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Organizational Leadership: Foundations and Practices for Christians

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“Organizational Leadership: Foundations and Practices for Christians” is essentially an anthology of theological leadership principles with contributions from Gayne J. Anacker, Jack Burns, Timothy G. Dolan, Rick Langer, Chris McHorney, Ronald K. Pyle, John R. Shoup, and R. Scott Rodin, who will all henceforth be referred to as "the authors," (Burns et al., 2014). While I do not see any of the authors explicitly state specific principles, the principles of the authors' “systematic theology” that I gleaned from the reading, I would say, are referenced in each of the three sections and further explained in each of the ten chapters.

The first principle is that Christian leadership must be rooted in where God calls us. That calling, whether in a church/parachurch setting or in a secular organization, is guided by a worldview informed by scripture. As leaders who are also Christians, we have a primary and secondary calling. Our primary calling is to Jesus, and a secondary calling is to the functional role He has placed us in, whether that is a secular vocational role or a leadership role in a Christian organization. As such, we must maintain a Christian worldview that is guided by the Holy Spirit and Scripture. The leadership role, whatever or wherever it may be, as Christians requires first a committed relationship to Christ and spiritual discernment so that we may respond to God's guidance through the Holy Spirit. Recognizing that both callings are God-ordained, that both have eternal value, and that one is no more important than the other

when they are both submitted to God. As Christian leaders, functioning in a "foreign land" not our own, our Christian worldview must be tested within the boundaries of a Biblical understanding of a Christian reality. That reality is that God is our sovereign creator, and while mankind is fallen, we are not only redeemed image-bearers but also ambassadors representing the kingdom of Christ, accountable to Him in our leadership endeavors. While there is some value in many secular leadership models, they must be considered with critical scrutiny, as the tapestry of scripture is woven with persistent leadership examples for us to follow in servanthood, stewardship, wisdom, integrity, and dependence upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit. **Matthew 6:9**, Jesus gives us an explicit example of "How you pray", but there is no specific direction of "How you lead," instead through thematic reading of scripture, we are able to extract leadership principles. In such, effective leadership is not merely about achieving outcomes but about embodying values such as truth, justice, and love that reflect the character of God in both decision-making and interpersonal relationships. The authors imply that Christian leadership is not merely a skill set or secular technique, but a calling of Christian leaders that is a theological vocation and an act of worship and obedience.

This principle aligns closely with the concept of principle-centered leadership presented in "First Things First," where effectiveness is rooted not in efficiency alone but in alignment with deeply held values (Covey, 2019). Just as Covey emphasizes the importance of a "True North" that guides decisions and priorities, the authors' emphasis on calling reflects a similar orientation, though grounded theologically in one's relationship with Christ. Both perspectives assert that leadership must be anchored in something greater than situational demands, whether enduring principles or a divine calling. This connection reinforces the idea that leadership is not

merely about managing time or tasks but about living and leading in alignment with foundational beliefs that shape both purpose and direction.

The second principle the authors communicate is that Christian leadership is not easy. They illustrate this through the path of the "Leadership River," which flows through the historical currents of management and progresses into both classical and postmodern leadership theory, into the sea of complexity. The implied concept is that there is no meaningful transformation unless there are obstacles to be encountered, challenged by, and overcome. Christian leaders should understand and learn from secular theory; however, it must be filtered through a biblical lens rather than letting it define leadership. Faith does not reject good management insights; it redeems and orients them towards a Christ-like end. The authors emphasize that transformational leadership begins with internal transformation rather than external behavior modification. Leadership is portrayed as an outflow of personal character shaped through spiritual growth and intentional development. This principle underscores that competencies alone are insufficient without corresponding maturity in areas such as emotional regulation, integrity, and self-awareness. Accordingly, leaders must prioritize ongoing personal formation, recognizing that it fundamentally shapes their leadership. The authors highlight that transformational leaders seek ongoing self-transformation and proactively equip and develop others rather than consolidate their authority. Effective leaders invest in the growth and capability of those they lead, fostering environments where individuals can contribute meaningfully and reach their potential. This principle shifts the focus from control to multiplication, suggesting that leadership success is measured by the extent to which others are enabled to lead and succeed. When leading organizations comprised of people, leaders must understand the complexity of the interrelated influences at a quantum level, both internal and

external. Organizations have the power to react and make changes autonomously, but external influences may limit those choices or provide unforeseen opportunities. Long-range plans should be allowed to be fluid, so they can adapt as circumstances and external environments change. But because organizations are comprised of people, leadership, in this framework, is inherently relational and functions within the context of community. The authors reject overly individualistic models of leadership and instead emphasize interdependence and shared responsibility. Organizations are viewed as collective bodies where each member contributes to the whole, and leadership serves to unify, support, and coordinate these contributions. This principle highlights the importance of trust, collaboration, and mutual respect as foundational elements of effective leadership.

The authors' emphasis on internal transformation and relational leadership closely aligns with the framework presented in "Primal Leadership," which identifies emotional intelligence as the primary driver of effective leadership (Goleman et al., 2013). Both perspectives highlight that leadership effectiveness is not rooted solely in technical competence but in the leader's ability to understand and manage both their own emotions and those of others. Additionally, the relational dynamics emphasized by the authors align with "The Five Dysfunctions of a Team," particularly the importance of trust, healthy conflict, and shared accountability in fostering team effectiveness (Lencioni, 2002). Together, these frameworks support the idea that leadership within complex organizations requires both internal maturity and commitment to cultivating healthy, interdependent relationships.

A third leadership principle that emerges from the text is that Christian leadership must be fundamentally theocentric, requiring what may be described (I hereby coin the phrase) as a "theorective" approach. In this model, leaders are not merely applying biblical concepts in

theory but are intentionally reflecting God's character in the practical realities of organizational life. The authors develop this principle throughout Section Three by demonstrating that authentic Christian leadership is most clearly revealed in how leaders engage the relational and operational challenges inherent within organizations. For example, in communication, leaders are called to demonstrate truthfulness, clarity, and grace, ensuring that their words both convey accurate information and preserve the dignity of others. In the context of conflict resolution, leaders are expected to pursue reconciliation rather than avoidance or domination, addressing issues directly while maintaining a posture of humility and respect. Similarly, in negotiation and decision-making, the authors emphasize fairness, wisdom, and a commitment to outcomes that reflect both justice and compassion rather than purely organizational gain. This theocentric orientation is further evident in the area of financial stewardship, where leaders are entrusted with resources that must be managed with integrity, transparency, and accountability, recognizing that these resources ultimately belong to God rather than the organization or the leader. Beyond external practices, the authors also stress the importance of the leader's internal life, highlighting personal and spiritual development as essential for sustaining long-term leadership effectiveness. Leaders must cultivate disciplines that promote self-awareness, emotional regulation, and spiritual maturity, recognizing that their ability to lead others is directly influenced by the state of their inner life. In this way, theorective leadership becomes both visible and formative, shaping not only how leaders act in specific situations but also who they are becoming over time. Ultimately, this principle reinforces that leadership is not simply about achieving results but about consistently aligning one's actions, decisions, and relationships with how God would have them lead amid complex, real-world organizational dynamics.

The concept of theorective leadership is further supported by the emphasis on the leader's inner life found in "The Emotionally Healthy Leader," which argues that sustainable leadership flows from emotional and spiritual health rather than external performance alone (Scazzero, 2015). Scazzero's assertion that leaders must lead from a deeply formed interior life aligns closely with the authors' focus on personal development as foundational to effective leadership. In both perspectives, the leader's ability to navigate communication, conflict, and decision-making is directly tied to their internal condition. This reinforces the understanding that leadership is not simply a set of external practices but a reflection of who the leader is becoming over time.

While the authors present a compelling, theologically grounded framework for leadership, one potential limitation is the application of these principles in secular organizational contexts. The emphasis on reflecting God's character, while foundational for Christian leaders, may pose challenges in environments without a shared theological framework. This raises questions about how leaders discern what it means to "reflect God" across diverse settings, as interpretations may vary, introducing subjectivity into leadership practice. Additionally, while the authors appropriately emphasize internal transformation and spiritual maturity, there may be a risk of underemphasizing the role of technical competence and organizational skill, which remain essential for effective leadership. Nevertheless, the strength of the authors' approach lies in its insistence that leadership cannot be reduced to technique alone, but must instead be rooted in character, values, and a broader understanding of purpose.

Within the context of "Organizational Leadership: Foundations and Practices for Christians," and how it reflects upon my philosophy as a Christian leader, I see leadership not as a transactional endeavor focused solely on outcome-based results, but one that I endeavor to

keep as a theologically grounded calling aimed at transformational impact on both myself and others. I appreciate that the authors present a coherent, biblically based framework that positions leadership as a theological discipline rather than a formulaic secular model. I view leadership in both my primary and secondary callings as a calling God has set me on. This framework, the authors set and that I agree with, begins with a clear understanding of calling, is shaped by the complexities of leadership and personal transformation, and is ultimately expressed through a theocentric, or “theorective,” approach to leadership in practice. It is being mindful that faithfully reflecting God begins with being theocentrically focused and led by the Holy Spirit. As a Christian leader, reflecting God, I believe that I must live with visible integrity. There is no separating belief from behavior, as the authors explain; leadership is formed through both general and special revelation, guiding the Christian leader to critically engage leadership practices through wisdom while remaining grounded in faith. By adopting this approach, as a Christian leader, I am equipped to lead with authenticity and integrity, informed by an eternal perspective that not only honors God but also produces meaningful, sustainable impact within any organizational context that God sets me in.

### References

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