Breaking the Culture Code: The Role Culture Plays in Effective Leadership Within the Black Church

By

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Duke University

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Ministry in the School of Divinity of Duke University 2019
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

In the Black Church tradition, community and connection are the bedrocks on which the culture stands. Much of what is known to be Black culture today was established in the heart of Black religion and the Black Church. This evidence can be found in the way Black religion is expressed. Within the Black Church, religion is expressed in cultural forms like music and song styles, content of preaching, and modes of worship that reflect the overall Black culture.

A good way to understand how people connect, form, and maintain community is by examining their belief system or religious orientation. Although a study of a people’s religion may not answer all the questions about their culture, it would point to a common core of values on which the culture is founded. Conversely, if leadership within religious organizations are viewed through the lens of culture, then perhaps some insight would be gained to why leaders lead the way they do.

Understanding and interpreting Black Church culture is key to effective leadership within that context. Although successful culture may look, and feel, like magic, the truth is that it is not. Culture is a set of living relationships working toward a shared goal. The decisions that are made by a few determine the culture experienced by many.
Dedication

This project is lovingly dedicated to the memory of my mother, Shirley E. Bratton.

Your passing during my doctoral studies pushed me to completion. Before your death I was stagnant . . . life was busy, and I made excuses as to why I could not finish my thesis. After your death, my perspective changed. I hope that I will grow to become the man of God that you have always encouraged me to be. My only regret is that you are not here to witness this.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction and Overview

Contrary to popular belief, culture is not a runaway train bound for utter destruction. This generation is not beyond restoration or redemption. It may be true that the nature of how leaders lead has changed significantly over the years, but all hope is not lost. Although leadership methods have shifted, people are essentially the same and still crave connection and community.

In the Black Church tradition, community and connection are the bedrocks on which the culture stands. In the book, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*, C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya suggested that much of what we know to be Black culture today was established in the heart of Black religion and the Black Church.1 If the authors’ assertion is true, then there must be evidence of this correlation between culture and religion. This evidence can be found in the way Black religion is expressed. Within the Black Church, religion is expressed in cultural forms like music and song styles, content of preaching, and modes of worship that reflect the overall Black culture. Some may wonder how this is any different from White churches and how White religion is expressed. Even though similarities exist between Black Churches and White Churches as it relates to the general structure of beliefs, rituals, and organization, Black Christians often practice their theological views differently based on

their overall experience in America.²

The jubilant, emotionally expressive, and passionate way in which the Black Church worships is a direct reflection of Black religion’s emergence from slavery. During a time when African Americans longed for freedom, the Black Church forged a culture centered around the necessity of freedom brought to bear by the Old Testament God of deliverance. The same God who delivered the Children of Israel from the oppressive hands of the Egyptians would surely deliver African Americans from their similar bondage. Unfortunately, over 250 years of slavery was followed by another 100 years of segregation in the United States. And racial prejudices and inequalities still exist today. These historical markers contribute to cultural nuances that dictate the differences seen in the way religion is expressed within the Black Church versus the White Church.³

Another notable distinction is that at a time when White denominations are in decline, the Black Church seems to be currently holding steady. According to Lincoln and Mamiya, “seven major Black denominations account for more than 80 percent of Black religious affiliation in the United States.”⁴ Before moving any further, a basic working definition of the term “the Black Church” should be offered. The term refers to more than just a single Black congregation or a single physical location. It is a sociological and theological reference to the multiplicity of Black Christian churches throughout the

² Ibid, 581.

³ Ibid, 581-583.

⁴ Ibid, 199-200.
United States. Prior to the late 1960s, “the Black Church” was referred to as “the Negro Church,” which was widely used by scholars and much of the public during that time.\(^5\)

The function of culture within the Black Church may have shifted over the years, but its importance within the ever-changing Black culture has never waived. According to Marc Dunkelman in his book, *The Vanishing Neighbor: The Transformation of American Community*, “the advances that mark the last few decades have actually served to deepen the connections we already treasure.”\(^6\) His research suggested that connections between people are not being lost but rather reassigned. Dunkelman further suggested that what limited time and energy people do have is now being divided between their closest relationships and a set of much more superficial connections.\(^7\) This shift has all but eliminated what he calls the “middle ring” of connections. The best way to understand his theory of relationship rings is to picture the planet Saturn as a person and each ring as different levels of connection for that person. Of course, the innermost ring would be composed of the most intimate relationships, like family members and very close friends. The middle ring follows with a group of friends who have daily interaction on a less personal level. Finally, the outer ring would include acquaintances that share very little if any personal information.\(^8\) The significance

\(^5\) Ibid, 278-279.


\(^7\) Ibid, 120.

\(^8\) Ibid, 96-98.
of the missing middle ring today is the realization that people are now doubling down on the inner and outer rings.

Understanding the history of how people, specifically Black people, have communicated in the past and how that communication has changed will afford the Black Church the opportunity to lead people effectively and bring them into reconciliation. The onus is on responsible church leadership to be keenly aware of what is going on in its cultural context. If people are no longer investing their social capital in middle ring relationships, the place where most mainline denominational churches fall, then the Black Church must find a way to cultivate deeper relationships. It is imperative to recognize the power that words truly have, the power to mold and shape communities for the Kingdom of God. The book of Proverbs confirms this principle; “Death and life are in the power of the tongue.” Effective communication is the key to reconciliation between the Black Church and modern Black culture.

Further, how can the Black Church ever hope to reach this generation for Christ if they are unwilling or unable to communicate in ways that connect with their audience? In general, embracing change is typically harder for older, more established congregations. In many of these situations, traditions become shackles that restrict the body from moving forward. For example, a church that has been in existence for over 100 years should be commended for their longevity; however, during that period, societal and cultural norms would have shifted several times, thus necessitating change.

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Now that it has been presented that change is necessary, the question is how to determine what kind of change is warranted. One of the highest callings in the world today is that of a leader of a Christian organization, such as a church. These leaders are called to serve the least, the lost, and the left out of society. Often a thankless job, ministry requires self-sacrifice and dedication. This calling is higher than any other vocation to include that of the President because the call to minister to any group of people comes from above and not from man. Jeremiah 3:15 says, “And I will give you pastors according to mine heart, which shall feed you with knowledge and understanding.”

It may be important to pause and consider what culture really is. It is also imperative to realize that churches have a culture all their own. It goes without saying that every leader wants strong culture in his or her organization, community, and even family. Everyone is aware that it works but not quite sure how it works. In the *Culture Code: The Secrets of Highly Successful Groups* by Daniel Coyle, he suggested that the reason may be based in the way we think about culture.\(^\text{10}\) Perhaps culture is more a matter of specific developed skills than it is mystery? The goal of this study was to look at the leadership within the Black Church through the lens of culture, suggesting that there is a direct correlation between how leaders lead and the culture they lead. Understanding and interpreting Black Church culture is key to effective leadership within that context.

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Black Church culture possesses distinctive characteristics and elements, including key questions, symbols, rituals, ideas, and beliefs that are always subject to adaptation, improvisation, reinterpretation, and even abandonment. Specific examples of these distinctive characteristics are the African American Baptist homiletical method, biblical hermeneutic, and style of music. Regarding the homiletical method, speech must function in the context of the preacher and the community of hearers. For preaching to attain its full potential, participation of the community is essential. “Call and response” in Black preaching captures this dynamic of participation in the power of the word and its experience. Therefore, the art and science of preaching in the African American Baptist context is the discovery of the harmony between the preacher, God, and the congregation all in concert with each other. Secondly, the way in which the Bible is interpreted within the African American Baptist context also has distinctive characteristics. The Black Hermeneutic has developed over time and directly reflects the rhetorical strategies of Black preaching. The hermeneutic is the pastoral/prophetic dialectic within the context of oppression and the quest for freedom and equality. Gayraud Wilmore suggested that throughout history, the Black hermeneutic has wrestled not only with questions of liberation, but with survival and self help or elevation as well.11

Lastly, distinctive characteristics exist within the way African American Baptists worship musically. Teresa Reed suggested that the first Africans transplanted to the New

World retained the most powerful aspects of their African musicality. Unlike the European approaches to music, where precision in performance is valued and musical notation leaves very little room for variation. Programs are timed, and recorded music is measured for duration down to the second. By contrast, African American music is more functional. It is used to facilitate and intensify the worship experience. One the most notable distinctions of this type of music is the accompaniment of drums and other percussion instruments.

Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought From Slavery to Freedom*, argued that the value system of African Americans can only be understood through an analysis of Black culture. In seeking ways to respond to ever-changing culture, it is important to look to biblical and historical approaches of incorporating culture into leadership methodology. Jewish practice, as evidenced in the Old and New Testament, focused on shepherding. The concept of shepherding corresponded to the culture of that time. In addition to the biblical text, there exist Ancient Near Eastern Texts that elude to the concept of shepherding as a model of leadership as well. Further, historical evidence also builds on the foundation that was laid in the Ancient Near Eastern Texts and the biblical text. The apostolic period established the Christian church upon a very similar premise. Christ himself announced that he was the Good Shepherd, referencing Old Testament scriptures.

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There are also modern-day examples of similar leadership methodology. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. comes to mind as a great example of a leader willing to lay down his life for those he did not know. What better image of a modern-day shepherd? Dr. King impacted the culture of his time and the repercussions are still being felt today. The question is, what aspect of the current Black culture is informing the leadership methodology within the Black Church and is it effective? Effectiveness is defined by setting and achieving goals within a set timeframe.

The onus is on responsible church leadership to be keenly aware of what is going on in its cultural context and not shy away from it. Although successful culture may look, and feel, like magic, the truth is that it is not. Culture is a set of living relationships working toward a shared goal. The decisions that are made by a few determine the culture experienced by many.
CHAPTER TWO

The Code in the Biblical Context

Old Testament

Effective leadership within any church context is based on biblical principles and the Black Church context is no different. The first key to unlocking the cultural code as it relates to leading effectively can be found in the Old Testament, where God (the leader) had a vision and plan for His people and could inspire His followers to believe in His vision. What is often lacking in contemporary churches is the ability to inspire members to believe in the vision of the church, but Proverbs 29:18 warned, “Where there is no vision, the people perish.” So then, it is imperative to glean from the pages of the Old Testament a glimpse of what an effective leader looks like in his or her cultural context. This approach can offer further insight into how modern leadership roles are viewed and understood.

Examples of leaders and leadership types in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures vary greatly. However, there is a common thread that can be found throughout all the texts. That commonality is the concept of shepherding. Could it be that shepherding in the Old Testament was more than just a mere menial profession reserved for the commoner but rather was a calling and the basis for various types of leadership models? This chapter will explore that assumption by defining key terms and exploring the origins of shepherding. Secondly, this chapter will highlight several examples of Old Testament

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leaders who were depicted as shepherds and how that related to the leading of their people. Finally, this chapter will present a few implications for modern church leadership contexts, arguing that the simple concept of shepherding in the Old Testament could inform future studies in the field of Christian Leadership.

**Origins of Shepherding**

To gain a better understanding of where the biblical concept of shepherding came from, one must first break the word shepherding down to its simplest form, that is, shepherd. According to the New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek dictionaries, the word for shepherd is רָעָה raah, which means “to pasture, tend, or graze.”\(^\text{15}\) That definition is both interesting and insightful. It speaks to the role of a shepherd (to tend) as well as the responsibility of the shepherd to the sheep (to pasture, or graze). With the primary responsibilities of leading and protecting their flock, the shepherd profession naturally lent itself as a symbol for those in leadership and God. Any leadership position is intimately related to the people group that leader is responsible for leading. Therefore, any conversation concerning shepherds must include equal treatment of the sheep they tend.

There are several words in the Hebrew language that have been translated as sheep. The word that has the most occurrences, appearing over 100 times throughout the Old Testament, is צאֹן tsōn. From an unused root word, which means “small cattle,

Sheep are arguably mentioned more than any other type of livestock in the Bible, which speaks to their economic value and importance. Considering the value ascribed to sheep, it is logical to ascribe that same value to the profession of those individuals called to care for them. Perhaps it is necessary to explore the significance of shepherding beyond the Old Testament scriptures. How was the lowly occupation of shepherd viewed in the ancient world?

In the ancient Near Eastern culture the position of shepherd transcended beyond a simple career choice, it became a metaphor. According to Thomas S. Laniak, *shepherding* was often connected with a “king’s role as just ruler, benevolent provider and/or powerful defender.”17 Ancient Near Eastern Texts give credence to Laniak’s assertion. For example, Hammurabi was a famous Babylonian king who was bestowed the title of shepherd in several places in his own code of law (ANET, 164; 177–178).18 Sources like this one suggest that shepherding was not a unique concept to the Old Testament scriptures alone but was in line with other ancient writings.

Like the kings in that culture, several of the gods worshipped in the Near Eastern culture were attributed the title of shepherd as well. This god-man connection is no mere coincidence. It directly relates to the belief that kings in the ancient Near Eastern

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16 Ibid.


culture were viewed as gods or godly. According to *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, some of the gods listed in Ancient Near Eastern Text are Enlil, Marduk, and Shamash. Enlil was the Mesopotamian god of agriculture and the chief among their deities. He was referred to as a shepherd in several of the Ancient Near Eastern Text (ANET, 576; ANET, 337). Marduk was a Babylonian god who was referred to as shepherd in their creation story, *Enuma Elish* (*Ee*, VII, 131). Lastly, Shamash was a Mesopotamian sun god praised as being a shepherd over everything that was beneath him (ANET, 387–388).

The god-man connection paints the role of shepherd in a slightly different light. It is also notable to consider the impact that the Near Eastern culture had on the writers of the Old Testament scriptures. Is it possible the Hebrew scribes were influenced by the prominent imagery and understanding of shepherding as a form of leadership? With all the years that Israel spent in captivity to their Near Eastern neighbors, it is very probable they assimilated some imagery from their captors. For example, even though Egyptian texts referring to Pharaohs as shepherds are rarer, they do exist.

*The Lexham Bible Dictionary* recorded that Amon-Re (the Egyptian sun god) and Osiris (the Egyptian god of fertility) both carried the title. *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* also suggested that on some of the Ancient Near Easter monuments, Osiris was depicted

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19 Laniak, 255-259.
20 Montonini, “Shepherd.”
21 Ibid.
22 Ibid.
with a shepherds’ staff. Further Amon-Re was referred to as the “good shepherd,” a term that has been attributed to Jehovah God in the Old Testament scriptures. It is notable that the Egyptian monarchy used similar terms as the Hebrew writers, which begs the question again: who influenced whom? The children of Israel were in Egyptian captivity for over 400 years and it is probable their literature and terminology truly originated in the Egyptian culture.

The term shepherding conjures such vivid imagery. All the references in the Near Eastern culture of “good shepherd” directly correlate to biblical references of Jehovah God. However, unlike the Near Eastern cultures, man did not attribute the biblical term to God. It was God who first gave the title. God is the only one who can define God.

Psalm 23 offers great imagery as to what a shepherd offers to his sheep.

1. The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
2. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures:
   He leadeth me beside the still waters.
3. He restoreth my soul:
   He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.
4. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
   I will fear no evil: for thou art with me;
   Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
5. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies:
   Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
6. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life:
   And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.24

A “good” shepherd provides food. The scriptures allude to the fact that there is no lack of food because the good shepherd leads the flock out to find green pastures.

23 Ibid.

There is also an image of refreshment when the text says that the good shepherd leads the sheep to drink from still waters. Lastly, there is an image of direction and guidance as the scripture points out that the good shepherd leads the sheep out of the sheepfold and back in to the sheepfold for safety.\textsuperscript{25} The care this imagery affords speaks directly to why so many kings, pharaohs, and leaders in general utilize the term shepherd.

**Examples of Shepherding**

After exploring examples of shepherding in adjacent Near Eastern cultures and the imagery associated with them, attention turns toward biblical examples of shepherding. There are several examples of shepherding contained in the Old Testament scriptures. In this section, examination of seven biblical characters that were in fact shepherds prior to becoming recognized leaders should further prove this point. It is important to consider that although they were tending sheep in obscurity, they were already leaders. Further, there is something to be said about people being born to lead, but that does not negate the need for leadership development. This process of preparation speaks to the character building aspect of shepherding. How can anyone hope to lead many if they are not faithful over the few? “Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things.”\textsuperscript{26} Could this be a modern-day implication of the necessity of preparation?

*Abel.* The first biblical example of a shepherd is Abel. Many recognize Abel as the


\textsuperscript{26} *The Holy Bible: King James Version*, Matthew 25:21.
first murder victim in the Bible, but Genesis 4:2 recorded Abel as being the earliest shepherd in the Old Testament. Cain’s motive for murder was due to anger over the sacrifice that Abel offered to God, the firstborn of his flock. Genesis Chapter 4 detailed the account of both Cain and Abel’s offering, with Cain offering from the “fruit of the ground.” Even though Abel never had an opportunity to translate his shepherding skills to other leadership positions, he is included in this conversation because he is the first recorded individual with the express responsibility of keeping his family’s flocks.27

**Abraham.** Abraham is the next biblical example of a shepherd. He is one of the patriarchs of the Old Testament, all of who lived amid Near Eastern cultures. Thus, we see the importance of exploring the concept of shepherding within those texts prior to presenting biblical examples of shepherding.28 Overall, Abraham is remembered as being the father of many nations according to the covenant made with God in the thirteenth chapter of Genesis. God made a six-fold promise to Abraham: to make him a great nation, to bless him, to make his name great, to make him a blessing, to bless them that bless him and vice versa, and that through him all the families of the earth would be blessed.29 However, prior to that prestigious promise, Abraham was a shepherd named Abram, as recorded in the twelfth chapter of Genesis. How appropriate that one who was destined to lead so many is a shepherd first? This occurrence is the beginning of a

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29 Ibid.
pattern of great leaders who were developed in the crucible of shepherding.

*Isaac.* The next biblical example and second patriarch is Abraham’s seed, Isaac. God made a promise to Abraham to make him a great nation, but his wife Sarah was barren and beyond the childbearing age. Despite interference from Abraham and Sarah, God faithfully kept his promise and gave them a son in their old age. Isaac was that son and he too was a shepherd. According to Genesis 26:13–14, Isaac had possession of many flocks and herds. Furthermore, it was recorded that Isaac had many servants just like his father before him. It could be argued that neither Isaac nor Abraham ever really tended sheep because they had servants to perform that task. However, in the Old Testament, the job of being a shepherd was a somewhat menial one. Therefore, if a man had several sons, it was the youngest who looked after the sheep, which is to say that at some point in their life, they were responsible for tending the family’s flock. Although Isaac’s life is of less prominence than the other patriarchs, he was still recorded as one of the Old Testament’s earliest shepherds.

*Jacob.* The last patriarch and the next biblical example of a shepherd is Jacob. Jacob, the twin son of Isaac, differs from his father and grandfather in his recorded role of shepherd. After betraying his brother Esau and stealing his birthright, Jacob fled to the land of Haran and found work with his uncle Laban. Chapters 29 and 30 of Genesis reported that Jacob worked for Laban as a shepherd. Here the difference between the other patriarchs are clearly seen as Jacob was expressly mentioned as tending flocks, not just owning or possessing them. Further, Jacob’s second wife Rachel was also a shepherd and the two of them met while she was tending her father’s flock. “And while he yet
spake with them, Rachel came with her father’s sheep: for she kept them." The significance of both Jacob and Rachel having shepherding experience came much later in the Genesis account where God blessed Jacob and changed his name to Israel. This scene was arguably the birth of a nation. Is it happenstance that God elected to name his chosen people after a shepherd? This example further exhibits a clear pattern of shepherding developing through the patriarchal accounts that translates to leadership roles in the Old Testament.

**Joseph.** The developing pattern of shepherding in the Old Testament continues with Jacob and Rachel’s son, Joseph. Joseph’s story is a “colorful” one, being favored over his other brothers by his father. In short, he was thrown into a pit, left for dead, sold into slavery, lied on, and thrown into prison. But prior to Joseph’s epic journey, he was a shepherd for his father’s flock with his other brothers. Joseph further fits this pattern of great leaders who were developed early in life through their shepherding experience. The ability to lead and care for sheep proved to be instrumental in Joseph’s ability to lead later in his life. In Genesis 41 and 42, Joseph exercised wisdom in dealing with the famine and in turn was able to aid his own family. Based on Laniak’s assertion that Shepherds were responsible to guide their flocks to safe pasture where they could eat and rest, it can be concluded that critical-thinking skills and proper planning were two characteristics of most shepherds. Those characteristics are essential to other

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30 *The Holy Bible: King James Version, Genesis 29:9.*


32 Laniak, 31-41.
leadership roles as well.

*Moses*. The next biblical example of shepherding in the Old Testament is Moses, the main character in the Exodus story. Moses received his call to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt while tending his father-in-law’s flock.\(^3^3\) This is one of the best examples of shepherding as leadership. Moses began his life in Pharaoh’s palace but found himself humbled in the land of Midian performing one of the culture’s most menial tasks. He literally went from hundreds of servants to hundreds of sheep. The Moses account gives an allusion of character development. It appeared as if the responsibility of tending sheep was used to cultivate certain skills within Moses in preparation for a greater calling. The calling to lead God’s chosen people after over 400 years of Egyptian bondage.

Prior to Moses’ self-inflicted exile, he was already exhibiting shepherd-like behavior. Although Moses was raised as an Egyptian, he was aware of the plight of the Hebrew slaves and had compassion on them. So much so that when he witnessed a Hebrew slave being mistreated by an Egyptian, he killed the Egyptian. Fearing reprisal, he fled to the land of Midian.\(^3^4\) Similar to Jacob’s story, Moses met his would-be wife while she and her sisters were tending her father’s flock.\(^3^5\) The role of protector was evidenced in both situations, and here is yet another connection between Old Testament leadership and shepherding. For one of the main duties of a shepherd was to

\(^3^3\) *The Holy Bible: King James Version*, Exodus 3:1.

\(^3^4\) Ibid, Exodus 2:11-12.

\(^3^5\) Ibid, Exodus 2:16-17.
protect the flock from dangerous animals intent on devouring them. Therefore, it is plausible to conclude that long before his burning bush encounter, Moses had within him the key characteristic of shepherding, protecting those who could not protect themselves.

David. The last biblical example of shepherding to offer is none other than David. Several scriptures allude to the fact that his background as a shepherd later defined his role as king of Israel. One of those scriptures was Psalm 78:70-72, which reads:

70 He chose David also his servant, 
   And took him from the sheepfolds:
71 From following the ewes great with young he brought him 
   To feed Jacob his people, 
   And Israel his inheritance.
72 So he fed them according to the integrity of his heart; 
   And guided them by the skillfulness of his hands.36

David’s destiny found him tending his father’s flock while the giant Goliath was terrorizing King Saul and his army in the Valley of Elah.37 He was sent to bring food and supplies to his brothers who were involved in the conflict with Goliath but became the main character in that story. God brought him from obscurity to prominence and it all started with shepherding. David was anointed to be king of Israel while he was still tending his father’s flock but he did not assume the role of king until much later. This period between anointing and appointment was a time of preparation. How fitting that a good portion of that time was spent caring for and protecting sheep, that is,

37 Ibid, 1 Samuel 17:20.
shepherding. According to Montonini, not only did shepherds need to remain vigilant against attacks from wild animals and robbers, they also dealt with inclement weather and sometimes-substandard accommodations.\textsuperscript{38}

**Implications for Modern Church Leadership**

If pastors are a modern-day version of the Old Testament shepherds, then there should be some shared responsibilities and similarities that are notable. First, modern pastors are responsible for the care and protection of the church members. They must be vigilant against attacks from false teachers and others who would come into the church and destroy it. Furthermore, modern pastors are often asked to do these things while living through the storms of life in substandard accommodations.

This point was also made by Lincoln and Mamiya when they surveyed both rural and urban pastors in the Black Church. The results showed that an overwhelming majority of the pastors’ reported income was considerably lower than their White counterparts. As a result, many in the sample size were found to be bi-vocational.\textsuperscript{39} This disparity adds to the cultural context in which leaders of the Black Church lead. Not only are they often ministering to people who have very little, they too are often living meager lives. An argument can be made that White pastors live meager lives as well. That may be true, but there is not the looming presence of slavery and oppression to color their meager existence. The reality is that the White Church in America started free

\textsuperscript{38} Montonini, "Shepherd."

\textsuperscript{39} Lincoln and Mamiya, 2003.
while the Black Church started in bondage. It is not a choice for the Black Church to be advocates for liberation theology, it is a necessity to its continued existence and survival.

Lincoln and Mamiya’s research further suggested that the reported income of Black pastors and their need for secular work point to the general economic culture of the Black Church in America. Their research puts the average Black family median income at approximately half that of the average White family income over the last fifty years. However, despite their poverty, Black church members seem to display a deeper connection to both their pastor and their church at a greater rate than their White counterparts. The church becomes part of their own identity and they often sacrifice their resources to take care of the pastor and his or her family. This observation speaks to the cultural aspect of belonging that dominates Black Church culture. In general, people ultimately want to feel as if they are a part of something bigger than themselves and that their small contribution can effect change on a global level.

Laniak suggested that the nature of a shepherd’s work lends itself to rich symbolism for both God and his agents, such as, prophet, priests and kings. It is possible to surmise that the Old Testament roles of prophet, priest, and king overlap in the role of the modern-day pastor. It is important, however, for pastors to not feel pressured to be all three always. Like the three roles depicted in the Old Testament narrative, they each appeared at different times. The times and seasons for each role

41 Laniak, 31–41.
corresponded to the need of the people and the will of God at that time.

The symbolism of the shepherd’s equipment is also applicable in modern church contexts. Two pieces of the shepherd’s equipment is especially interesting to this discussion: the rod and the staff. These two elements were mentioned in the 23rd Psalm. In that passage God himself was called the “good shepherd” and the rod and the staff was used to guide the sheep. More specifically, the staff was used to negotiate difficult terrain and the hook at the end was used to bring sheep back into the fold when they strayed.\(^{42}\) This is one of the responsibilities of a shepherd that translates to modern pastors. If a sheep strays away from the fold (congregation), it is the pastor’s duty to go after that lost sheep and rescue him or her. How much better would the Black Church be if more pastors would adopt the concept of shepherding as their method of leadership? Few people care what a pastor knows until they know that pastor cares for them. The rod, on the other hand, was used to beat off predators trying to attack the sheep.\(^{43}\) It is a fair assumption that the Black Church is lacking this function as well. If more pastors cared to defend the defenseless, then there would be less hurt and dejected church members. The symbolism of a shepherd points to the willingness of a leader to fight for those who he or she is responsible to lead. Referring to the example of God as the good shepherd, God was recorded time and time again fighting for his people against opposing nations.\(^{44}\)

\(^{42}\) The Holy Bible: King James Version, Ezekiel 34:11–12.

\(^{43}\) Ibid, Psalm 23:4.

\(^{44}\) The Holy Bible: King James Version, Genesis 48:15; 49:24; Psalm 23:1–4; 28:9; 80:1; Ecclesiastes 12:11; Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah 31:10
This first section of the chapter only serves as a foray into the topic and is by no means exhaustive. The purpose was only to explore and establish shepherding as a valid form of leadership displayed throughout the Old Testament scriptures. However, it is important to remember the Old Testament is only half of the story.

**New Testament**

Examples of leaders and leadership types in the New Testament Scriptures vary greatly. Yet, there is a common thread or code that can be found throughout all the texts. That commonality, much like in the Old Testament, is the concept of shepherding. Thus, the focus of this section is to establish shepherding in the New Testament scriptures by exploring the profession specifically in the context of the Gospel according to John. In the Fourth Gospel, shepherding was more than just a mere menial profession reserved for the commoner, but rather was a calling and the basis for pastoral leadership. As such, the metaphor of shepherding in John 10 will be explored, the meaning of the metaphor of shepherding will be examined, and a few implications for modern pastoral leadership contexts will be presented. The hope is that this analysis will ultimately illuminate how John’s parable of the Good Shepherd relates to the leading of actual people within any cultural context, with specific attention given to the Black Church.

**The Metaphor**

Prior to any metaphorical interpretation there must be an examination of the metaphor itself. Although the shepherding metaphor has its roots in the Old Testament, found in such passages as the aforementioned account of the Good Shepherd in Psalm
23, the metaphor extends into the New Testament scriptures as well.\textsuperscript{45} In John’s Gospel, Verses 1 – 6, Christ expounded on the shepherding metaphor by describing two distinct ways in which an individual can enter a sheepfold. Exegetes commonly interpret this parable to be a metaphor for the kingdom of heaven. Still, several older commentators such as Arthur Pink believed there are really three doors spoken of in this chapter. Pink even suggested theologians must distinguish between these different doors to get the full meaning of the metaphor.\textsuperscript{46} According to Pink, since the first door appears in Verse 1, \textit{“the door into the sheepfold,”} this reference is not about the kingdom of heaven but about the nation of Israel. Pink suggested that in this parable, John the Baptist was the porter who opened the door for Christ to come to the nation of Israel.\textsuperscript{47} Likewise, Pink presented that the second door appears in Verse 7, \textit{“The door of the sheep.”} According to Pink, this door leads the people out of their current fold; that is, Judaism.\textsuperscript{48} Lastly, Pink suggested that the third door appears in Verse 9, which he referred to as the \textit{“door of salvation”} and represents liberty and freedom.\textsuperscript{49}

Regardless of whether a person views the door as entrance into the kingdom of heaven or as some other metaphor, the fact remains there are only two ways of entry

\textsuperscript{45} Quentin P. Kinnison, "Shepherd or one of the sheep: Revisiting the biblical metaphor of the pastorate," \textit{Journal of Religious Leadership} 9, no. 1 (March 1, 2010): 66-67.


\textsuperscript{47} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{48} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
mentioned in the passage. There is the wrong way, such as climbing over the wall and the right way, such as entering through the gate. Christ reminded the reader that anyone who enters the sheepfold by any other means is a thief and a robber.50

The Meaning

In John, Chapter 10, Christ revealed his ultimate purpose for being born by contrasting the Good Shepherd with bad shepherds and hirelings. When Christ portrayed himself as the Good Shepherd, he was pointing back to Old Testament prophecies found in Ezekiel and Zachariah, further making a case for his messianic identity.51 As previously said, there are three main characters illustrated in John 10: The Good Shepherd, the false shepherds, and the hirelings. It was also previously stated that Christ was depicted as the Good Shepherd, which stood in stark contrast to the false shepherds or the false teachers of his day. The problem then is rightly interpreting who were the bad shepherds (thieves and robbers). Some theologians, such as Johannes Quasten, suggested that they were more concerned with their own profit than the welfare of their faithful followers, that is sheep.52 Conversely, people who believed in the Messiah would know and follow Christ for two specific reasons. First, Christ came to the people through the gate or the prescribed way in which the Old Testament described. Secondly, people would follow Christ because he knew them by name or cared for each

50 The Holy Bible: King James Version, John 10:1b.

51 Kinnison, 86.

Implications for Modern Church Leadership

If pastors are a modern-day version of the New Testament shepherds, then there is a great responsibility and expectation placed upon them. Following the example of the “good shepherd,” the Bible warns all would-be leaders to put the needs of the people before themselves. Matthew D. Montonini posed an appropriate question in response to the warning in Ezekiel 34:2. If a shepherd does not take care of his flock, is he really a shepherd? For modern ministry contexts, pastors are known by their actions and not just their titles. Anyone can be called by the title of pastor, but shouldn’t a pastor care for the people? Zechariah 10:3 promised punishment for all those who do not take seriously the severity of caring for God’s flock. Moreover, if a pastor is the cause for the sheep being scattered, he can expect swift punishment from God. Jeremiah warned the leaders of his day saying, “Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the Lord. Therefore, thus saith the Lord God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the Lord.”

In sum, the role of modern church leadership is not just a continuation of the Old Testament model of leadership as shepherding but the New Testament as well. Both

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53 Ibid, 10-11.
54 Montonini, “Shepherd”.
testaments come together to paint a more complete picture. Pastors are called to be shepherds to lead, feed, and protect the people of God, that is the flock. It is still viewed by the outside world as being a menial task, but successful execution of the role is of utmost importance to forward movement of the Christian church, the Black Church in particular. Leading change in the Black Church context involves the leader’s willingness to change the way in which leadership is viewed, which is rarely the case. Church leadership must be God led and not just Godly.

Conclusion

As this chapter closes, shepherding in the overall biblical context has been established as more than just a mere menial profession reserved for the commoner, but rather that shepherding is commonly associated with preparation for leadership. Several factors led to this conclusion. In the Old Testament, it was revealed the concept of shepherding was prevalent in the Near Eastern culture. Those cultures were very influential to the Biblical patriarchs and likely the Hebrew writers as well. Secondly, this chapter highlighted seven examples of Old Testament leaders who were depicted as shepherds and how that related to the leading of their people. That section also uncovered the progressive influence of shepherding in Old Testament scriptures. For example, leaders in the beginning of Genesis were mainly listed as possessing sheep whereas later chapters chronicled actual shepherding work.

Further, this chapter has laid the groundwork by defining key terms while exploring the origins of shepherding. The Hebrew and Christian Scriptures serve as a blueprint for how to lead organizations from a Christian perspective. It became
increasingly clear while searching the Old Testament scriptures how God intends to lead his people Israel into success. The Old Testament also documented the people of God’s failures as well as chronicled God’s response. This pattern closely resembles the life pattern of organizations today. The leader is responsible for responding correctly to mistakes made by followers and capitalizing on their successes. This is an area that leadership within the Black Church seem to struggle with the most. Being self-aware is essential in leadership. It is not just about what the organization is doing right that shapes the culture and the trajectory of that organization, but what is being done wrong as well. For the Black Church to continue to be effective, it must learn from the mistakes of the past and find innovative ways to correct those issues moving forward.

When searching the New Testament scriptures, this chapter highlighted the parable of the Good Shepherd found in the Gospel according to John. A brief exploration of the metaphor of the Good Shepherd in John’s Gospel revealed a deeper meaning. Upon closer inspection of the meaning of the metaphor found in the Fourth Gospel, a common thread between shepherding and leadership was uncovered. The argument was made that this specific parable directly relates to the leading of actual people. After accurately interpreting this passage, a few practical implications for modern pastoral leadership contexts could be offered. The hope is that modern-day pastors can see themselves as servants who have been given a great responsibility to care for those who could not otherwise care for themselves.56 This should be a humbling revelation that

56 Laniak, 222.
causes leaders to lead with more compassion and tender loving care. “He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep.” John 21:17

Lastly, this chapter presented a few implications for modern church leadership contexts, arguing that the simple concept of shepherding in both the Old and New Testaments could inform future studies in the field of Christian leadership. The bottom line is that organizations rise and fall based on leadership methodology. Instead of looking to secular examples of leadership, the church should look toward the Biblical example of leadership as shepherding. If God was referred to as the shepherd of Israel, then there is significant reason for further study on the topic.
CHAPTER THREE

The Code in the Christian Historical Context

Leadership should ultimately be developed and not just discovered. One of the many things the early church did very well was develop dynamic disciples or leaders who were equipped to carry the Gospel to the ends of the earth. One of the most disturbing trends over the last few years to occur in many mainline denominational churches is the steep decline in vitality and effectiveness of those churches. Even those churches that are growing in number are still in decline because there is no leadership development occurring.\(^{57}\) While spreading the gospel throughout the world, the early church leaders had the task of organizing churches for new converts as well. These early churches existed with one purpose, to develop disciples who would in turn do the work of the ministry. As a matter of practicality, they had to develop new leadership to take over so they could continue spreading the gospel message. If those early church leaders would have lost sight of the mission and commission of the church, found in Matthew 28:19-20, they would have become complacent in their leadership development.

Contrary to one of the current leadership trends found within the Black Church where the leader is expected to be the hub of innovation, or the “sage on stage,” effective church leadership should rely on the strength and creativity of everyone. 1 Corinthians 12:18-22 confirmed this concept,

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\begin{align*}
\text{But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now are they many members, yet but one body. And the eye cannot say unto the} \\
\end{align*}
\]

\(^{57}\) Charles Chaney, *Church Planting at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1989).
hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary. This shift of leadership responsibility, especially in a small church, is a definite change in traditional church culture, but history has demonstrated that effective church leadership requires a commitment to equipping and empowering emerging leaders. Thus, overall success of the local church should be assessed largely based on the leader’s ability to be and make disciples. The early church leaders, to include Jesus Christ and his disciples, modeled the way church leadership should look today. Leadership should be organic and dynamic. There is no cookie cutter model that if followed will produce canned results. Each organizational situation is as different as the people within the organization. However, the Holy Bible offers a reference for each dynamic that organizations may face. Leaders must strive to attain the trust of their followers and in the Black Church context, individuals must be constantly reminded that the true leader of the church is Christ and not the pastor. When Christ is elevated to his proper place within the church, He will draw all unto Himself. It is a simple matter of order and priorities. In all things the church, if no other organization, should seek first kingdom things and then allow God to order everything else.

Throughout various periods of Christian history, the role of leadership has changed many times. Yet, there remains a similar theme or code that can be seen in each period. In the apostolic age the role of leadership was established and has endured in some form despite cultural shifts and divisions. What is unique about the office of a Christian leader is that its primary role is directly connected to the congregation and not a disassociated board of directors. In Paul’s letter to the church at Rome he posed the
question, “How then will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? How will they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? How will they preach unless they are sent?”

In this chapter, the ever-changing significance and scope of clerical ministry will be investigated while also highlighting similarities across time periods. Again, this is a great opportunity to underscore the impact culture has on the way in which leaders lead. Beginning with the apostolic age, the origin of the Christian leader will be explored. This will be somewhat of a continuation from the previously addressed biblical context. Next, the more official development of the office of Christian leader will be searched through the patristic age. Then, the role of the Christian leader will be examined through the medieval age and the changes that came with that period. Each period brings with it specific challenges. However, the challenges of the medieval age being particularly dire gave rise to the changes seen in the reformation age. After the reformation, this chapter will conclude by looking at the role and responsibility of the Christian leader in the early modern age.

**Apostolic Age**

It is safe to say there was a public ministry within the apostolic age and that this ministry was of a divine nature. It is recorded in the fourth chapter of Ephesians that God gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers. These were given for the perfecting of the saints, for the

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work of the ministry and for building up the body of Christ.\textsuperscript{59} So, the role of the Christian leader during the beginning of the apostolic age was primarily stewardship of the gospel message. Within the Black Church culture there is still a great emphasis placed on the centrality of the gospel message. However, the focus seems to have shifted to the style and delivery of the message versus the message itself.

As the early church grew numerically, the role of the Christian leader began to divide into two functions: ministry of the Word and administration. In response to this role change, local men were selected to perform the administrative work so that the Apostles would be free to continue in the ministry of the Word. It is likely these local leaders were secondary to the Apostles at first but later became the primary point of contact for the administrative affairs of the congregation. This seemed to be a natural development, and the Apostle Paul may have been referring to this transition in his Second Letter to Timothy where he told Timothy to prepare faithful men for the work of the ministry.\textsuperscript{60}

It is reasonable to compare these first leaders of administration to modern-day elders as they performed a service for the church that did not directly involve the ministry of the Word. Paul’s first letter to Timothy alludes to this by stating that certain elders limited their activities to governing and did not labor in “the Word and doctrine.”\textsuperscript{61} It is also notable how these early elders were selected. During the apostolic

\textsuperscript{59} Ibid, Ephesians 4:11-12.  
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid, 2 Timothy 2:2.  
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid, 1 Timothy 5:17.
period, the responsibility of conferring the office of public ministry on individuals fell to the congregation. This process can be confirmed by looking at the selection of Matthias in the first chapter of Acts or selection of the seven in chapter 6. There are other scriptures that would suggest that the duty to proclaim the gospel message and the responsibility to administer the sacraments were given to all believers and was directly bestowed from above. Paul makes it very clear in his writing that he had received his Gospel not by way of human tradition but directly from heaven. So, there is evidence contained in the New Testament that confirms both ideas; God and the congregation selected Christian leaders during the apostolic age.

**Patristic Age**

During the dawn of the patristic age the role of the Christian leader experienced yet another transition. In his book, *Leading God’s People: Wisdom from the Early Church for Today*, Christopher A. Beeley presented the views of significant early church figures and how they connected the profession of medicine to the role of the Christian leader. Beeley suggested that the early church fathers often spoke about the care and cure of the soul. Beeley also acknowledged that there is a strong connection that exists between the soul and body, but he emphasized care for the soul above everything else.

Thus, the primary focus of leaders during this period was rightly on spiritual needs rather than material needs. This is a continuation of the division of ministerial roles during the apostolic age where the apostles primarily focused on the ministry of the Word. This period is also reflective of the role of the modern-day Christian leader in the Black Church context. The economic disparity previously mentioned lends itself to
the Word of God being “administered” to the felt needs of the people.

Beeley supported this proposition, in that leaders are physicians and their only medicine is the Word of God. According to Augustine, church leaders are above all “interpreters and teachers of the divine scriptures”62. Beeley confirmed by stating, “The knowledge and love of God revealed in the Bible is thus the cause, the blueprint, and the meaning of church leadership in every age.”63 This great undertaking requires a lifetime of hard work studying the Scripture to develop the necessary skill to rightly administer this kind of medicine. According to Gregory of Nazianzus, “The first of all our concerns is the distribution of the word”64. The early church fathers had a valid concern as it pertained to training because how can one teach what he or she does not know? The Scripture should be prioritized over all other functions of the office.

According to William Harmless in Augustine in His Own Words, the ministry of the Word, the primary function of the office, was an extension of exegesis. God gives divine revelation of the scriptures for the minister to share with the congregation. Augustine himself continued the tradition began by the apostles of delegating the responsibility of proclamation to presbyters.65 This allowed more time for study and preparation of his teachings for other leaders, most of which took place at night. During


63 Ibid, 79.

64 Ibid, 105.

65 William Harmless, ed., Augustine in His Own Words (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2010), 85.
this period, more and more emphasis was placed on the proper education of leaders. This slight shift in role and responsibility of the leader prepared the office for another transition during the medieval age.

**Medieval Age**

During the medieval age the role of the Christian leader became a public office backed by the government. According to André Vauchez in *The Spirituality of the Medieval West*, medieval monarchs wanted to create a Christian society and looked to the Old Testament for models. But this unfortunately led to a type of church that was more about outward appearances than about true transformation.\(^6\) Vauchez suggested, “Religious practice was less an expression of inner adhesion than a social obligation.”\(^7\) This uneasy alliance produced order and control throughout the church and addressed the issue of heresy, which was a problem in the patristic age. It also produced an episcopal monarchy. This concept is quite different from the Christian leader as servant during the apostolic age.

Vauchez further suggested during this time more emphasis was placed on worship practices, which expanded the distance between the Christian leader and the congregation he was called to lead. The increased use of Latin added to the already growing chasm and this resulted in the laity being disinterested in the service due to lack

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\(^7\) Ibid, 14.
of participation and interaction.\textsuperscript{68} Vauchez further suggested the unmet spiritual needs of the laity led them “to look elsewhere for an answer to their quest.”\textsuperscript{69} This opened the door for monasticism to become a dominant influence in the Christian community. Monasticism represented a withdrawal from the world and a reestablishment of boundaries between sacred and the profane. Although monasticism was traditionally seen as the ideal way of life for Christians during this era, new forms of commitment were emerging as well. For example, Eremity was gaining traction as an alternative to the monastic movement and many Christian leaders were drawn to it because of its ascetic lifestyle. Vauchez asserted that this was usually short lived because these recluses would often acquire disciples and form religious communities.\textsuperscript{70} Although many of these communities broke completely with the outside world, there were other communities that attempted to reclaim the traditions of the apostolic era. They turned their attention outward and had a burden for the poor and a desire to evangelize the secular world.

This age was full of changes for the church and the Christian leader. Vauchez noted that there was a surge of devotion among the laity to achieve spiritual enlightenment through the acceptance of suffering. There was also a desire to reclaim God’s promised land to preserve God’s reputation.\textsuperscript{71} This new sense of devotion gave

\begin{itemize}
\item[] \textsuperscript{68} Ibid, 17.
\item[] \textsuperscript{69} Ibid, 25.
\item[] \textsuperscript{70} Ibid, 92.
\item[] \textsuperscript{71} Ibid, 108.
\end{itemize}
birth to the rise of the spiritual origins of the crusades. Vauchez also noted that the common man’s willingness to participate in the crusades was a direct reflection of his or her growing sensitivity to religious piety.

Reformation Age

During the reformation age, there were several divisions that took place in response to the ever-changing role of the ministry within the church. The office of the Christian leader itself had shifted from a calling from God that was confirmed by the congregation to a political position selected by the clergy, such as the Pope. This was one of the issues Martin Luther addressed with his treatise Concerning Ministry. He expressed that congregations should have the right to choose their own pastors and not be forced to accept leaders whose ordination could not be verified.  

This treatise by Luther brings to light that there were more than one group of churches operating without the blessing of the Pope in Rome. It seemed as if the church, located in Rome, had become more of a business than a ministry and it was clear they were disconnected from the needs of the local churches. The role and responsibility of the Christian leader had never been so challenged than it was during this period of reformations.

The position of the Christian leader also shifted greatly during this period from a servant of the people to a bridge between God and people. Although this concept is biblical, it reaches back to the Old Testament model of the minister as priest. Luther exhorted to fellow believers to hold to the scriptures on which the church was founded.

72 Martin Luther, Luther’s Works, American Ed. (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 1955), 4.
rather than the human tradition of the fathers. He stated, “A Priest is not identical with a
Presbyter or Minister – for one is born to be priest, one becomes a minister.” Luther’s
statement underscores the centrality of issues concerning clerical authority during this
period. Because the Pope was believed to have received his authority directly from the
apostles, he carried with him some sort of “special” authority to appoint other clergy.
This was a nonbiblical tradition that had become almost synonymous with the
scriptures.

Interestingly, [well known] reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin were not
initially separatists. They truly desired to preserve the unity of the brethren but due to
insistent protest they were labeled as such. It is worth noting how convoluted the office
of the Christian leader had become largely in part to humanity’s addition or
requirements and stipulations.

**Early Modern Age**

During the last period this chapter covers, the role and responsibility of the
Christian leader returns to that of the apostolic age in some ways. In E. Brooks Holifield’s
*God’s Ambassadors: A History of the Christian Clergy in America*, he suggested that
Christian clergy in America saw a push toward a more professional and educated
protestant leader. Notwithstanding, competition with their Catholic counterparts may
have been motivation for this push. The desire to make the role of protestant clergy

73 Ibid. 18

more professional inspired the creation of an accreditation association to raise the educational standards at seminaries. This emphasis on studying is reminiscent of the apostolic age where the apostles spent as much time as possible in the ministry of the Word.

Even still, education was just one field of ministerial influence during this time. During this period of history, clergy raised funds for about 300 protestant hospitals, 400 children’s homes, and 300 group homes for the elderly.\textsuperscript{75} Here, the Christian leader is seen once again ministering to the felt needs of the people and the community to which he or she is called. Holifield also pointed out that as new social issues arose, leaders became more concerned with civil rights, political policies, theology of ministry, and ecumenism. This period of history saw clergy moving to more specialized ministry instead of traditional parish ministry. During this time, the Christian clergy in America experienced a resurgence that coincided with the postwar baby boom. Holifield suggested that baby boomers wanted their children to have some form of religious instruction as they did as children.\textsuperscript{76} This led to larger churches with diversified ministry staff. The role and authority of the clergy was changing yet again, but this time in a more familiar fashion.

During the apostolic age, the administration function was delegated to the laity so that the apostles could concentrate on the ministry of the Word. However, during the

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid, 217.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid, 238.
early modern period, the Word had to coincide with the issues the congregation was facing. No longer could the pastor separate himself from the people to whom he or she ministered. The congregation during the early modern age needed to see a sermon as much as hear one. This period also saw a revisiting of who can be called and how are they affirmed. A woman in ministry was and still is a hot topic, which has caused even more divisions within the universal church. However, with the decline in male ministers and an increase of females attending seminary, the church must seriously consider the possibility that God is in fact pouring out his spirit on ALL people; sons and daughters.

Conclusion

This chapter has been a brief but interesting look at the role of the Christian leader throughout the ages. From the apostolic age to the dawn of the early modern age the Christian leader has endured many changes to the office. The way in which one is selected has varied and the issue of who has authority to select leaders has continued through several periods of time. In the apostolic age, the leader was chosen by God and confirmed by the congregation. He was responsible for ministry of the Word and the building up of the Body of Christ. This responsibility was shared with the laity by the end of that age. In the Patristic age, religious traditions were established and emphasis was placed on the leader’s ability to share the gospel message with integrity to the scriptures. This perceived gift contributed to the notion that there was a difference


between clergy and laity. During this period, the church had grown to a point where the
leader was also responsible for contesting heresy within the church. During the medieval
age, there was more change than could be addressed in this chapter. However, this
chapter did highlight the introduction of a state-sponsored church and talked about
some of the implications of that kind of alliance. Next, the reformation age was explored
and the ever-changing role of the Christian leader was investigated further. During this
period, the leader was not only responsible for defending the faith from without but
from within the church as well. In the last period, the early modern age, the role of the
Christian leader seems to return to its origins in the apostolic age. Local pastors found
themselves ministering the Word of God in direct correlation to the social and economic
issues of their congregations.

In sum, the more things change, the more they seem to stay the same. Even with
all the murkiness of humanity’s requirements and impositions, the true calling of the
Christian leader has remained. God is still calling leaders for the express purpose of
edifying the Church. God “has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of
the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so
that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves.”

CHAPTER FOUR

The Code in the Theological Context

In this chapter, the focus will shift from biblical and historical contexts to a theological context. Liberation theology has played, and continues to play, a large role in the way the leaders within the Black Church lead. One of the most notable examples of this is Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. It is no coincidence that one of the foremost leaders in the civil rights movement was also a leader in the Black Church.

Much has been said and written about the legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He is widely known and recognized for his passionate speeches for racial equality. What is not as widely known, however, is that Dr. King was more than just a great orator. He was also a very accomplished Baptist preacher and he often drew from his time in the church when crafting his speeches. For it was within the sacred walls of the church that Dr. King first learned about the relationship of suffering and hope. Long before a public speech was ever given about freedom, Dr. King was crafting messages of hope for the members of his congregation. In Richard Lischer’s book, *The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr. And the Word That Moved America*, Dr. King was often recorded giving his congregation a glimpse of the future Kingdom of God being realized in this present life.80 For his congregation there was more to life than just waiting for the “sweet by and by.” The congregants could lose themselves in worship, not forgetting about their current situation but rather anticipating better conditions promised to every believer.

Throughout the entire civil rights movement, this message of clear and present freedom was at the forefront. It is remarkable to note that an entire nation was moved by overtly Christian persuasions of a Black Baptist preacher. Even though Dr. King’s identity as a preacher and an activist has been recorded time and time again, very little has been written about him as a theologian. That fact is very provocative in as much as everything that Dr. King accomplished as a preacher and a civil rights leader was shaped by his own personal theology. Lischer suggested that King’s self-proclaimed mission “to redeem the soul of America” cannot be understood without fully comprehending his identity as a preacher of the gospel.\textsuperscript{81}

The aim of this chapter is to highlight how Dr. King’s ministry was truly theological and how his speeches were founded on theological principles. By examining what he said, the reader will begin to see how Christian scriptures and traditions were constantly interacting with his experience of God and the world. Considering those revelations, the strengths and weaknesses of his theological leadership will be evaluated. Every type of leadership has both strengths and weaknesses and is worthy of inspection if future generations ever hope to build upon the foundation that has already been laid. Finally, lessons learned from Dr. King’s leadership will be discussed and suggestions for present day applications will be explored.

\textbf{Analysis}

The third section of Richard Lischer’s book focused on the theology behind the

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid, 4.
civil rights movement championed by Dr. King. Notice that Lischer highlights the fact that Dr. King was not the only one involved in the civil rights movement but he was the one who gave a name to the struggle. There is power in giving a name to the struggle because it brings clarity to the movement. Without clearly identifying the problem it is impossible to move toward solving that problem. There were several “symptoms” Dr. King could have addressed, such as voting rights, education equality, etc. But all those symptoms pointed to a larger issue, an issue of equality and freedom for all. Dr. King knew that America had a race issue because White Americans did not realize that all Americans were a part of the same race, the human race.

Dr. King was also able to declare the meaning of the movement using Biblical narratives. He often referenced the plight and exodus of Israel for Egypt. All African Americans suffering injustice in American at that time could understand a clear correlation between Israel’s plight of oppression and freedom. This biblical imagery can be seen in his historic response to local White clergymen who criticized the nonviolent protest campaigns against segregation laws in the south from a Birmingham city jail. Much like the apostle Paul who pinned most of the New Testament in chains, Dr. King emerged as a modern-day prophet for the African American community. In this bold letter, Dr. King again spoke of hope. He hoped that the White clergymen would support his nonviolent efforts but, unfortunately, he was disappointed. He also hoped, despite the “shattered dreams of the past,” that his fellow clergymen would understand the

\[ \text{82 Ibid, 197.} \]
need for immediate equality and not when it was convenient. Sadly, he was again disappointed. But Dr. King also referenced the Old Testament narrative of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in their nonviolent protest of King Nebuchadnezzar’s unjust laws. How interesting that he would connect a present-day calamity to an event found in the scriptures? Surely this was no coincidence as this letter was addressed to clergymen who could appreciate the theological implications of that passage.

Could this be the passage that guided his nonviolent approach to civil disturbance? Could this be how Dr. King found hope in such hopeless situations? How could he be sure that his “direct action” would bring about positive change? What motivated him to be beaten and imprisoned time and time again? Could it be that Dr. King was drawing strength from the biblical narratives that highlighted suffering for the furtherance of the move of God? Is it possible that his own personal theology compelled him to suffer for the greater good of the civil rights movement? Further inspection may reveal that there are more points of connection between Dr. King’s theology and his actions.

In Lischer’s book The Preacher King: Martin Luther King, Jr. And the Word That Moved America, he also explored Dr. King’s theology against the conservative backdrop of the seminary he attended. The methodology taught at Crozer Seminary was one of “higher criticism” and found little to no place in the tumultuous plight of the African

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83 Martin Luther King, Jr., Letter from Birmingham Jail (The Atlantic Monthly; August 1963; The Negro Is Your Brother; Volume 212, No. 2) 3.
American population.\textsuperscript{94} As a result, Dr. King had to find creative ways to relate what he was learning about scriptures to his socioeconomic context. The reality of most biblical interpretation is that scriptures are often read through the lens of the reader’s context and not the author’s. Dr. King’s seminary formation will be explored further in the next section of this chapter.

Lischer painted a very provocative image of Dr. King as theologian that stands in stark contrast to what we know about him from his recorded speeches and sermons. Dr. King was more than just a Baptist preacher or just a civil rights leader. He was a philosopher and scholar. Dr. King was also wise enough to understand the correct way to apply everything that he learned in seminary and from his childhood in “Sweet Auburn” to galvanize a movement that ultimately changed the world.\textsuperscript{85} Lischer further asserted that Dr. King was very intentional about relating the plight of the African American community to that of the Israelite Exodus from Egypt. This narrative served his context well for both the promise of deliverance and the future provision by God himself. What better way to motivate an oppressed people group suffering in silence? Not only does the path of social equality for African Americans closely resemble that of the early Jews but also it provides the same hope for better days ahead.

**Strengths and Weaknesses**

Every type of leadership has both strengths and weaknesses and is worthy of

\textsuperscript{94} Lischer, 199.

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid, 210.
inspection if future generations ever hope to build upon the foundation that has already been laid. In the third section of Lischer’s book he explored Dr. King as theologian and how his formation affected the way he ministered to his congregation at Ebenezer and ultimately to the world. The first section in this chapter looked specifically at Dr. King’s time at Crozer Seminary and the evolution of his theology from seminary to mass meetings. Lischer illuminated that the most popular way to interpret scriptures at that time was historically. However, the historical criticism Dr. King learned stifled his natural instinct to “get close to the Scripture, to live it,” and it did nothing to bridge the racial divide that existed in Dr. King’s context.86 The problem with historical criticism, as pointed out by Lischer, was that it did not translate well with the African American community. For years, White preachers had used historical literalism to reinforce “the godliness of slavery” among other atrocities.87 For Dr. King, a more figurative reading of the scriptures would better reach his audience of second-class citizens. Lischer concluded this chapter by stating that Dr. King’s interpretation of scripture, although heavily influenced by psychology, was ultimately guided by the church context to which he was called to serve.88 The strength of Dr. King’s theology was also his weakness. His context colored his theology and how he was later able to apply scripture to his life. Conversely, his context was a point of disconnect for White clergymen. The oppressors rarely understand the plight of the oppressed. In sum, liberation theology is great for

86 Ibid, 199.
87 Ibid, 201.
those who need liberation but is often lost on those who already enjoy various levels of freedom. So, that begs the question whether the message being conveyed is truly gospel because the gospel is universal regardless of context. Or perhaps the gospel is intended first for those who are afflicted by the toxicity of the context, and then secondarily for those who live in the society but are not at the bottom of society. Could it be that the message of the gospel is different for the oppressor and the oppressed? For example, God’s message to Moses wasn’t the same as it was to Pharaoh.

Further observation of Dr. King’s theological formation can be witnessed during his time at Ebenezer Baptist Church. Lischer referred to this section of his book as the Ebenezer Gospel because that was the name of his father’s church where he pastored.\(^9^9\) In this chapter, Lischer illuminated the essential elements of Dr. King’s message as a pastor. This gospel message that was developed at Ebenezer gives a glimpse into his quest for justice, desire for redemption, nonviolent approach, and his prophetic rage for the widespread suffering that was occurring.\(^9^0\) The part of the Ebenezer Gospel that stood out the most was the role that God assumed in the African American culture. God was depicted to the people as the creator of the world and the liberator of Israel. The significance of this point is that God did not just want to set his people free, but as the creator, he had the power to do just that.\(^9^1\) Though powerful, how is God depicted to Caucasian Americans? Is there no hope or redemption for them? Are all White people

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\(^9^9\) Ibid, 221.

\(^9^0\) Ibid.

\(^9^1\) Ibid, 224-225.
guilty by default even if they have never mistreated an African American? There are so many causes for people to support, how does the believer know which ones to fight for? For example, should the church wage war against Planned Parenthood or should it be more concerned about Head Start programs once that baby is born? These are just a few questions that come up when discussing liberation theology.

Lischer also presented that the character of God was central to the Ebenezer Gospel and the most prominent characteristic of God in the New Testament was his love. What better message for an oppressed people than one of God’s unconditional love and concern for them? This aspect of Dr. King’s message was universal, and this theme has been seen manifested in his public addresses. The concept of love and caring transcends all color lines and differences. This period of Dr. King’s life revealed not only his prowess as pastor but also as a solid theologian. From Lischer’s observations, it is safe to assume that theological formation is progressive. Everything Dr. King learned in seminary was applied in the church and everything he had learned in the church was utilized in the development of his messages for larger audiences. These mass meetings were pivotal to the civil rights movement but were in so many ways birthed out of the Black church experience. Most meetings included singing of hymns and announcements, culminating with an encouraging and inspiring message by a prominent Black leader. In this way, these meetings served as sub-culture among the participants. Lischer pointed out that

92 Ibid, 225.
93 Ibid, 244.
the mass meetings effectively provided a forum for information and tactical planning.\textsuperscript{94}

In retrospect, it is amazing to consider that these meetings were not widely publicized but always well attended. It could be argued these early mass meetings served as the driving force that fueled the civil rights movement and Dr. King was able to apply everything he had learned throughout his short life to create a crusade that would be perpetual. This is one of the strengths of Dr. King’s theological formation; it was more than just what was said but the atmosphere in which it was said as well. So, in the end, Dr. King’s leadership transformed from just a quest for equality and justice to an actual Word-of-God movement.

\textbf{Application}

To apply what was learned from Dr. King’s theological journey, there are several questions that should be pondered:

1. How important should context or environment be to the formation of our own theology? Can any preacher be effective if he or she is not keenly aware of his or her audience’s context? Preaching is much more than just reciting biblical narratives. It is the art and science of causing those narratives to become incarnational for everyone listening.

2. How important is the message of the Kingdom of God in the social justice context? Having a correct image of the Kingdom of God could effectively shape future discourses about social justice. In the Kingdom of God there is no respect of person, so

\textsuperscript{94} Ibid, 245.
why are there so many divisions here on earth? Dr. King constantly pointed to the utopia of the Kingdom of God as a perfect example of what society should be.

3. Could the “separate but equal” policy in segregated congregations contribute to the social divide rather than minimize it? Are there any conditions that have been created in the name of unity that divide? Pointing back to the Kingdom of God, there is neither slave nor free. At what point did Americans start segregating and separating ourselves from others? At the end of the day, there are more similarities than differences. After all, there is the same creator. And if the creator is described as love, then his creations should show love constantly. Dr. King’s theology captured the characteristics of God as well as the Kingdom. How can Christians profess to be Christ like if they do not have love for one another?

The most important lesson that can be learned from Dr. King’s theological formation is that believers must be willing to get involved. Theology is more than just head knowledge; it is the epitome of faith in action. Knowing God motivates to action on that knowledge to change the world for the better. Dr. King did not attend seminary just to learn how to interpret the scriptures, but he wanted to be able to interpret those scriptures for the people in his ministry context. That led to him applying those same principles of justice, redemption, and nonviolence to a wider audience during his mass meetings and finally bringing him to the forefront of the civil rights movement, speaking to diverse audiences from all over the country. Two scriptures come to mind – Zechariah 4:10 and Proverbs 18:16.

“For whoever has despised the day of small things shall rejoice, and shall see the
plumb line in the hand of Zerubbabel."\textsuperscript{95}

“A man’s gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men."\textsuperscript{96}

In sum, personal theology is constantly being formed through various life experiences but the result of walking by faith will lead to great places. To be clear, “great places” may not have the same interpretation as modern-day prosperity gospel teaches. When following our faith, the believer may have to sacrifice his or her own comfort for the greater good. On the road to great places, the believer may find him- or herself in a pit or a prison like Joseph before being elevated to the palace. In Dr. King’s case, he was elevated to an audience with the creator, no greater place for a believer.

**Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter was to highlight how Dr. King’s ministry was truly theological and how his messages were founded on theological principles. After examining what Dr. King said, the reader should now have a clearer understanding of how Christian scriptures and traditions were constantly interacting with his experience of God and the world. Although Dr. King has been noted as one of the greatest leaders of our time, even his type of leadership had strengths and weaknesses. Further exploration of his leadership revealed some weaknesses but overall his leadership style was strong. The hope of future generations of leaders is built on the foundation that Dr. King laid. Lastly, this chapter briefly discussed some lessons that could be learned from Dr. King’s

\textsuperscript{95} The Holy Bible: English Standard Version, Zechariah 4:10.

\textsuperscript{96} The Holy Bible: King James Version, Proverbs 18:16.
leadership and theological formation. The key takeaway was that theological leadership is progressive and is shaped by life experiences. To wit, Dr. King’s life was lived for his generation and future generations to come. The example he left was more than nonviolent protest. He left a message of hope crafted from the biblical narratives he preached at Ebenezer Baptist Church, the same biblical narrative that can be drawn upon today. Inequalities still exist and there are still oppressed sections of the American society who need to be touched by the gospel message. The Kingdom of God and the character of God still offer hope for people who may be hopeless. It is now the responsibility of all who call themselves preachers to carry the mantle that Dr. King once carried into future generations. The cultural context may have changed but the source material, the biblical narrative, remains the same.
Epilogue

The Code in the Practical Context

As noted at the beginning of this examination, culture impacts leadership. Much of what is known to be Black culture today was established in the heart of Black religion and the Black Church. The question is, what aspect of the current Black culture is informing the leadership methodology within the Black Church and is it effective?

Biblical Evidence

After looking at biblical and historical approaches of incorporating culture into leadership methodology, the Black Church can begin to see ways to respond to the ever-changing culture. First, Jewish practice, as evidenced in the Old and New Testament, focused on shepherding. The concept of shepherding corresponded to the culture of that time. In addition to the biblical text there exist Ancient Near Eastern Texts that elude to the concept of shepherding as a model of leadership as well. If pastors are a modern-day version of both Old and New Testament shepherds, then there are some shared responsibilities and similarities that are notable. First, modern pastors are responsible for the care and protection of the church members. They must be vigilant against attacks from false teachers and others who would come into the church and destroy it. Furthermore, modern pastors are often asked to do these things while living through the storms of life in substandard accommodations.

Laniak suggested that the nature of a shepherd’s work lends itself to rich
symbolism for both God and his agents, that is, prophet, priests, and kings.\textsuperscript{97} It is possible to surmise that the Old Testament roles of prophet, priest, and king overlap in the role of the modern-day pastor. It is important, however, for pastors to not feel pressured to be all three always. Like the three roles depicted in the Old Testament narrative, they each appeared at different times and the times and seasons for each role corresponded to the need of the people and the will of God at that time.

The symbolism of the shepherd’s equipment is also applicable in modern church contexts. Two pieces of the shepherd’s equipment is especially interesting to this discussion: the rod and the staff. These two elements were mentioned in the twenty-third Psalm. In that passage God, himself was called the “good shepherd” and the rod and the staff were used to guide the sheep. More specifically, the staff was used to negotiate difficult terrain and the hook at the end was used to bring sheep back into the fold when they strayed.\textsuperscript{98} This is one of the responsibilities of a shepherd that translates to modern pastors. If a sheep strays away from the fold (congregation), it is the pastor’s duty to go after that lost sheep and rescue him. How much better would the Black Church be if more pastors would adopt the concept of shepherding as their method of leadership? Few people care what a pastor knows until they know that pastor cares for them. The rod, on the other hand, was used to beat off predators trying to attack the sheep.\textsuperscript{99} It is a fair assumption that the Black Church is lacking this function as well.

\textsuperscript{97} Laniak, 31–41.

\textsuperscript{98} The Holy Bible: King James Version, Ezekiel 34:11–12.

more pastors cared to defend the defenseless, then there would be fewer hurt and
dejected church members. The symbolism of a shepherd points to the willingness of a
leader to fight for those who he or she is responsible to lead. Referring to the example of
God as the good shepherd, God was recorded time and time again fighting for his people
against opposing nations.100

Following the example of the good shepherd, the Bible warns all would-be
leaders to put the needs of the people before themselves. Matthew D. Montonini posed
an appropriate question in response to the warning in Ezekiel 34:2. If a shepherd does
not take care of his flock, is he really a shepherd?101 For modern ministry contexts,
pastors are known by their actions and not just their titles. Anyone can be called by the
title of pastor but shouldn’t a pastor care for the people? Zechariah 10:3 promises
punishment for all those who do not take seriously the severity of caring for God’s flock.
Moreover, if a pastor is the cause for the sheep being scattered, he can expect swift
punishment from God. Jeremiah warned the leaders of his day saying, “Woe be unto the
pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the Lord. Therefore, thus
saith the Lord God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered
my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you
the evil of your doings, saith the Lord.”102

100 The Holy Bible: King James Version, Genesis 48:15; 49:24; Psalm 23:1–4; 28:9; 80:1; Ecclesiastes 12:11;
Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah 31:10

101 Montonini, “Shepherd”.

This scripture speaks to the fact that in life, as well as in history, there exist negative examples of shepherding. In the gospel of John, Jesus referred to all those who came before him as “thieves and robbers.” This is a stark contrast between the good shepherd and those false shepherds who came to “steal, kill and destroy.”\(^{103}\) It can be argued that everything has duality and that the enemy plans to counterfeit whatever God has created. This point is illustrated in the story of Joseph. Genesis 50:20 states, “you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.”\(^{104}\) Though counterfeits may exist, God’s plan supersedes the plans of the enemy.

Pastors are called to be shepherds to lead, feed, and protect the people of God, that is the flock. It is still viewed by the outside world as being a menial task, but successful execution of the role is of utmost importance to forward movement of the Christian church, the Black Church in particular. Leading change in the Black Church context involves the leader’s willingness to change the way in which leadership is viewed, which is rarely the case. Church leadership must be God led and not just Godly.

**Historical Evidence**

Further, historical evidence also builds on the foundation that was laid in the Ancient Near Eastern Texts and the biblical text. The apostolic period established the Christian church upon a very similar premise. In the apostolic age, the leader was chosen

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\(^{103}\) *The Holy Bible: King James Version*, John 10:1-10.

by God and confirmed by the congregation. He was responsible for ministry of the Word and the building up of the Body of Christ. This responsibility was shared with the laity by the end of that age. In the Patristic age, religious traditions were established and emphasis was placed on the leader’s ability to share the gospel message with integrity to the scriptures. This perceived gift contributed to the notion that there was a difference between clergy and laity. During this period, the church had grown to a point where the leader was also responsible for contesting heresy within the church.

Next the reformation age was explored and the ever-changing role of the Christian leader was investigated further. During this period, the leader was not only responsible for defending the faith from without but from within the church as well. In the last period, the early modern age, the role of the Christian leader seems to return to its origins in the apostolic age. Local pastors have found themselves ministering the Word of God in direct correlation to the social and economic issues of their congregations.

Unfortunately, during the modern age, the concept of the Christian leader as shepherd has once again been perverted. In the late 1970s, there was an emerging movement that developed into a network of churches under the leadership of lay shepherds. This movement was characterized by the sheep/shepherd relationships they encouraged. However, the shepherd in that relationship was a man and not God. The movement received heavy scrutiny over their requirement of absolute submission to the shepherd’s authority. David S. Moore highlighted this controversy, stating that many
Charismatics considered the movement’s teachings on spiritual authority and submission to be bondage like.\textsuperscript{105}

In sum, the more things change, the more they seem to stay the same. Even with all the murkiness of man-made requirements and impositions the true calling of the Christian leader has remained. God is still calling leaders for the express purpose of building up His body. God himself “has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves.”\textsuperscript{106}

**Theological Evidence**

There are also modern-day examples of similar leadership methodology. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. comes to mind as a great example of a leader willing to lay down his life for those he did not know. What better image of a modern-day shepherd? To apply what was learned from Dr. King’s theological journey, there are several questions that were posed.

1. How important should context or environment be to the formation of our own theology? Can any preacher be effective if he or she is not keenly aware of his or her audience’s context? Preaching is much more than just reciting biblical narratives. It is


the art and science of causing those narratives to become incarnational for everyone listening.

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3. Could the separate but equal policy in segregated congregations contribute to the social divide rather than minimize it? Are there any conditions that have been created in the name of unity that divide? Pointing back to the Kingdom of God, there is neither slave nor free. At what point did Americans start segregating and separating ourselves from others? At the end of the day, there are more similarities than differences. After all, there is the same creator. If the creator is described as love, then his creations should show love constantly. Dr. King’s theology captured the characteristics of God as well as the Kingdom. How can Christians profess to be Christ like if they do not have love for one another?

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**Conclusion**

A good way to understand how people connect, form, and maintain community is by examining their belief system or religious orientation. Although a study of a people’s religion may not answer all the questions about their culture, it would point to a common core of values on which the culture is founded. Conversely, if leadership within religious organizations are viewed through the lens of culture, then perhaps some insight would be gained to why leaders lead the way they do. Paramount to this discussion is a historical look at the way culture has impacted leadership in several different contexts and how effective that leadership was as a result.
The onus is on responsible church leadership to be keenly aware of what is going on in its cultural context and not shy away from it. Understanding and interpreting Black church culture is key to effective leadership within that context. Although successful culture may look, and feel like magic, the truth is that it is not. Culture is a set of living relationships working toward a shared goal. The decisions that are made by a few determine the culture experienced by many.
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