Pitfalls in 'Biblical' leadership

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This article is about the pitfalls involved in writing a Christian handbook on leadership. By analysing some elements of the Rule of Benedict it is argued that it is impossible to write such a handbook without using non-Biblical sources. Moreover, there are typical pitfalls when authors attempt to develop a pure Biblical leadership theory. The first pitfall is typical of Christians representing Niebuhr's type of 'Christ against Culture'. As early as 1951, Niebuhr claimed that in the field of leadership in particular the radical exclusive Christians reintroduced rules from non-Christian cultures. Examples from the last decade support Niebuhr's observation. The second pitfall, referred to as reconstruction, is typical of those authors who are open to secular sources but who seek to give Biblical evidence for their leadership theory. This pitfall is illustrated by analysing the process in which the secular concepts of transforming leadership and vision statements found their way into evangelical books on Christian leadership. Reconstruction typically consists of four steps: *Perception* (a secular model of leadership becomes popular), *Acceptance* (this model is examined and accepted for the context of the church) *Assimilation* (it is claimed that leaders in the Bible worked exactly as described in the model, books are written about Biblical leadership, exemplifying the model. The secular source becomes obsolete.) and *Standardisation* (this model of leadership is declared to be the Biblical norm for every Christian leader). I argue that step 3 is at least problematic and step 4 is a fatal error.

Introduction to the problem

This article discusses cultural influences on the understanding of leadership and, in particular, the often fruitless attempts of Christians to construct a pure Biblical leadership theory. I will argue that there is no culture-free Biblical leadership theory as 'there can never be a culture-free gospel' (Newbigin 1986:4). This statement is explained using the example of Benedict's Rule, which can be seen as the first handbook on Christian leadership.

Cultural influence on Christian leadership theory is not a significant problem as long as people are aware of this influence. However, it becomes a problem when Christians attempt to construct a pure Biblical leadership theory. It will be argued that any attempt to escape cultural influence will actually lead to its increased, but covert, influence on church leadership. I will demonstrate this by describing two typical pitfalls encountered when constructing Christian leadership: Firstly, there is an attempt to ignore the cultural influence, and secondly, there is the assimilation, or even baptising, of secular leadership theories.

Cultural influence on the understanding of leadership

Our culture and our concept of leadership go hand in hand. Whether we perceive different types of leadership as positive or negative is mainly influenced by the culture in which we were socialised. The only question is whether we are aware of this fact or not.

Generally, people who, for centuries, have lived in an absolute monarchy will have a different perception of leadership styles to those of people from a long-standing democracy. A good example of this difference can be found in a comparison between Switzerland and Russia. In Russia, ancient tsardom was replaced by another dictatorship, that of the Communist Unity Party. Although, nowadays, Russia has free elections, the government's style of leadership remains strange to Western Europeans, as well as their handling of critics and their understanding of democracy. In contrast, Switzerland, which began as a confederation in 1291, was a loose alliance of states, in which the different cantons were highly autonomous (Russenberger 2010:658). To date, the following values remain important to the Swiss people: 'No exclusive power to the individual', and 'the democratic right of codetermination' (Russenberger 2010:662). A leadership style which would be perceived as normal by a Russian citizen would be declared abuse of power by the Swiss. Normal leadership, according to Swiss standards, would seem like a lack of leadership capability to the Russians.

These cultural differences become problematic whenever one society believes that their own culture of leadership is the only true one, or when religious groups consider their leadership culture to be God-given. Many dictatorships are and were justified through religion, with the leader being seen as God or, at least, divine. However, this absolute view can also occur in a democratic constitution, as happened during the euphoria in New England after the colonists there had freed themselves from the English throne and saw their chance to come under the true reign of the Lord:

> Lyman Beecher tends to identify the moral law of God with the law of New England Puritanism and the latter with the law of the United States: 'Our own republic [he declares] in its Constitution and laws is of heavenly origin. It was not borrowed from Greece or Rome, but from the Bible. … It was God that gave these elementary principles to our forefathers, as the 'pillar of fire by night, and the cloud by day,' for their guidance.' (Niebuhr 1988:174)

If a certain leadership culture is justified by religion and seen as the only truth, any questioning of this type of leadership is condemned and viewed as sacrilege and a lack of faith. For this reason, it is always problematic to 'baptise' any philosophy of leadership.

Sometimes, however, people regard the kind of leadership that they have experienced as wrong or morally reprehensible, in which case they strive for the opposite, at least in theory. In reality their style of leadership is often closer to the rejected, or even detested, style than they would like to admit. Many a father has criticised his father's parenting style not realising that he is not that different in the end.

It is somewhat ironic that it is exactly those groups of believers who verbally distinguish themselves most distinctly from the culture they live in, who often copy the leadership patterns exemplified in that culture to a great extent. They teach Romans 12:2, 'Do not conform to the pattern of this world', but their leadership is like the worldly leadership in their culture.

Following in Niebuhr's footsteps

This phenomenon has been mentioned by H. Richard Niebuhr in his famous book *Christ and Culture.* Published in 1951, this book has become a theological classic (Marty in Niebuhr 2001:xiii). Niebuhr's comment on leadership culture has inspired me to undertake further research on the topic.

Concerning the attitudes of Christians towards their culture, Niebuhr distinguishes five types and gives a number of examples of people who represent these types. The following Table 1 gives an overview of Niebuhr's classification (2001:xliii–lv):

According to Gustavson (in Niebuhr 2001:xxvi), these five categories can be understood in a similar way to Max Weber's ideal types. Thus, this differentiation is not meant to be a taxonomy of Christian authors (2001:xxix). For example, Niebuhr sees Augustine as the great representative of the conversionist type but also recognises other approaches in his thinking (2001:xxix).

The most radical rejection of culture is found in the position 'Christ against culture' (pp. 45–82), according to which any kind of culture is seen as negative, or even diabolical. Niebuhr (2001) identifies this type in 1 John (p. 47), in Tertullian (p. 51–55) and in Tolstoy (p. 56–65). Furthermore, he explains why, at the end of the day, it is impossible to live an attitude of 'Christ against culture':

> Man not only speaks but thinks with the aid of the language of the culture. … He cannot dismiss the philosophy and science of his society as though they were external to him: they are in him – though in different forms from those in which they appear in the leaders of the culture. … If Christians do not come to Christ with the language, thought patterns, the moral disciplines of Judaism, they come with those of Rome; if not with those of Rome, then with those of Germany, England, Russia, America, India, or China. Hence the radical Christians are always making use of the culture, or parts of the culture, which ostensibly they reject. (Niebuhr 2001:69)

Even the most exclusive Christians use parts of the culture they reject wholeheartedly. This is a general observation. Niebuhr (2001), however, claims that this phenomenon is especially valid in the field of leadership, which is a very interesting observation:

> In his effort to be obedient to Christ, the radical Christian therefore reintroduces ideas and rules from non-Christian culture in two areas: in the government of the withdrawn Christian community, and in the regulation of Christian conduct toward the world outside. (p. 71)[1]

This is how the dilemma emerges: There is a group of people that wants to retreat from the 'evil' world in order to concentrate on Christ. When enough people follow this path a religious community is born. Next, the practical question arises: how will this religious community be led and administered? Most probably, they will look for the answer in the Bible. And, of course, the Bible contains some references to and guidelines on leadership (e.g. Mt 20:26; Heb 13:17; 1 Pt 5:1–3). However, the Bible does not provide answers for every eventuality. To achieve a handbook on Christian leadership one has to use other sources or culturally influenced wisdom.

Example: the Rule of Benedict

The best known and oldest Christian guide to leadership is the *Regula Benedicti* (hereafter referred to as 'RB'), which

TABLE 1: Niebuhr's types.

Type	Niebuhr's types		
	Attitude towards culture	Christ vs culture	Representatives
New law	radical	Christ against culture	John, Tertullian, Tolstoy
Median	dualistic or oscillatory	Christ and culture in paradox	Paul, Martin Luther, Kierkegaard
	conversionist	Christ the transformer of culture	Augustine, Jean Calvin
	synthetic or architectonic	Christ above culture	Justin, Clement of Alexandria, Thomas Aquinas
Natural law	accommodationist	Christ of culture	Gnosticism, Abelard, Culture-Protestantism

was written for the monastery Monte Cassino (founded in 529 AD). This rule has greatly influenced the monasteries of the Latin church. Recently, the Rule of Benedict has also been rediscovered for the management of secular enterprises (see Grün 1999; Gehra 2009:26; Benedikt for Management 2011).

According to Gehra (2009:94) the Bible is the foundation of the community created by Benedict. The RB is seen as a concretisation of the Bible (Gehra 2009:94) that directs the monks in the way in which to build up their community and to administer it. Niebuhr (2001) writes the following about the emergence of the RB:

> Benedict of Nursia seeks Scriptural foundation for all his regulations and counsels; but the New Testament does not suffice him, nor does the Bible as a whole; and he must find, in old reflections on human experience in social life, rules by means of which to govern the new community. The spirit in which both Scriptural and non-Scriptural regulations are presented also shows how impossible it is to be only a Christian without reference to culture. (p. 72)

In some respects, definitely not all, Benedict's handbook on leadership is brilliant and impressive, especially for its time. *However, it is simply impossible to deduce such a handbook solely from the Bible.*

I would like to support this view by giving some examples. Wisely, Benedict broaches the issue of how to deal with the fault and misconduct of functionaries:

> Chapter 21: On the Deans of the Monastery
> 5. If any of these deans should become inflated with pride and found deserving of censure,
> let him be corrected once, and again, and *a third time*.
> If he will not amend,
> then let him be deposed
> 6. and another be put in his place who is worthy of it.
> (*RB* 21:5–6 *author's emphasis*)

> Chapter 65: On the Prior of the Monastery
> 18. If it should be found that the Prior has serious faults,
> or that he is deceived by his exaltation and yields to pride,
> or if he should be proved to be a despiser of the Holy Rule,
> let him be admonished verbally *up to four times*.
> 19. If he fails to amend,
> let the correction of regular discipline be applied to him.
> 20. But if even then he does not reform,
> let him be deposed from the office of Prior
> and another be appointed in his place who is worthy of it.
> 21. And if afterwards he is not quiet and obedient in the community,
> let him even be expelled from the monastery.
> (*RB* 65:18–21 *author's emphasis*)

Furthermore, Benedict regulates the procedures to be followed if a monk were to decide to leave the monastery voluntarily:

> Chapter 29: Whether Brethren Who Leave the Monastery Should Be Received Again
> 1. If a brother
> who through his own fault leaves the monastery
> should wish to return,
> let him first promise full reparation for his having gone away;
> 2. and then let him be received in the lowest place,
> as a test of his humility.

> 3. And if he should leave again,
> let him be taken back again,
> *and so a third time*;
> but he should understand that after this all way of return is denied him. (*RB* 29:1–3 *author's emphasis*)

In both of these cases Benedict gives concrete numbers: three reproaches for the dean, four in the case of the prior and three re-entries for strayed monks, and that is it! The question remains: Why three and four, respectively?

As far as I can see, it is not possible to base these numbers solely on the Bible. In Matthew 18:22 Jesus talks about 'seventy-seven',[2] which is significantly more than three. In Titus 3:10 a contentious person 'should be allowed a second warning; after that, have nothing more to do with him', thus one warning less than in RB. Actually, Matthew 18:15–18 uses the number 'three'; however, in this passage the number of conversations is not as important as the fact that the number of people involved increases (first one, then two or three, then the whole congregation).

Of course, the RB contains more important passages than just those concerning the numbers 'three' and 'four'. Nonetheless, this small detail reveals the dilemma when attempting to create a Christian handbook on leadership. In practice, however, the concrete numbers are definitely helpful. I assume that the numbers three and four were a wise choice for the Benedictine context; note that Benedict even makes a wise distinction between the dean and the superior prior. Nevertheless, it should be stated that these concrete numbers cannot be deduced from Biblical passages; Benedict had to rely on further sources or practical experience.

Two common pitfalls

How does an author of a Christian handbook on leadership fill the gaps not covered in the Bible? For Christians with a liberal perspective on the application of the Bible, this does not present a problem as they can refer to other sources such as sociology or psychology. They would name these sources and show no inner conflict when using these insights, sometimes even elevating them above the insights given in scripture.

It is indeed a challenge for those Christians wanting to live as Bible-oriented a life as possible. They will always look for Biblical evidence. In the following sections this process is described. Accordingly, I will identify two typical pitfalls that arise during the search for a Biblical foundation for regulations on leadership.

Pitfall 1: 'Christ against Culture'

This pitfall occurs frequently in Christian groups of the type 'Christ against Culture'. Their underlying idea is that the Bible is enough and nothing else should to be taken into consideration. Their motto is 'I read the Bible only'. People

2.Or even 'seventy times seven', both translations are possible.

from this group will fill the gaps in the leadership handbook with experience. This experience is, however, significantly influenced by the culture in which they live. Thus, Christians take on parts of the leadership culture that have proven to be helpful in their jobs and their life. For the reason that they do not reflect on their own culture, because it is not worth spending time on such secular things, they are often unaware of the cultural influence on their leadership.

Two examples should help to illustrate this type of pitfall. One is chosen from the West and the other from the East. The majority of the German-Russian churches are obviously culture-critical in their theology. Although I value these churches highly and enjoy working with them, as their dedication to the kingdom of God is enormous, their style of leadership can be described as autocratic, and is usually focused on one person. The German-Russian fellow believers would not admit to a connection between their style of leadership and the culture of leadership prevalent during the era of tsardom or the period of communism, but would rather justify this style by citing Hebrews 13:17 ('Obey your leaders and submit to them'). Nonetheless, I would argue that Russian history is recognisable in the leadership style of these churches.

During a conference that took place in Hungary in 2005, I gave a talk about McGregor's theories of leadership (Theory X and Theory Y). The next speaker was not particularly enthusiastic about secular leadership literature and wanted to deduce leadership principles directly from Paul's writings. He laid his emphasis on the importance of encouragement and empowerment, which is something I can fully agree with. However, when I mentioned that these aspects are in accordance with the principles of Theory Y, he denied this fiercely, stating that his ideas had nothing to do with Theory Y and were solely influenced by the Bible. This speaker was from the United States and he seemed not to have noticed the extent to which his culture has influenced his own interpretation of the Bible. The audience, however, was very aware of how greatly his 'Biblical' ideas had been influenced by the American leadership culture, because the majority of the audience was from Eastern Europe and was, thus, acquainted with a different culture of leadership.

As with everyone, I myself have these blind spots. I am 'typically German' in my style of leadership, as a Polish theologian once told me a few years ago, and I have to agree. These blind spots can only be detected by a dialogue with other cultures.

Pitfall 2: Reconstruction

This pitfall[3] is typical for groups who are Bible-oriented, but who have a closer relationship with secular sciences than is found in the 'Christ against Culture' type. When analysing these sciences, this type not only ensures that the ideas do not contradict Biblical principles; it actually attempts to find

3.The term 'reconstruction' is taken from Herbst (n.d.:2) who uses it to refer to a certain kind of Christian counselling.

the ideas in the Scripture itself. Michael Herbst, professor of Practical Theology in Greifswald, Germany, describes this approach as follows:

> Basically, I can develop a scientific psychology based directly on the Bible […] this means that psychology as the secular science is just a heuristic aid, providing insights that are fully enfolded when rediscovered in the Bible. If we read the Bible for what it is, we would not need mundane psychology any more. (translated from Herbst n.d.:2)

A similar process can be detected in some Christian leadership literature. Secular literature about leadership is read, then liked, and then rediscovered in the Bible.

Wilhelm Wessels, Old Testament professor at the University of South Africa, draws a similar conclusion in his analysis of Christian leadership authors: 'They will allow room for being enriched by secular leadership literature, but also express the conviction that sufficient knowledge is already in the Bible and has only to be detected and made explicit' (Wessels 2003:173).

Example: visionary leadership

The process of reconstruction becomes clear when observing the use of the concept of 'visionary leadership' in evangelical literature and presentations on leadership today. The idea of visionary leadership was promoted in management literature in terms of the concept of 'transforming leadership'. The popularisation of this concept will be described in the following sections (see Chemers 1997:78–93; Neuberger 2002:142–221).

Two publications by House (1977) and Burns (1978) were the starting point for much research and literature on transforming leadership (Chemers 1997:82, Dörr 2008:12). According to Chemers (1997:82), three popular books were responsible for the spread of this concept, one of these was the book *Leaders: The strategies for taking charge* by Bennis and Nanus (1985). These authors interviewed 90 managers and deduced four key strategies for successful leadership (Bennis and Nanus 1985:28). Although it seems as if these strategies were discovered by empirical research, it is also possible that the leadership paradigm used by the interviewers influenced the results. In any case, Bennis and Nanus (1985:17) pay tribute to the concept of transforming leadership, 'the work of James MacGregor Burns and especially want to note his contributions to our work'. Today, transforming leadership is considered *the* leadership model of the future (see, for example, the discussions at the leadership conference Lancaster 2005).

This concept has had a great impact on evangelical leadership literature. In 1991 the evangelical author Leighton Ford (brother-in-law to Billy Graham) wrote a book about Jesus' leadership style in the first century, and titled it *Transforming leadership: Jesus' way of creating vision, shaping values & empowering change* (Ford 1991). Ford mentions that his book is inspired by the two leadership experts Burns and Bennis (Ford 1991:21–22; 26–27). His subtitle suggests

that Jesus' leadership style is identical to the transforming-leadership model of Burns and Bennis. And this is exactly Ford's opinion. Ford describes a dialogue where another person declared that he thinks Jesus was the greatest leader of all time:

> Later I thought of his answer in terms of Bennis' key strategies. Who had greater visions than Jesus? Who knew better how to communicate with his followers … ? Who was more trustworthy, credibly positioned and believable than Jesus? And who has ever been able to empower others more than he, through his own wonderful self-knowledge and the total positive giving of himself? (Ford 1991:27)

In other words, according to Ford, Jesus used the four key strategies described by Bennis and Nanus (1985) better than any manager. Thus, these strategies and the concept of transforming leadership underwent a Christian baptism! Consequently, the books by Burns, Bennis and others have become obsolete. The reasoning is as follows: Their books have helped us to understand how Jesus led, and now that we have understood this, the only source we need is the Bible when looking for the right leadership style.

A similar process happened in relation to the term 'vision', a concept with great importance for transforming leadership. Yukl (in Neuberger 2002:205) maintains that the first step of a transforming leader is to create a clear and motivating vision. This notion was made even more popular by Bennis and Nanus (1985:87) because their first key strategy is 'attention through vision'. It therefore follows that visionary leadership or leading with a vision is a very popular concept today.

Neuberger (2002:205) points out the irony that every manager nowadays is expected to have a vision, whilst this used to be seen as madness or a sign of abstraction, and something opposing the idea of a gifted leader. Public opinion changes quickly! In 1980 the German chancellor Helmut Schmidt stated publically during the election campaign that 'whoever has visions should see the doctor' (Schmidt 2009), and he was re-elected nonetheless. Today, if a leader is not able to show that he has a vision for the company, or even the church, his ability to lead is questioned.

Naturally, the term 'vision' also emerged in evangelical literature on leadership and church development. One of the most important theologians of the evangelical movement in the 20th century, the Briton John Stott, published the work *Issues facing christians today* (1999) in 1984. After 400 pages, his conclusion is a 'call for Christian Leadership' (pp. 421–435). Here he names five important features of an empowered leader. The first is identical to the first key strategy named by Bennis and Nanus (1992):[4] Vision! Stott begins his explanation with Biblical (pseudo)-support:

> 'Where there is no vision, the people perish' is a proverb from the King James' Version of the Bible, which has passed into common usage. And although it is almost certainly a mistranslation of the Hebrew, it is nonetheless a true statement. (Stott 1999:422)

In a footnote Stott (1999:477) mentions that Proverbs 29:18 actually means divine revelation.[5] Stott (1999:423) uses 'vision' as meaning 'goal', 'manifest', or 'strategy'. He does not give a source for this classification, but remains vague: 'Management experts tell us we must set both long-term and short-term goals' (1999:423).

Stott (1999:424) uses passages from the Bible describing three different visions: Moses' vision of the promised land, Nehemia's vision of the new wall around Jerusalem (Neh 2:12.17.18) and Paul's vision of a church without division between Jews and heathens (Eph 2:11–3,13).

In the same manner, Bill Hybels (2002), the well-known leader of the Willow Creek Community Church, in his book *Courageous Leadership*, gives vision first place on the list of characteristics leaders should have: 'A leader's most potent weapon: the power of vision' (Hybels 2002:29). He also refers to Proverbs 29:18 and equates prophetic revelation and vision (p. 31). The only other Biblical passage (beside many examples from politics and church history) quoted by Hybels is Acts 20:24 (2002:36), in which Paul describes his own vision for his life. Hybels defines vision as a 'picture of the future that produces passion' (2002:32).

It is refreshing that Hybels (2002) distances himself from the nit-picking and time-intensive technical distinction of some strategy specialists:

> One more piece of counsel about going public with the vision: Keep it simple. […] These days so much is being written about the technical distinctions between vision, mission, and purpose that some leaders feel compelled to have separate statements for each. For years, we too attempted to make these distinctions. But in the end, I think it produced more confusion than clarity in our congregation. People would say, 'What's our vision? Oh, I thought that's our purpose. No that was our mission. I give up!' (p. 44)

Andy Stanley, another well-known evangelical pastor in the United States, even created a tool for developing a vision, *Visioneering* (Stanley 1999), thus, using a new term which came up to describe the 'engineering of a vision'.

Laurie Beth Jones is another author from the United States, who sees Jesus as an example for visionary management (Jones 1998). At first glance Jones' language looks very evangelical. She quotes much of Scripture and owns a firm called 'Jesus, CEO'. Nonetheless, Jones has distanced herself from basic evangelical positions.[6]

In church praxis the emphasis on vision is often combined with the misinterpretation of Proverbs 29:18 'Where there is no vision, the people perish' (KJV), which was mentioned

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5.See Pohlman (2011) for a detailed explanation on Proverbs 29:18.

6.In Jones (1998) one can see how she bends Jesus to fit her strategy. Although she emphasises that he remained faithful to his mission (1998:31), she does not explain what his mission was, namely to take away the sins of the world as the Lamb of God (e.g. Jn 1:29). She lists 136 Bible passages (1998:319-322) but none of them refer to his death on the cross. Perhaps this fact does not fit the image she is attempting to create, for she explains that in her opinion man is good in his inner core (1998:73). Jones has obviously separated herself from her Presbyterian and Methodist roots (1998:318).

4.I assume that these two books were written independently of each other. When Stott published his book in 1984, Bennis' book had not yet been released but Bennis and Nanus had started to conduct the interviews. Another unknown factor is whether or not the American leadership expert Bennis even knew about the British evangelical author Stott.

before. I share the same experience in German churches that Pohlman (2011:120) obviously had in South Africa: 'I have heard motivational speakers suggesting repeatedly that this verse is referring to the importance of creating a 'Vision Statement' for an organization.'

It is a remarkable change, whilst a few decades ago many churches believed vision to be a symptom of sickness or spiritual aberrance, today vision is the pivot in church development. The motto used to be, 'Those with visions should see a doctor', whereas now it is 'Those without visions cannot be Christian leaders'. It is strange that the church survived 2000 years without making the detailed vision statements modern strategy developers tend to formulate.

Actually, I believe it to be positive, when churches and Christian organisations formulate their visions, and answer the question: What is our church supposed to look like in ten years? A vision statement of this sort can be immensely helpful.

But I challenge the view that a vision statement is a must for a church to be sustainable.[7] Whenever visions are mentioned in scripture, they mean divine revelations like Peter's famous vision (Ac 14:10–17), which has been of high importance for church history. If vision is seen as the superior category, meaning 'goals' or 'strategies', there are, of course, many examples to be found within the Bible. The apostle Paul was obviously a strategist with ambitious goals. His goals were sometimes very general (e.g. 'to testify to the gospel of the grace of God' [Ac 20:24]), and sometimes very specific (e.g. 'I would like to visit Spain via Rome', see Rm 15:24). However, this is not enough evidence to conclude that the Bible requires leaders to create precise vision statements. It is hard to imagine that the apostles Paul, Peter or Barnabas sat down to describe in detail what their churches would look like in ten years' time, in terms of the number of members and pastors and so on. Too many things were happening and changing for that to make sense. Planning church development is almost impossible during turbulent times, let alone in times of massive persecution.

On the reconstruction of 'Biblical leadership'

The example of 'leading with vision' shows that the reconstruction of Biblical leadership typically occurs in four steps: perception, acceptance, assimilation and standardisation:

1. *Perception*: A secular model of leadership becomes popular.
2. *Acceptance*: This model is examined, parallels with the Bible are determined and it is pronounced useful in the context of the church.
3. *Assimilation*: It is claimed that leaders in the Bible worked exactly as described in the model. Books are written about 'Biblical leadership', exemplifying the model. The

original, secular sources for this model of leadership become obsolete.
4. *Standardisation*: Following the realisation that this is the way leadership worked in scripture, this model of leadership is declared to be the Biblical norm. It is stated that this model must be applied in order to be a truly good Christian leader.

I would argue that the steps of perception and acceptance (point 1 and point 2) are reasonable and even desirable. It is important to learn from other sciences and it is necessary to check the insights in the light of the Bible (Kessler 2004:35–75).[8]

Step three is where these steps become problematic, because reading the Bible is always subjective, and tainted by our cultural background. This causes us to emphasise certain passages whilst we overlook others. The urge to justify a certain leadership model by using Scripture holds the inherent danger of bending either the Bible passages or the leadership model in order to make them congruent.

The step of standardisation, step four, is fatal. As a result of the sources having been forgotten, the management model that has recently been published is declared to be *the* Biblical model. The fact that management theories are very short-lived is completely ignored.

Conclusion

The 'Christ against Culture' Christian says, 'No!', to any kind of secular knowledge about leadership. In the end, however, this knowledge is applied subconsciously, because the Christian author or teacher is also influenced by the culture she or he lives in. The reconstructivist says, 'Yes, it may be applied if it can be found in the Bible'. However, this possibility leads to the assimilation and eventually the standardisation in the form of, 'You must apply this model'. In this article, I used examples to illustrate that the a leader's own worldview, as well as his or her biography, influences his or her choices and hermeneutic approaches used to apply the passages from the Bible to leadership concepts.

I would like to propose a dialogue with the other sciences as follows:

1. The Bible is not a handbook on leadership. For this reason, everyone who is in a leadership position must use further sources.
2. Christian leaders should be knowledgeable in the fields of management theory, sociology and psychology. On the one hand, it helps them understand and reflect on their own culture. On the other hand, church leaders can also learn from the wisdom detected by people outside of the church.
3. Leaders should check which leadership models are applicable within the Biblical framework (theology, Christology, pneumatology, anthropology, and ecclesiology) and can be of help in the context of church leadership.

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7. Concerning this question, my presentations and articles have changed. In 2000 I stated the advantages of leadership with vision/goals (e.g. Kessler 2000), whilst today I reject the demand for vision statements in churches as a necessity.

8. In my dissertation, I argued why it is justifiable to use insights from secular sciences in church leadership (Kessler 2004:35–75).

4. However, it is of great importance that the leadership model that has been found to be useful and helpful is not elevated to *the* Biblical model. No leadership culture, no management method, and no philosophy shall be given the authority reserved for the Bible.

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Competing interests

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