

10-1-2018

## Christian Leadership in a Secular World

Janet S. Jones

*Wayland Baptist University*

Samantha R. Murray

*Wayland Baptist University*

Kelly B. Warren

*Wayland Baptist University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jacl>



Part of the [Leadership Studies Commons](#), and the [Practical Theology Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Jones, Janet S.; Murray, Samantha R.; and Warren, Kelly B. (2018) "Christian Leadership in a Secular World," *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*: Vol. 12: No. 2, 90-107.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/jacl/vol12/iss2/9>

This Dialogue is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Applied Christian Leadership by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact [repository@andrews.edu](mailto:repository@andrews.edu).

JANET JONES, SAMANTHA MURRAY,  
AND KELLY WARREN  
**CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP  
IN A SECULAR WORLD**

### **Introduction**

Over the past decades, corporate corruption and unethical behavior have risen steadily. This has caused organizations to be scrutinized, leading to a corporate environment of distrust and suspicion. Evidence of major corporate corruption includes the Enron and WorldCom scandals, as well as the indictment of Arthur Anderson. There is much debate in literature as to the causes of increased corruption. Personal greed, a decline in personal ethics, decreased sense of service, and cultural environments that condone unethical behavior have all been identified as possible reasons for an increase in unethical behavior (Zuber, 2015).

Because of widespread ethical concerns, organizations have shown a renewed interest in the concept of workplace spirituality, for both the organization as well as the individual employee (Dodd, 2003). Although spiritual leadership in secular research has increased in popularity (Dodd, 2003; Greenleaf, 1977), one criticism of this stream of literature is that there is a lack of appropriate models of spiritual leadership (Hunt, 2005; Heifertz & Laurie, 2005), particularly as it pertains to Christianity and the teachings of Jesus. Since its birth almost 2000 years ago, Christianity remains a dominant religion; however, its application to modern business is relatively recent. Drawing from Jesus' teachings, this research will offer several practical ways that will enhance authentic Christian leadership in secular organizations.

The purpose of this article is first to discuss workplace spirituality, a topic

Janet S. Jones, D.B.A., is Professor of Management at Wayland Baptist University in Plainview, Texas.  
Samantha R. Murray, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of Management at Wayland Baptist University in Plainview, Texas.  
Kelly B. Warren, Ph.D., is Professor of Management at Wayland Baptist University in Plainview, Texas.

that is prevalent in secular literature. Next, a discussion of the attributes of Christian leaders (which include being Christ-led, a person of character, humility, wisdom, absence of power and ego, and a servant leader) will be presented. Finally, the tensions Christian leaders experience in balancing the interests of all organizational stakeholders will be addressed.

## **Ethics and Spirituality Versus Religion**

There is a growing body of business literature on workplace spirituality, both for the organization and the individual employee. Studies show that the presence of workplace spirituality has a positive influence on organizational outcomes (Avey, Luthans, & Mhatre, 2008; Badrinarayanan & Madhavaram, 2008). Organizations that report a high level of spirituality tend to have more positive attitudes (Avey et al., 2008), better working relationships (Badrinarayanan & Madhavaram, 2008), increased employee commitment, decreased employee turnover and absenteeism (Badrinarayanan & Madhavaram, 2008), and increased job satisfaction (Avey et al., 2008).

However, despite its popularity in academic and practitioner publications, literature has not agreed upon a standard definition of workplace spirituality (Spohn, 1997). Neck and Milliman (1994) define spirituality as “expressing our desires to find meaning and purpose in our lives and . . . a process of living out one’s set of deeply held personal values.” Von Tonder (2009) defines spirituality as an employee experiencing a sense of wholeness, connectedness at work, and deeper values. Dehler and Welsh (1994) describe spirituality as an individual’s inner source of inspiration and an energizing feeling. In their review of the literature, Giacalone and Jurkiewicz (2003) compiled a meta-analysis of definitions of spirituality. This resulted in workplace spirituality being defined as “a framework of organizational values evidenced in the culture that promotes employees’ experience of transcendence through the work process, facilitating their sense of being connected to others in a way that provides feelings of completeness and joy” (p. 13).

Despite not having a unified definition of spirituality, much research has added value to the discussion of spirituality in the workplace. Spirituality has been linked with ethics, moral behavior, and individual value systems (Fry, 2003; Fry & Slocum, 2008; Sweeney & Fry, 2012). In this regard, Fry and Slocum (2008) emphasize that personal ethics are driven by what people believe are the values and principles of moral behavior, and further, that people come to work with their own values and attitudes that drive their behavior. This is a particularly important point because generally, leaders

## CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP IN A SECULAR WORLD

create the culture of an organization which in turn impacts the decisions made by organizational members.

Regarding spiritual leadership, Fry (2003) framed the concept in terms of leaders' ability to understand their core values and to communicate them to followers. He defined spiritual leadership as, "comprising the values, attitudes, and behaviors that are necessary to intrinsically motivate one's self and others so that they have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership" (p. 695). Effective spiritual leadership creates a shared vision among organizational members, giving them a sense of purpose and importance. Such a vision helps produce a culture of genuine compassion and care for other organizational members and a selfless attitude (Fry, 2003).

Although the various definitions of spirituality recognize the importance of organizational culture and the value of interpersonal relationships, they do not offer anything substantial other than a "feel good" environment. Recently, the concept of workplace spirituality has been comprehensively criticized (Mabey, Conroy, Blakeley, & Marco, 2017). In many cases, the component missing from workplace spirituality is a guiding ethical system or an entity that shapes moral reasoning. For Christians, this component is based on one's understanding and implementation of the attributes embodied in Jesus Christ.

It is crucial for this discussion to differentiate between spirituality and religion. Like the concept of spirituality, a definition of religion also has been debated. For example, Kirkland (1976) considered the concept from several perspectives before arriving at his conclusion that religion is humanity's sensitivity to the ultimate meaning of existence, which derives from his relationship to a transcendent or super-empirical plane of reality. The purpose of religion is to give direction and guidance for all aspects of life. For religious members, believing in a higher power gives life meaning and a source of strength and purpose; additionally, it provides a common ground for others in a group that espouses a common belief in a deity (Covrig, Ledesma, & Gifford, 2013). However, despite the bonds built through religious institutions, there may be stronger social controls regarding beliefs and practices. Thus, religion could be perceived as harmful, whereas spirituality stresses stronger personal control. Along these same lines, others have pointed out that studies of workplace spirituality have not considered religious ideology; further, the inclusion of religion from a practical workplace application could be divisive due to the perceived social control (Fry & Slocum, 2008).

## Christian Leaders

The guiding force of Christian leaders is to know God to become more like Jesus (Early, 2006). One of the greatest gifts God gave Christians is the presence of the Holy Spirit, who takes up permanent residence in the hearts of believers (Rom. 8:9; 1 Cor. 6:19-20, 12:13). It is the Holy Spirit who guides and helps us with wise discernment and transforms our hearts. This transformation, outlined in the Sermon on the Mount, emphasizes humility, integrity, kindness, forgiveness, peace, and love as the core of Christian living (Matt. 5:6). This is in direct opposition to living for self, both in the sense of decision-making and materialism (Mabey et al., 2017).

In addition to these Christian virtues, truth is one of the most valuable characteristics a leader can possess, both Christian and non-Christian. The Holy Spirit is the revealer of truth, and it is Christ who sends the Holy Spirit to dwell inside Christians and to guide them in truth. Jesus told the disciples that “when He, the Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide you into all truth” (John 16:13). He reveals to us the whole counsel of God as it relates to Christian living and thus, Christian leadership. The Holy Spirit is our ultimate guide, creating a more complete understanding and making all things clear. Without such a guide, we as humans are prone to make mistakes. Therefore, real Christian leadership must embody the teachings of Jesus and be guided by the Holy Spirit, who was sent to all Christians by Christ.

However, it is important to note that there are effective, successful leaders who are not professed Christians; there are also non-Christian leaders who have adopted ethical behaviors. The Bible even speaks of such in Luke 16:8: “And, the Lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light” (KJV).

One modern-day example of a successful leader who does not espouse belief in God is Bill Gates. Bill Gates has been documented as saying that he prefers to believe in a more scientific approach rather than to believe in a creator (Goodell, 2014). However, he does believe that there is substantial merit in the moral aspect of religion and that religion can have a positive impact on ethical code in organizations. Therefore, Gates believes that whether God exists or not, Jesus’ teachings could still have a positive impact on moral and ethical development in organizations. Those like Gates who believe that Jesus Christ was just a good man who lived long ago (and is not God) often recognize the benefit and value of His moral and ethical life. Therefore, Jesus Christ’s teachings can be influential on both the Christian and the non-

Christian, if the non-Christian is open to the direct influence offered in biblical teachings.

However, for the non-Christian leader, the Holy Spirit is not a guide for truth and understanding because according to Romans 8:9, the Holy Spirit dwells only in believers of Jesus Christ. “You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him” (ESV). In this same vein, Ephesians 1:13-14 teaches us that the Holy Spirit is a seal of salvation for those who believe. “In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory” (ESV). Thus, although the perfect life of Jesus Christ can influence non-Christian leaders’ ethical decisions, the Holy Spirit can only reveal the council of God to true believers in Christ.

Our society is blessed with many great leaders worth studying. However, the man whose life and leadership left the most significant impact on our world is Jesus Christ. The premise of this argument is that, although there are ethical, non-Christian leaders, their foundation of goodness is themselves which is earthy and imperfect. For Christian leaders, their foundation is on Jesus Christ who is perfect. Although studying the life of Jesus Christ could be beneficial to all leaders (Christian or non-Christian), with their compass set on Him, faithful Christian leaders will have a higher purpose than earthy success.

However, having ethics is not always congruent to having morality. What is deemed “ethical” may not necessarily be Christ-like. For example, ethics are the guiding principles of the behavior of a group of individuals, whereas morality relates to the principles that guide one's judgment of right and wrong. Ethics, on the other hand, are influenced by an organization and in one's professional field. Morals are influenced by society, culture, and religion, and are typically not related to professional work per se. The legal system partly defines ethics; the consequence for breaking an ethical code generally is some form of societal punishment, such as a financial fine or perhaps prison.

Organizations often make decisions that largely are considered immoral by society, but which fall within the legal framework. For example, exploiting cheap labor markets has been an ethical dilemma for decades. From an ethical and legal perspective, moving production facilities to under-developed nations and paying the workers at their nation's standards are considered ethical practices by many American organizations. Such business strategies sig-

nificantly lower costs, which is beneficial for many organizational stakeholders. However, these conditions trigger a moral argument about the disparity in the treatment of the foreign worker versus the organization's American workers. Additionally, from a Christian standpoint, the question is, "What would Jesus do?" From the many examples of how Jesus treated others, a reasonable conclusion is that Jesus would treat every person with love and respect, regardless of their station in life.

## Character

Part of being Christ-led is to be a person of good character. Character is the most crucial element of leadership, but also is the most elusive (Sheehy, 1990). Our view of life is defined by what we choose to value, and our character is determined by how we actively live out that which we value (Gini & Green, 2014). Therefore, being a person of character is ongoing; it is not a one-time activity. A common theme in recent leadership literature is the virtues-based model; this model assumes character development is at the heart of ethical decision-making (Crossan, Mazutis, Seijts, & Gandz, 2013). According to Ephesians 4:17-22, it is not possible to develop good character by trusting in personal strength. Something more than willpower and good intention is needed; we need to live out the new self through the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul states, "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (NIV). According to scripture, good character comes from being Christ-led.

As Christian leaders, we should value the virtues taught by Christ that lead to good character. Additionally, it is important that our actions demonstrate good character as Christian leaders in organizations. When outlining the qualifications of church leaders, elders are instructed to have character above reproach, which means that they are to be free from sinful behaviors that would negatively influence others (Heb. 13:7; 1 Pet. 5:3). In his letters to Timothy and Titus, the Apostle Paul was addressing church leaders; however, this does not diminish the need for all Christians to aspire to the same qualities, specifically Christian leaders in any organization. A sampling of these qualities includes humility, admitting mistakes, leading with wisdom, honesty, and avoiding the pitfalls of ego, and the influence of power.

## Humility

Because of the emphasis on individual achievements, power, and authority, humility is often a missing virtue among leaders (Argandona, 2015).

Despite these selfish reasons that humility is undervalued in organizations, theories of leadership and organizational management continue to recognize the necessity for organizational leaders to be humble (Cameron, Bright, & Caza, 2004). Humility is defined as an interpersonal characteristic, comprised of a willingness to see oneself accurately, acknowledgment of the strengths and contributions of others, and an openness to new ideas and feedback (Owens, Johnson, & Mitchell, 2013). Research has linked leader humility to the foundation for organizational learning, quality customer service (Vera & Rodriguez-Lopez, 2004), charismatic leadership (Nielsen, Marrone, & Slay, 2009), and participative leadership (Morris, Brotheridge, & Urbanski, 2005).

Studies show that organizational leaders characterized as humble tend to collaborate, share information, jointly make decisions, and possess a shared vision (Ou, Waldman, & Peterson, 2018). Additionally, humble leaders are associated with stronger firm performance, increased organizational commitment (Ou et al., 2018), and increased leader-follower relationship (Owens et al., 2013), thus suggesting that CEO humility has important implications for firm processes and outcomes (Ou et al., 2018). Humility of leaders can be shown by admitting mistakes (Malphurs, 2003), creating a culture where the voices of organizational members are heard (Early, 2006), and deflecting praise to employees (Owens & Hekman, 2012). An extension of humility is honesty, which is thought of as a value or characteristic that is good. Frequently, being honest involves being open and genuine to fellow workers, which in turn would result in trustworthiness and good relationships (Elm, 2003).

Jesus' teachings on leader humility coincide with academic findings. Jesus directly linked faith and humility to necessary qualities for leaders (Mabey et al., 2017). When the disciples began to debate who was the greatest after the Lord's Supper, Jesus answered, "The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who exercise authority over them call themselves benefactors. But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest and the one who rules like the one who serves" (Luke 22:25-26, NIV). Christians should put into practice those things that are true, honorable, and right because we are "God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works" (Eph. 2:10, NIV). For example, Paul revealed in Philippians that the Lord requires Christians to be humble while providing grace to others. Although this is not an easy task, as we discover our weaknesses, we can



draw on God's wisdom and power for help with the understanding that it is "God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose" (Phil. 2:13, NIV).

## Wisdom

With each corporate scandal, we are left to question where are the wise leaders and managers. Why is it that the same leaders and managers, once celebrated as heroes, turn out to have been complicit in fraud or are profiting personally at the expense of their company and society at large? As Sternberg (2003) states, "Certainly, the business leaders of Enron, Arthur Andersen Accounting, WorldCom, and other organizations whose leaders drove them into bankruptcy were intelligent and creative. They were not wise" (p. 396).

Wisdom is almost always associated with doing the right thing in the right way under the right circumstances to achieve the common good. Paired with the increase in corporate corruption, there appears to be a decrease in leader wisdom. In an attempt to understand why there seems to be a wisdom deficit, recent research on the subject has emerged (Kessler & Bailey, 2007), particularly among leaders (McKenna, Rooney, & Boal, 2009; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 2001; Solansky, 2014; Yang, 2014; Zacher, Pearce, Rooney, & McKenna, 2014). Wisdom has been characterized as a developmental process, one that emerges out of encountering difficult situations, experiencing irreconcilable moral dilemmas, and deliberating about them (Holiday, Statler, & Glanders, 2007; Srivastva & Cooperrider, 1998). Wisdom comes from learning through many experiences and failures (Gini & Green, 2014). Some researchers doubt that wisdom exists in corporate America due to greed and selfish behavior (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 2001), but others believe that wisdom can be taught and learned (Hicks & Waddock, 2016). What can be agreed upon is that leadership wisdom has positive effects on organizational performance (Elbaz & Haddoud, 2017).

The importance of wisdom in leadership has a strong theological background (Robinson, 1990). The Bible tells us that wisdom comes from God. Proverbs 2:6 states, "For the LORD gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding" (NIV). If any of us wants to obtain wisdom, we must ask God, and it will be granted to us. James 1:5 states, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him" (NIV). Scripture allows us to receive God's wisdom, but wisdom can also come by seeking wise counsel. For example, in Proverbs 11:14 we are told, "Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in

an abundance of counselors there is victory” (NASB), and in 12:15, “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel” (NASB). Proverbs 18:13 suggests that decision-makers should have all of the facts: “He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him” (NASB). Proverbs 19:2 further advises that careful consideration and analysis are important for good decision-making: “Also, it is not good for a person to be without knowledge, and he who hurries his footsteps errs” (NASB). This idea is supported further in Proverbs 21:5, which suggests that due diligence should be given in the decision-making process. The author writes, “The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage, but everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty” (NASB).

Of course, the most famous wise leader in all of history is King Solomon; he asked for wisdom instead of earthly riches, which pleased the Lord. The Lord said to Solomon, “Behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you” (1 Kings 3:12, NASB). However, the Bible also teaches that wisdom only comes if you live in obedience to the Lord. King Solomon lost his wisdom when he turned away from God by inviting foreign wives into his home; he allowed himself to be influenced to worship idols instead of the Lord (1 Kings 11:3). Solomon knew better because the Lord had warned him of such evils (1 Kings 11:2). Because of his sins, God declared that He would surely tear the kingdom away from Solomon and give it to one of his servants (1 Kings 11:11). Solomon’s sins would eventually lead to his kingdom being divided into the two separate kingdoms of Israel and Judah (1 Kings 11:26-40).

We see this consequence come to fruition in 2 Chronicles when Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, chose to listen to unwise counsel as his father had at the end of his life. Shortly before Rehoboam was to be crowned King of Israel, the people asked that he consider decreasing the workload that King Solomon had instituted. Rehoboam sought out wise counsel from the elders and foolish counsel from his friends. Sadly, he chose to implement the foolish advice he received; as a result, the kingdom of Israel was divided, and Jeroboam became King of Israel (2 Chron. 10:8), just as God had promised. This biblical example demonstrates that Christian leaders must continue to be Christ-led, seeking the wisdom that only God can give, through sources such as Scripture and the wise counsel of others.

## **Avoiding the Negative Influence of Power and Ego**

The character of leaders influences the degree to which organizations are run ethically and responsibly (Bragues, 2008; Wright & Goodstein, 2007). Power has been shown to negatively impact ethical behavior (Mabey et al., 2017). For example, there is an inverse relationship between power and empathy, compassion, and concern for others, but a positive relationship exists between power and selfishness (Anderson & Brown, 2010). Power leads to ego, which then leads to self-gratification, the promotion of self-interest, as well as a lack of empathy, self-control, humility, or self-sacrifice (Kohlberg, 1984). Jesus spoke about the dangers of leadership and power by confirming that individuals who obtain power were more likely to be susceptible to becoming hypocrites, corrupted by power. To be a true Christian leader it is crucial to be Christ-led, having humility and wisdom to guard the heart against the negative influences of power and ego.

## **Servant Leadership**

Greenleaf (1977) introduced the concept of servant leadership into secular literature; his ideas were based on the theory that leadership is not about the leader. Authentic servant leadership lays ego and selfish behavior aside, emphasizing the needs and desires of the community and others.

Following Greenleaf's lead, several other notable writers and consultants (e.g., Blanchard, 2016; Covey, 1990; Drucker, 2004; Senge, 1990) embraced the principles of servant leadership (Kolodinsky, Bowen, & Ferris, 2003). For example, Blanchard's (2016) overall idea of servant leadership suggests that there are two parts to the concept: 1) Leaders should have vision and direction which are shared; and, 2) Leaders should assume a servant role in the implementation and operational aspects of the organization. Another similar philosophy had been previously introduced by Covey (1990), whose principle-centered leadership suggests that leaders should be service-oriented individuals with positive energy, who recognize the potential in other people. Drucker (2004) argues that the primary purpose of all organizations is to make the human condition more secure, more satisfactory, and more productive. Senge's (1990) definition of servant leaders mirrors that of Greenleaf; Senge states that servant leaders emphasize others, not self. Therefore, leadership means service, not self-interest (Senge, 1990).

Other researchers also have attempted to operationalize the concept of servant leadership by emphasizing that leaders should be altruistic, moral/ethical, and spiritual (Ehrhart, 2004; Smith, Montagno, & Kuzmenko, 2004;

Pekerti & Sendjava, 2010). Such characteristics of servant leaders include integrity, humility, relational power, autonomy, and moral development of followers (De Pree, 1992; Focht & Ponton, 2015). Additional characteristics of servant leadership include stewardship, empowerment, accountability, forgiveness, courage, and authenticity (Focht & Ponton, 2015; Van Dierendonck & Nuijten, 2011). Servant leadership also has a community service component, which might include considering the well-being of followers, community service, and acting ethically (Avolio, Walumbwa, & Weber, 2009; Erhart, 2004; Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008; Reed, Vidaver-Cohen, & Colwell, 2011; Stone, Russell, & Patterson, 2004).

Part of the good character practiced by Jesus was being a leader who served others. Biblical teachings suggest that servant-leadership is Christ-centered. The Apostle Paul presents servant leadership as being united in Christ when he states:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interest of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death. (Phil. 2:3-8, NIV)

Because of the compelling desire for ethical and effective leadership, some theorists have suggested that embracing a servant leader model would result in a more desirable environment where leaders would serve others and invest in the development and well-being of organizational members, while promoting the idea of ethical leadership (Smith, Montagno, & Kuzmenko, 2004; Pekerti & Sendjava, 2010; Shekari, Nikooparvar, & Taft, 2012). The need for renewed attention to ethical and moral leadership has become much more pronounced after the recent decades full of fraud and corruption; also, the concept of servant leadership has become the leadership benchmark for many organizations.

## Stakeholders

Thus far, the discussion (in terms of both the secular and biblical contexts) has focused on the qualities that a Christian leader should possess, including being Christ-led, being of good character, and being a servant leader.

However, these two-dimensional descriptions do not consider how Christian leaders integrate their faith when decisions are complicated and hard to discern, particularly when decisions affect the organization's stakeholders in both positive and negative ways. Christian leaders often find themselves pulled in many directions; they may find themselves faced with creating an appropriate vision while articulating a strategic plan that is in line with stakeholder values. This is especially difficult when stakeholder values are not congruent with one another. This tension that Christian leaders often face creates a polarity between caring for the needs of the person (e.g., employees, communities) and caring for the needs of the organization (Cafferky, 2011).

Pohlman and Gardner (2000) suggested a model whereby the organizational leader should consider eight major stakeholder groups: external cultural values, organizational cultural values, individual employee values, customer values, supplier values, third-party values, owner values, and competitor values. It is essential that leaders, both Christian and non-Christian, consider all stakeholder values when making decisions. However, the individual characteristics of the leader play a role in using the stakeholder model (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997). For example, the leader's own values relative to a situation may have a substantial impact on how they react to the major stakeholders in the situation; these values may include self-interest or self-sacrifice (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997). Kotter (1990) posits that leaders must understand and deal with the complexities of aligned relationships within an organization or industry, and execute implementations through inspiration, recognizing that stakeholders have a mutually dependent relationship with one another. Thus, one stakeholder exerting power over another is not always in the best interest of the organization as a whole (Appelbaum & Paese, 2003).

Some researchers suggest that the leader's consideration of stakeholder values should go beyond financial reasons to recognize that other moral obligations exist in the organizational context (Phillips, 2010). The Christian leader will ideally consider more than just the organization's bottom line. In developing their visions, Christian leaders will recognize the importance of balancing the major stakeholders' values and needs for the long term. Thus, Christian leaders have the difficult task of creating organizational strategies that value all stakeholders (e.g., communities, employees, customers, and organization) in a way that avoids creating a great benefit for one group at the expense of or detriment to another (Anderson & Adams, 2016). Although some studies mention that it may be necessary to accept lower profits in order to align Christian values with values of the stakeholders (Driscoll & Wiebe,

2007), other studies show that organizational leaders who balance the values of the relevant stakeholder groups see higher profits in general (Ni, Egri, Lo, & Lin, 2015).

Examples of leadership failing to please multiple stakeholders can be found among many organizations, especially in the manufacturing sector. One such example is that of the NIKE Corporation. NIKE's organizational leaders continue to choose to operate their factories in Asian countries, benefitting the customers, shareholders, and executives by producing great products at lower prices. However, the social responsibility of NIKE has been called into question with the decision to manufacture products where labor is cheap and where working conditions are below American standards; this manufacturing decision also displaced American workers when factories moved abroad. While there has been much debate in academic literature on the issue of the appropriate degree of social responsibility as it pertains to overseas manufacturing, the ethical concerns of such decisions are not within the scope of this article. However, this example reflects a situation where Christian leaders might have made different decisions.

Organizational leaders should seek to be Christ-led by prayerfully seeking guidance from God's Word. For example, Jesus often withdrew to a quiet place to pray and seek the Father for direction (Matt. 14:23; Luke 5:16; 6:12; 22:41-44), and he taught his followers to do the same (Matt. 6:5-15; Luke 11:2-4). While seeking to be Christ-led, leaders should ask questions such as: Will this action benefit humanity? Is the plan ethical and moral? Will any aspect of the implementation bring harm to a particular stakeholder group? The notion that organizations must sacrifice specific stakeholders (i.e., community and employees) for financial success has been refuted in the literature (Na, Egri, Lo, & Lin, 2015). To be truly Christ-led means exhibiting the character and servant heart that comes with balancing the needs and values of all relevant stakeholders, while still maintaining a profitable bottom line.

## Conclusion

Whether or not a leader is successful depends as much on the time, place, and circumstance as it does on particular skill sets and leadership qualities (Gini & Green, 2014). There is no rubric to follow in the uncertain, unstable environment in which organizations operate, which perhaps, has created much unethical behavior in organizations. However, Christian leaders do have a specific guidebook for leading like Christ: the Bible. The Bible gives us clear direction on how to be a true Christian leader; this narrow path is not

always easy, and the gap between actions and words can be worlds apart.

For Christian leaders, the challenge becomes how to accomplish the traditional functional roles of leadership while incorporating the ethical, moral attributes suggested by the literature and the Scriptures. By following appropriate business practices and being Christ-led, a person of character, and having the heart of a servant, it is possible for Christian leaders to run a profitable organization effectively.

In short, leadership is more than just a set of facts and theories; it is a lived process. In this regard, future research is needed to examine how Christian leaders incorporating their Christian values might elucidate further the practical ways in which leaders can impact their organizations in a positive way. Additionally, quantitative studies would help to determine the effectiveness of specific programs or practices.

## References

- Anderson, C., & Brown, C. (2010). The functions and dysfunctions of hierarchy. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 30, 55–89.
- Anderson, R., & Adams, W. (2016). *Mastering leadership: An integrated framework for breakthrough performance and extraordinary business results*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Appelbaum, L., & Paese, M. (2003). What senior leaders do: The nine roles of strategic leadership. *Development Dimensions International* (DDI Publication No. MKTLD-WP01-06010MA).
- Argandona, A. (2015). Humility in management. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 132, 63–71.
- Avey, J., Luthans, F., & Mhatre, K. (2008). A call for longitudinal research in positive organizational behavior. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 29(5), 705–711.
- Avolio, B., Walumbwa, F., & Weber, T. (2009). Leadership: Current theories, research, and future directions. *Annual Review of Psychology*, 60, 421–449.
- Badrinarayanan, V., & Madhavaram, S. (2008). Workplace spirituality and the selling organization: A conceptual framework and research propositions. *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, 28(4), 421–434.
- Blanchard, K. (2016). *Understanding servant leadership*. Retrieved from <https://howwelead.org/2016/04/27/understanding-servant-leadership-2/>
- Bragues, G. (2008). The ancients against the moderns: Focusing on the character of corporate leaders. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 78(3), 373–387.



CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP IN A SECULAR WORLD

- Cafferky, M. (2011). Leading in the face of conflicting expectations: Caring for the needs of individuals and of the organization. *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, 5(2), 38–55.
- Cameron, K., Bright, D., & Caza, A. (2004). Exploring the relationships between organizational virtuousness and performance. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 47, 766–790.
- Covey, S. (1990). *Principle-centered leadership*. New York, NY: Rosetta Books, LLC.
- Covrig, D. M., Ledesma, J., & Gifford, G. (2013). Spiritual or religious leadership: What do you practice? What should you practice? *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, 7(1), 104–113.
- Crossan, M., Mazutis, D., Seijts, G., & Gandz, J. (2013). Developing leadership character in business programs. *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, 12(2), 285–305.
- De Pree, M. (1992). *Leadership jazz*. New York, NY: Dell.
- Dehler, G. E., & Welsh, M. A. (1994). Spirituality and organizational transformation: Implications for the new management paradigm. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 9(6), 17–26.
- Dodd, B. (2003). *Empowered church leadership: Ministry in the spirit according to Paul*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.
- Driscoll, C., & Wiebe, E. (2007). Technical spirituality at work: Jacques Ellul on workplace spirituality. *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 16(4), 333–348.
- Drucker, P. (2004). *The daily Drucker: 366 days of insight and motivation for getting the right things done*. New York, NY: Harper Business.
- Early, G. (2006). The inner work of the chief executive: Humility and wisdom in the service of leadership. *Transformation*, 23(4), 243–252.
- Ehrhart, M. (2004). Leadership and procedural justice climate as antecedents of unit-level organizational citizenship behavior. *Personnel Psychology*, 57(1), 61–64.
- Elbaz, A., & Haddoud, M. (2017). The role of wisdom leadership in increasing job performance: Evidence from the Egyptian tourism sector. *Tourism Management*, 63, 66–76.
- Elm, D. (2003). Honesty, spirituality, and performance at work. In R. Giacalone & C. Jurkiewicz (Eds.), *Handbook of workplace spirituality and organizational performance* (pp. 277–288). Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, Inc.
- Focht, A., & Ponton, M. (2015). Identifying primary characteristics of servant leadership: Delphi study. *International Journal of Leadership Studies*, 9(1), 44–61.
- Fry, L. W. (2003). Toward a theory of spiritual leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 14, 693–727.
- Fry, L. W., & Slocum, J. W. (2008). Maximizing the triple bottom line through spiritual leadership. *Organizational Dynamics*, 37(1), 86–96.
- Giacalone, R., & Jurkiewicz, C. (2003). Toward a science of workplace spirituality. In R. Giacalone & C. Jurkiewicz (Eds.), *Handbook of workplace spirituality and organizational performance* (p. 3–28). Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, Inc.
- Gini, A., & Green, R. (2014). Three critical characteristics of leadership: Character, stewardship, experience. *Business and Society Review*, 119(4), 435–446.
- Goodell, J. (2014, March). Bill Gates: The Rolling Stone Interview. *Rolling Stone*. Retrieved from <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/bill-gates-the-rolling-stone-interview-111915/>



JANET JONES, SAMANTHA MURRAY, & KELLY WARREN

- Greenleaf, R. (1977). *The servant as leader*. Indianapolis, IN: The Robert K. Greenleaf Center.
- Heifertz, R., & Laurie, D. (1997). The work of leadership. *Harvard Business Review on Leadership*, 75(1), 124–134.
- Hicks, D., & Waddock, S. (2016). Dignity, wisdom, and tomorrow's ethical business leader. *Business and Society Review*, 121(3), 447–462.
- Holiday, G., Statler, M., & Glanders, M. (2007). Developing practically wise leaders through serious play. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 59(2), 126–134.
- Hunt, J. (2005). Explosion of the leadership field and IQ's changing in the editorial guard. *Leadership Quarterly*, 16, 1–8.
- Kessler, E., & Bailey, J. (Eds.). (2007). *Handbook of organizational and managerial wisdom*. London, UK: SAGE.
- Kirkland, R. (1976). *Defining religion*. Retrieved from <https://faculty.franklin.uga.edu/kirkland/sites/faculty.franklin.uga.edu.kirkland/files/RELDEFINE.pdf>
- Kohlberg, L. (1984). *The psychology of moral development: The nature and validity of moral stages (Essays on moral development, Vol. 2)*. San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row.
- Kolodinsky, R., Bowen, M., & Ferris, G. (2003). Embracing workplace spirituality and managing organizational politics. In R. Giacalone & C. Jurkiewicz (Eds.), *Handbook of workplace spirituality and organizational performance* (pp. 164–180). Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, Inc.
- Kotter, J. (1990). *What leaders really do*. Watertown, MA: Harvard Business Review Press.
- Liden, R., Wayne, S., Zhao, H., & Henderson, D. (2008). Servant leadership: Development of a multidimensional measure and multi-level assessment. *Leadership Quarterly*, 19(2), 161–177.
- Mabey, C., Conroy, M., Blakeley, K., & de Marco, S. (2017). Having burned the straw man of Christian spiritual leadership, what can we learn from Jesus about leading ethically? *Journal of Business Ethics*, 145(4), 757–769.
- Malphurs, A. (2003). *Being leaders: The nature of authentic Christian leadership*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker.
- McKenna, B., Rooney, D., & Boal, K. (2009). Wisdom principles as a meta-theoretical basis for evaluating leadership. *Leadership Quarterly*, 20(2), 177–190.
- Mitchell, R., Agle, B., & Wood, D. (1997). Toward a theory of stakeholder identification and salience: Defining the principle of who and what really counts. *Academy of Management Review*, 22(4), 853–886.
- Morris, J. A., Brotheridge, C., & Urbanski, J. (2005). Bringing humility to leadership: Antecedents and consequences of leader humility. *Human Relations*, 58(10), 1323–1350.
- Neck, C., & Milliman, J. (1994). Thought self-leadership: Finding spiritual fulfillment in organizational life. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, 9(6), 9–16.
- Ni, N., Egri, C., Lo, C., & Lin, C. (2015). Patterns of corporate responsibility practices for high financial performance: Evidence from three Chinese societies. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 126(2), 169–183.

CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP IN A SECULAR WORLD

- Nielsen, R., Marrone, J., & Slay, H. (2009). A new look at humility: Exploring the humility concept and its role in socialized charismatic leadership. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 17(1), 33–43.
- Nonaka, I., & Takeuchi, H. (2011). The big idea: The wise leader. *Harvard Business Review*, 89(5), 59–67.
- Ou, A., Waldman, D., & Peterson, S. (2018). Do humble CEOs matter? An examination of CEO humility and firm outcomes. *Journal of Management*, 44(3), 1147–1173
- Owens, B., & Hekman, D. (2012). Modeling how to grow: An inductive examination of humble leader behaviors, contingencies, and outcomes. *Academy of Management Journal*, 55(4), 787–818.
- Owens, B., Johnson, M., & Mitchell, T. (2013). Expressed humility in organizations: Implications for performance, teams, and leadership. *Organization Science*, 24(5), 1517–1538.
- Pekerti, A., & Sendjaya, S. (2010). Exploring servant leadership across cultures: Comparative study in Australia and Indonesia. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 21(5), 754–780.
- Phillips, R. (2010). Ethics in network organizations. *Business Ethics Quarterly*, 20(3), 533–44.
- Pohlman, R., & Gardiner, G. (2000). *Value-driven management*. New York, NY: AMA-COM.
- Reed, L., Vidaver-Cohen, D., & Colwell, S. (2011). A new scale to measure executive servant leadership: Development, analysis and implications for Research. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 101(3), 415–434.
- Robinson, D. (1990). Wisdom through the ages. In R. Sternberg (Ed.), *Wisdom: Its nature, origins and development* (pp. 13–24). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Senge, P. (1990). *The fifth discipline*. New York, NY: Double/Currency Books.
- Sheehy, G. (1990). *Character: America's search for leadership*. New York, NY: Bantam Books.
- Shekari, H., Nikooparvar, M., & Taft, Y. (2012). Promoting leadership effectiveness in organizations: A case study on the involved factors of servant leadership. *International Journal of Business Administration*, 3(1), 54–65.
- Smith, B., Montagno, R., & Kuzmenko, T. (2004). Transformational and servant leadership: Content and contextual comparisons. *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*, 10, 80–92.
- Solansky, S. (2014). To fear foolishness for the sake of wisdom: A message to leaders. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 122(1), 39–51.
- Spohn, W. (1997). Spirituality and ethics: Exploring the connections. *Theological Studies*, 58(1), 109–124.
- Srivastva, S., & Cooperrider, D. (1998). *Organizational wisdom and executive courage*. San Francisco, CA: The New Lexington Press.
- Sternberg, R. (2003). WICS: A model of leadership in organizations. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 2(4), 386–401.
- Stone, A. G., Russell, R., & Patterson, K. (2004). Transformational versus servant leadership: A difference in leader focus. *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, 25(4), 349–361.

JANET JONES, SAMANTHA MURRAY, & KELLY WARREN

- Sweeney, P. J., & Fry, L. (2012). Character development through spiritual leadership. *Consulting Psychology Journal Practice and Research*, 64(2), 89–107.
- Van Dierendonck, D., & Nuijten, I. (2011). The servant leadership survey: Development and validation of a multidimensional measure. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 26(3), 249–267.
- Vera, D., & Rodriguez-Lopez, A. (2004). Strategic virtues: Humility as a source of competitive advantage. *Organizational Dynamics*, 33, 393–408.
- Von Tonder, C. (2009). A spirited workplace: Employee perspectives on the meaning of workplace spirituality. *Human Resource Management*, 7(1), 342–361.
- Wright, T., & Goodstein, J. (2007). Character is not “dead” in management research: A review of individual character and organizational-level virtue. *Journal of Management*, 33(6), 928–958.
- Yang, S. (2011). Wisdom displayed through leadership: Exploring leadership-related wisdom. *Leadership Quarterly*, 22(4), 616–632.
- Zacher, H., Pearce, L., Rooney, D., & McKenna, B. (2014). Leaders’ personal wisdom and leader-member exchange quality: The role of individualized consideration. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 121(2), 171–187.
- Zuber, F. (2015). Spread of unethical behavior in organizations: A dynamic social network perspective. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 131(1), 151–172.