desire to make this the land of their adoption, it is not in my heart to throw aught in their way to prevent them from coming to the United States. (in Van Doren Stern, 1940/1999, p. 637)

One of Lincoln's favorite Bible quotations was Jesus' exhortation in Matthew 7:1 to "judge not, that ye be not judged" (Carnegie, 1936/1981, p. 10). He apparently learned early on that if he were to be an effective leader, he would have to put into practice what he consistently preached, and he did so in an exemplary fashion.

Pioneering.

McPherson (1991) notes that Lincoln had three revolutionary achieve-

ments. He 1) preserved the Union and maintained the Republic, 2) abolished slavery, and 3) destroyed the social stratification of the South while altering the balance of power with the North. Though each of these monumental accomplishments is pioneering in its own right, the abolition of slavery is particularly so as it was something which Lincoln had more control over than the other two, he himself recognizing he did not control events but that events controlled him (McPherson, 1991, p. 42).

On the achievement of the abolition of slavery “Lincoln fits the pattern of a revolutionary leader . . . in the end, he was more radical than Washington or Jefferson or any of the leaders of the first revolution” (McPherson, 1991, p. 37). In leading up to this monumental accomplishment, Lincoln, in what has been recognized as the first great speech of his career (Van Doren Stern, 1940/1991), a speech in the Lincoln-Douglas debates at Peoria, Illinois on October 16, 1854, made the following statement:

What I do say is that no man is good enough to govern another man without that other’s consent. I say this is the leading principle, the sheet-anchor of American republicanism. . . . according to our ancient faith, the just powers of governments are derived from the consent of the governed. (in Van Doren Stern, 1940/1991, pp. 362-363)

In his famous “House Divided” speech on June 16, 1858, Lincoln cogently argued against slavery, summarizing his thoughts, “A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free” (in Cuomo & Holzer, 1990, p. 105). On March 17, 1865, after the Emancipation Proclamation and shortly before his assassination, Lincoln made a slavery-related speech at which Walt Whitman was in the audience, stating,

I have always thought that all men should be free; but if any should be slaves it should be first those who desire it for themselves, and secondly those who desire it for others. Whenever I hear any one arguing for slavery, I feel a strong impulse to see it tried on him personally. (in Van Doren Stern, 1940/1999, p. 844)

From Lincoln's comments on slavery noted here and his actions toward it, culminating in the Emancipation Proclamation (enacted on January 1, 1863), it is evident that he was a pioneering leader for his day concerning the condition of the slaves. Of course, though this is perhaps the clearest example of pioneering during Lincoln's presidency, it is by no means the only one. Gienapp (1995) summarizes the pioneering spirit of Lincoln the leader when he states that he was "not tied to the past, he was willing to try new policies to achieve his ends" (p. 79).

Appreciation of others.

Lincoln was well aware that everybody likes a compliment. He once wrote, "It is a true maxim that 'a drop of honey catches more flies than a gallon of gall.' So with men, if you would win a man to your cause, first convince him that you are his sincere friend" (in Carnegie, 1936/1981, p. 146). Far from being manipulative, however, Lincoln truly was sincere in his praise and magnanimous when he was proven wrong in a matter.

An example of both may be found in his Letter to General Grant from the Executive Mansion on July 13, 1863, shortly after Grant's victory at Vicksburg on the Fourth of July. He wrote,

I do not remember that you and I ever met personally. I write this now as a grateful acknowledgement for the almost inestimable service you have done the country. I wish to say a word further. . . . [Regarding a debated military maneuver during the campaign] I now wish to make the personal acknowledgement that you were right and I was wrong. (in Van Doren Stern, 1940/1999, p. 765)

Lincoln was thankful for and expressed appreciation to individuals who rendered effective service for the country. He was equally appreciative of those on a large scale who made great sacrifices on behalf of the nation, the most well-known occasion of which was expressed during the Gettysburg Address when he said,

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate—we cannot consecrate—we cannot hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who

struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. (in Van Doren Stern, 1940, 1999, p. 788; cf. Wills, 1992, p. 263)

Though but two examples, the above indicate that Lincoln did appreciate others, particularly those who rendered service for the country he loved. Perhaps this was his way of showing appreciation for what the country had done for him, providing him with the opportunity to rise from the backwoods of Kentucky to the White House in Washington, D. C.

Empowerment.

A stellar example of empowerment on a massive scale was the Emancipation Declaration. In what Martin Luther King, Jr. called “this momentous decree” (in Oates, 1985, p. 111), the President legally freed approximately one-eighth of the population of the nation. Upon hearing of the abolition of slavery, Karl Marx, who was watching the American Civil War carefully from London, ecstatically declared, “Never has such a gigantic transformation taken place so rapidly as the liberation of four million slaves” (in McPherson, 1991, p. 6).

As a result of this, though there was no black vote in 1867, blacks had become the majority of registered voters in several ex-Confederate states by 1868. By 1872, approximately 15% of political offices in the South were held by blacks, a larger proportion than in 1990 (McPherson, 1991).

Recognizing the momentousness of what he had done in making the Proclamation in September 1862, Lincoln in his Annual Message to Congress (December 1, 1862) stated,

Fellow-citizens, we cannot escape history. . . . In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free—honorable alike in what we give and what we preserve. We shall nobly save or meanly lose the last, best hope of earth. Other means may succeed; this could not fail. The way is plain, peaceful, generous, just—a way which, if followed, the world will forever applaud, and God must forever bless. (in Van Doren Stern, 1940/1999, pp. 745-746)

Clearly, Lincoln realized what he had set in motion by granting the slaves their freedom, an act which in part would cost him his life two and a half years later. Seldom in history has any one leader done so much in empowering so many at such a great personal cost.

Naturally, many more examples could be cited which illustrate Lincoln's demonstration of the servant leader's functional attribute of empowerment. The same could be said for the previous seven attributes described above as well. However, it is felt that these suffice to illustrate the point that Lincoln was a servant leader and that he fits the pattern of a Christian worldview of leadership, a topic which will now be briefly discussed.

Abraham Lincoln and a Worldview of Christian Leadership

Gingrich (1998) asserts that Lincoln as a leader had six great strengths, which were: 1) a sense of intellectual clarity; 2) a strong moral purpose; 3) courageous firmness and persistence; 4) genuine humanity; 5) an ability to learn; and 6) belief in God. The second and sixth of these are of particular importance here. The quotations from Lincoln's writings and speeches mentioned above indicate that he did indeed believe in God and acknowledged his place before Him. He invoked God on numerous occasions and indicated that he understood very well that the Lord Almighty alone possessed all authority and was sovereign over the governments of the world.

It appears that he realized that God was working through him to accomplish the great achievements of preserving the Union and emancipating the slaves. In this sense, it may be said that Lincoln as president was submitting to God's will and working in partnership with Him to achieve His higher purpose for the nation of America.

His invocation of the Bible in both direct and indirect quotations, as well as in reference to the principles taught in Scripture, indicate he felt it held a place of special importance, a place above all other writings. He referred to the Bible in some of his greatest speeches, showing that he believed it would lend a moral authority to the words he spoke that could be had nowhere else.

As for the work that a leader is called upon to do in the Scriptures, it has been demonstrated that, as president, Abraham Lincoln worked diligently for the community he served, providing care and support to individuals when he could, giving guidance and direction to the nation, and engaging in good deeds. In addition to these, he certainly protected those he led, taught (or reminded) the people the principles upon which the nation was founded, and served as a leader from pure motives.

As far as being a good example of faith, it may be inferred that Lincoln was such a leader based upon his actions. Certainly there were no moral scandals during his Presidency, and his leadership was such that a person would be hard-pressed to show where he did not act as if he were a Christian leader of exemplary faith. However, the fact that he never clearly articulated his position on Christianity as president leads one to equivocate somewhat on this issue.

Concerning the two primary models of leadership articulated and demonstrated in the life of Jesus Christ, the leader as servant and the leader as shepherd, this writer is of the opinion that Lincoln served well in both capacities. It was shown above that he possessed and demonstrated all eight of the functional attributes of servant leadership. He served on behalf of both individuals and the nation, showing interpersonal sensitivity and being skilled in care giving.

In addition, Lincoln appears to have been an ideal shepherd of the nation as well. He guided, cared for, and protected all of the “sheep,” even at the cost of his own life. Furthermore, he inspired and led the nation to work towards a higher purpose, one that he felt was in step with the Lord’s will for the country as a whole.

Lincoln apparently humbly served both individuals and the community of his followers in a manner consistent with the servant-shepherd leadership model. Though certainly not perfect, as he would himself surely acknowledge, Abraham Lincoln nevertheless led in a manner consistent with a worldview of Christian leadership.

Conclusion

The definition of leadership offered at the outset of this article was “the ability to influence others, through caring, inspiration, and persuasion to act toward accomplishing goals in alignment with a divine sense of purpose.” This is best accomplished through the worldview of Christian leadership articulated herein, with the servant-shepherd leadership model as exemplified by Jesus Christ being of the highest order and the most effective means of successfully leading others. Abraham Lincoln is an inspirational example of a “mere mortal” who naturally applied the principles of leadership consistent with a Christian worldview and the concept of the leader as a “servant-shepherd,” making it evident that this model of leadership can be effective far beyond anyone’s expectations.

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