Why Christian Leaders Must Acquire Wisdom

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Written by

BRIAN TUNG

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WHY CHRISTIAN LEADERS MUST ACQUIRE WISDOM

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ABSTRACT

Why Christian Leaders Must Acquire Wisdom.
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The thesis of this project is that intentional and explicit wisdom development in Christian leaders needs cultivated using current leadership development approaches. Like other nations, the Israelites valued wisdom. In the Old Testament, hokhmahi is used to identify the insight into the nature of things obscured by complexity and uncertainty. Israel’s wisdom is exegeted by Jesus Christ. The nature of things can now only be properly understood in him. This dissertation argues that the nurture of wisdom among Christian leaders is a much-needed addition to their development.

Leadership development is determined by what leadership is. The first part of this dissertation considers the contemporary understanding of leadership. The Christian understanding of leadership and how it compares with the general understanding of leadership is then considered. Lastly, observations is made on the role of wisdom in leadership.

In the second part, the current research on wisdom is considered. Furthermore, biblical wisdom is compared to the general understanding of wisdom. Drawing from observations from the first part about what makes good leaders, reasons why acquiring wisdom may help leaders to become better leaders are explained. Leaders must make good judgments in a context of chaos and uncertainty, balancing the demands of the self and the environment, between personal, interpersonal and interpersonal interests, between the present and the distant future, between the good and right for the individual and that of the whole, and between results and values. Wisdom will enable a leader to better meet these challenges.

Although knowledge can be directly transferred and its reception and acquisition tested, the nature of wisdom and the task of Christian leadership defies the direct teaching of wisdom. Hence, in the final section, an analysis takes place regarding models for wisdom nurturing and how these can help shape similar processes for the development of Christian leaders.

Content Reader: David Augsburger, PhD

Words: 303
To Jen, Bethany, Zoe, Amalee, and Maia—my hope, my joy, and my crown in the presence of my Lord Jesus at his coming.
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PART ONE

THE CONTEXT
INTRODUCTION

Pastors have always been ministers, preachers, teachers, evangelists, shepherds, elders, and now they must be leaders. In reflecting on the changing demands and expectations on pastors, Gregg S. Morrison, then director of external relations at Beeson Divinity School of Samford University, notes that “In 1996 the Association of Theological Schools made ministerial leadership the cornerstone of its redeveloped standards of accreditation.”¹ This might be self-evident in the current milieu, but it has not always been the case. It has been argued that the interest in leadership and how to develop Christian leaders is a relatively recent one. Robert Banks and Bernice Ledbetter suggest that people “are usually concerned with leadership during times of crisis.”² It might be that Christians perceive that they are at a point of crisis and uncertainty. As a result, the development of leadership competency and effectiveness has become a focus and priority for pastoral ministry training.

To develop leadership competency, John Maxwell, Jim Collins, Rick Warren, Calvin Miller, and Oswald Sanders are now required reading for pastors. Goal setting, strategic planning, vision casting, mentoring, and lay empowerment must now be pastors’ core competencies in addition to exegesis, language studies, theology, homiletics, preaching, church history, and pastoral counselling. The increased interest in developing


effective Christian leaders shadows the increasing interest in leadership development in the wider community.

John Kotter of Harvard Business School, similar to Banks and Ledbetter, contends that leadership has become paramount recently because the operating environment for businesses has been changing significantly and rapidly. Technological change, global competition, deregulation of the markets, and changing work force are contributing to unparalleled competition and volatility. “The net result,” Kotter writes, “is that doing what was done yesterday, or doing it 5% better, is no longer a formula for success. Major changes are more and more necessary to survive and compete effectively in this new environment. More change always demands more leadership.”

The foregoing might well be valid, and have been widely accepted, but the elevation of leadership to such a level of importance has been done on some significant (and contested) assumptions. For example, it is often assumed that everyone understands and agrees on what leadership is and what good leadership is. There is a distinct lack of integration and conclusiveness about the definition of leadership and a good leader. To argue that wiser leaders are better leaders, it is necessary to define leadership. The first part of this dissertation therefore seeks to define good leadership in order to understand

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4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.
the goal of leadership development. It then proceeds to show how wisdom can help to achieve this goal.

The second part of this dissertation focuses on wisdom and its relationship with good leadership. The idea that leaders must be wise is an ancient one. Plato has made clear in *The Laws* that wisdom must be the source of all political rule. Plato asserts that the unwise citizen “ought never to have any kind of authority entrusted to him: he must be stigmatised as ignorant, even though he be versed in calculation, and skilled in all sorts of accomplishments, and feats of dexterity; and the opposite are to be called wise, even though, in the words of the proverb, they know neither how to read nor how to swim.” For the ancients, wisdom is different to other forms of intellectual activity. To be wise is not to have superior IQ or hold higher degrees; other qualities are needed—such as self-control and virtue. According to Plato, political, military, and legal leadership needs wisdom. Like Plato, Aristotle does not consider the wise to be necessarily the smart or the knowledgeable, rather the wise are those who have the right dispositions (*hexeis*), that is, the rightly disposed desires and passions to make the right choices (*prohairesis*) to achieve a condition of moral perfection or virtue (*arte*). Arte enables

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7 Ibid.

8 Ibid., 14-15.

9 Ibid., 17.
the wise to find and apply the “golden mean” in all of the significant affairs in life. The wise ones are rational, intelligent, knowledgeable, and virtuous. It is the wise who will lead well because they understand the causes of things. The knowledge of the Final Cause is necessary to live a good life, that is one must possess wisdom for a life of *Eudaimonia*—the “‘complete’ life of true and enduring joy.” The Stoics also considered wisdom necessary for a good life and by implication good leadership. For example, Marcus Aurelius notes that the person “who acts unjustly acts impiously. For since the universal nature has made rational animals for the sake of one another . . . he who transgresses her will, is clearly guilty of impiety towards the highest divinity.” Wisdom is conformity to the cosmic necessities of the world.

A similar view of the relationship between wisdom and the leader is held in Eastern political-philosophical thought. In the Analects of Confucius 1.5, the master teaches that: “To rule a country of a thousand chariots, there must be reverent attention to business, and sincerity; economy of expenditure, and love for men; and the employment of the people at the proper seasons.” Although the term “wisdom” is not used,

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10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid., 18.
13 Ibid., 19.


Confucius explains that a good ruler is one who knows the way between the ways of heaven, the way of earth, and the way of people—the way to living well in this life. That is, like the Greeks, Confucius considers knowledge and the application of that knowledge in a virtuous way is necessary for good governance. Therefore, the notion that wisdom is needed for good leadership is common among the ancient civilisations.

Interest in wisdom in the academy has waned for a time. Robinson and others observe that the apathy correlated with the rise of empiricism as the dominant epistemology in the English-speaking world. Wisdom has been considered a form of non-empirical knowledge associated with an older metaphysics. This changed in the twentieth century when the social sciences embraced empiricism. Since the 1960s, wisdom is considered a legitimate topic of empirical research. The interest in wisdom started with studies on the positive aspects of ageing by psychologists. Early work was done by Vivian Clayton in the 1970s. Eventually two prevailing theories developed.


The first dominant theory is Robert Sternberg’s “balanced theory of wisdom,” which takes what is often described as an implicit-theoretical approach. He defines wisdom as “the application of tacit and explicit knowledge as mediated by values toward the achievement of a common good through a balancing among interpersonal, interpersonal and extrapersonal interests, over the short term and long term to achieve a balance among the adaptation to existing environment, shaping of existing environments and selection of new environments.”21 The second dominant theory is the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm. This second theory takes what is known as an explicit-theoretical approach to the study of wisdom. Paul Baltes, Jacqui Smith, Ursula M. Staudinger, and Ute Kunzmann of the Max Planck Institute for Human Development and Education in Berlin define wisdom as “an expert knowledge system concerning the fundamental pragmatics of life.”22 Together, the balanced theory of wisdom and the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm have re-invigorated academic interests in wisdom.

Wisdom is beneficial, even necessary, in a leader because of the nature of leadership. A helpful way of understanding this is to contrast the activity of leadership with that of management.23 Kotter and others have observed that leadership and management are distinct but complimentary systems of action, with Kotter noting that each “system of action involves deciding what needs to be done, creating networks of

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people and relationships that can accomplish an agenda, and then trying to ensure that those people actually do the job. But each accomplishes these three tasks in different ways.”

24 The aim of management is to bring order, stability, and consistency to chaos, while the aim of leadership is to bring change and by implication disorder and instability. 25 The tools of management are structures and systems, reviews and benchmarks. Leadership uses vision and values. Management controls. Leadership motivates and inspires. According to Max De Pree, leaders are like artists, scientists, and other creative thinkers. 26 As leadership operates in the sphere of uncertainty, chaos, and complexity, wisdom is needed. For wisdom, as understood within the Bible, and to a similar extent without, is “the ability to understand the nature of things and events, to perceive and take advantage of the order or lawfulness of the universe albeit obscured by complexity” 27 and uncertainty.

In the Old Testament, hokhmahi is used with a number of other words such as “discernment, discretion, prudence, knowledge” 28 as well as “understanding, insight,

24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
28 Goldsworthy, “Christ, our Wisdom.”
skill, counsel, advice, perception, plan, [and] teaching”\textsuperscript{29} to express a certain type of thinking. However, as Peter Adam has warned, the studying of biblical wisdom is more than just a matter of word study.\textsuperscript{30} Wisdom is a theological construct. Like wisdom outside the Bible, biblical wisdom has many different facets—it is a shrewd investment by a property owner, an astute political decision by a statesman, and it is the safe navigation of growing up to adulthood. Wisdom is a way of thinking and a way of doing. It is a way of teaching and a way of expressing ideas in writing. It is to know creation and creatures as well as the way to know the Creator and the reward for knowing Him. Wisdom is treasured in the Bible (Pb 2:4; 4:8-18; 16:16).\textsuperscript{31} Like the Greek and Chinese conceptions of wisdom, biblical wisdom is not a mere intellectual activity, but a moral and spiritual one.

The wise is synonymous with the righteous, as the fool with the wicked. True to biblical anthropology, wisdom has to do with the whole person. To be wise is to be God-like. Like His power, transcendence, honour, glory, and faithfulness, true wisdom belongs to God and Him alone (Rm 16:17; 1 Tm 1:17; Jud 1:25). This is in contradistinction to idols and to human beings. In the New Testament, there is a worldly wisdom which is foolishness, and there is God’s true wisdom that is revealed in Jesus Christ. God created the world by His wisdom (Pr 3:19). By wisdom God sustains and


\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{31} Unless otherwise noted, all Bible references are from the 1984 New International Version.
saves the world (Jer 10:12; 1 Cor 1-2). To be wise, a creature must come to know the One who has created and sustains the created order. God is not confounded by the uncertainty and chaos of the universe. Wisdom is embedded in the creation order, albeit obscure to human perception. It is possible to be wise and to live wisely. To live wisely is to live well (Pr 3), and the corollary is that to lead wisely is to lead well.

If wisdom were embedded in the created order, then Christians could learn from non-Christians good leadership practices and theories because Christians and non-Christians occupy the same created universe. This is also why good Christian leadership practices are applicable in non-Christian contexts. However, because of the sapiential nature of leadership, models and principles of leadership cannot be absolutised for leaders lead in that sphere which Qohelet has called in the book of Ecclesiastes “under the sun.”

Lastly, the good news for leaders is that wisdom can be acquired. Wisdom is not the property of some elite class. The Bible teaches that human beings can and should be wise. The primary purpose of Israel’s wisdom was “to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discernment to the young” (Pr 1:4). In fact, the burden of the book of Proverbs is for all to acquire wisdom (Pr 4:7). Some of the recent studies of wisdom have been undertaken to operationalise wisdom, that is, to make the very abstract idea of wisdom useable in the real world. An example of this is Robert Sternberg’s attempt to demonstrate how wisdom could be taught in schools.32 On this possibility, this

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32 Sternberg, Jarvin, and Grigorenko, *Teaching for Wisdom, Intelligence, Creativity, and Success*. 
dissertation will conclude by suggesting ways that leaders could intentionally acquire wisdom through a case study.
PART ONE

THE CONTEXT
CHAPTER 1
THE CHALLENGE OF DEVELOPING GOOD LEADERS

This first chapter clears the ground on the argument that wisdom is necessary for good leadership development for Christians. In this chapter three questions are considered: Who is a leader? What is the goal of leadership development? How are leaders developed? Then a tentative suggestion is offered that the nurture of wisdom might be a fruitful way of developing leaders.

Who is a Leader?

The phenomenon of leaders is common enough—it is the experience of every culture in every age. Where two or three are gathered, there will be a leader.¹ A variety of words have been used to signify and distinguish leaders from other people: president, chairman, parent, captain, pastor, supervisor, manager, chief, prince, and general. Leaders are also many who have no name or title. They can rise up informally, extemporally, and suddenly. They can also recede just as quickly and anonymously. Some people are leaders in one context and in another situation or at another time may not be. They may

even not be leaders in the same situation at another time. According to Wilfred Bion, a leader may not even know that he or she is a leader or acting as a leader. Countless attempts have been made to account for, explain, and understand leaders. Intuitively and implicitly these people, their roles, behaviour, function, or effect have one thing in common—they lead. This is not to reject the essentialist, behaviourist, or situationalist understanding of leadership in favour of a functionalist one, but to signal that a sharp line will not be drawn between leaders and leadership. A good leader leads well.

One thing is clear from the research on leadership—there is little agreement on the definition of leadership and what makes a good leader. The definition of leadership varies. Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus understand leadership as ‘doing the right things.’\(^2\) J. Oswald Sander defines leadership as influence.\(^3\) Tom Peters contends that leadership is mastering paradoxes and what they stand for.\(^4\) Bernard M. Bass, one of the foremost scholars on leadership, notes: “There are almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept.”\(^5\) Bennis and Nanus likewise observe:

Literally thousands of empirical investigations of leaders have been conducted in the last seventy-five years alone, but no clear and unequivocal understanding


exists as to what distinguishes leaders from nonleaders, and perhaps more important, what distinguishes effective leaders from ineffective leaders.\(^6\)

Gary Yukl, another leader in leadership studies, has warned against thinking that there is a single “correct” definition of the term.\(^7\) Defining leadership is as complicated as it is elusive. However, if a way forward in leadership development is to be argued, the different approaches on leadership so far must be considered, even if the approaches cannot be completely resolved or synthesised.

David Starling has helpfully identified some contradistinction between overlapping concepts.\(^8\) He notes that the concept of leadership overlaps with the concept of authority, but not completely: “Not all leadership involves an exercise of authority, and not all authority is directed toward the task of leadership” (See Appendix A, Figure 1).\(^9\) For example, someone may be given the authority to allocate resources, and may not be exercising leadership. Likewise, the position of a leader overlaps with, but is not identical to office-bearers (See Appendix A, Figure 2). He gives the example of a financial auditor as an office bearer without leadership function, and a charismatic group-member who exercises leadership without formal office. This is equally true of leaders and teachers (See Appendix A, Figure 3). He argues that teaching is essential for

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\(^9\) Ibid., 7.
Christian leadership, but there are leaders who do not lead by teaching, such as sports captains.\textsuperscript{10} Lastly, He argues that whilst all good leadership involves servanthood, the concept of leadership partially overlaps with the concept of servanthood (See Appendix A, Figure 4).\textsuperscript{11} These contradistinctions are helpful in isolating the concept of leadership. Starling himself describes a leader as someone “who does (or is asked to do) the job of going somewhere, and taking others with them.”\textsuperscript{12} He observes that the word used by Paul in 1 Corinthians to identify a leader is the word \textit{κυβέρνησις} (kybernesis)—a word originally used for the helmsman of a ship and later adopted for political leadership.\textsuperscript{13} To him, leadership involves direction and motivation, requiring wisdom (to set direction and to help the followers to align to it) and courage (to motivate).\textsuperscript{14}

Leadership has been the subject of study by the ancients—Plato, Caesar, Plutarch, the Chinese, the Egyptians, and Machiavelli during the Renaissance, as well as by the moderns. Moderns have had considerable difficulty categorising leadership as an academic discipline. Scholars who have had significant influence on leadership thinking have come from education, psychology, management, public administration, business administration, organisation behaviour, philosophy, and even theology.\textsuperscript{15} It has been

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 8.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 5.
argued that rather than studying leadership, leadership is “an amalgam of behaviours and attributes that can be more tractably defined . . . when they are analytically decoupled.”\(^{16}\)

A survey of the presented literature shows a general consensus that the theorisation of leadership has progressed through distinct phases in modern times, and that the different approaches can be helpfully grouped together.\(^{17}\) Each approach impacts who is or should be considered a leader, what they do, what good leadership is, and how and whether good leaders can be developed. For example, a purely essentialist view of leadership would lead to a search for people who are born leaders, while a purely behaviourist view would mean that people can be trained to have good leadership behaviour. Broadly, the approaches are those of pure agency, pure situation, and a balance of both. The position taken in this dissertation is that leaders can learn to be good leaders.

The early reflections on leadership tend to focus on the leader—who they are and how they behave. The assumption is that who the person is and what they do have a direct and significant impact on the organisational outcomes. That is, the agency aspect of the person distinguishes him or her from others. The focus of study was primarily on the person of the leader.\(^{18}\) From the mid-nineteenth century to the early twentieth, leaders


were regarded as superior individuals to the masses who accomplish great things and shape history—often referred to as the Great Man theory. Leadership is the “ability to impress the will of the leader on those led and induce obedience, respect, loyalty and cooperation.” In the early twentieth century, attention moved to identifying the traits or personality that set those leaders apart from others—what Clinton calls “trait theories.”

In this period, there was an emerging view that leadership is influence rather than dominance. A similar approach to the traits approach is to focus on skills. A skills approach shifts thinking from fixed personality characteristics to skills and abilities that can be learned and developed. Skills that would be focused on would include technical, human, and conceptual ones.

Over time, the focus of leadership thinking moved away from looking at who the leaders are to looking at how they behave. Leadership studies shifted from examining the antecedents of the leaders (traits and background) to the impact or consequence of the

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22 Northouse, Leadership: Theory and Practice, 75-97.

23 Ibid., 43-73.

24 Ibid., 43.

25 Ibid., 44-46.

leaders’ behaviour. Leadership as influence became more prominent. Two examples are the Ohio State Leadership Studies and the University of Michigan Leadership studies. In the Michigan Leadership Studies, questionnaires were used to measure leadership behaviour under two categories: consideration and initiating of structures. Good leadership would then be attributed to those people who scored well. It follows that good leadership can be developed by enhancing those behaviours. An example of a training and development program that appples this theory is the Blake and Mouton Leadership Grid (formerly Managerial Grid) seminar. At the seminars participants can learn through self-assessments, small group experiences, and candid critique how to change their behaviour to become better leaders. However, these approaches tend to ignore the impact of the leader’s situation on his or her behaviour on outcome. Eventually researchers recognise that research must also take into account how situational variables impact outcome.

At the other end of the spectrum of leadership thinking, emphasis is put on the context in which leaders operate. The belief is that good organisational outcome is dependent or contingent on the specifics of any given situation and on the response of the

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31 Ibid.
followers. At the extreme end of this spectrum, Vroom, Jago, and others suggest that Hegel, Spencer, and others see individual human agency plays little or no role in organisational outcomes. The great men of history are “merely ‘puppets of social forces,’” which “selected people for positions of leadership and shaped their behaviour to coincide with social interests.” Later, and similarly, the thinking on leadership and organisation would see the organisational structure rather than the characteristics of the people leading them as the dependent and not an independent variable of organisational outcomes. According to Jago and Vroom, Charles Perrow argued in 1970 that “the traits of leaders reflect the mechanisms by which they are selected, and their behaviour is constrained by the situations they face.” In this case, there is no such thing as good leadership, rather whoever leads or how they behave would make no difference to the organisational outcome.

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32 The transition from pure agency theories is often attributed to the publication of the seminal paper by Stogdill in 1948, found in Clinton, *A Short History of Modern Leadership Theory*, 51.


34 Jago and Vroom, “The Role of Situation in Leadership,” 19.

35 Ibid.


37 Jago and Vroom, “The Role of Situation in Leadership,” 19.

38 Ibid.
The contingencies theories are found in the middle of the two theoretical extremes of pure agency and pure situation. Leadership is understood to be a dynamic process involving both the individual agent and the situation, between the leaders, their followers, the leader-follower relationship, and other situational variables. Fred Fiedler is often identified as the first psychologist to formulate an integrative model taking into account both leader traits and situational variables. Fiedler’s focus was on leadership style categorised as either relationship-motivated or task-motivated, discoverable by his “least preferred coworker” inventory.

Another group of contingency theories would focus on the followers, their expectations, needs, and capacities. Hersey and Blanchard saw style as not being a function of the situation but of the followers’ maturity. A similar theory is House’s Path-Goal theory. How a leader leads, that is, their style of leadership (whether directive, supportive, participative, or achievement-oriented) is contingent on the means of influencing the followers towards their own and collective goals.

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42 Ibid., 99-121.


influence would include the followers’ characteristics (locus of control, ability etc.) and situational characteristics (task and authority system).  

It is hard to argue a priori against the proposition that leadership must to some extent be contingent on the situation, the followers, and the person who is the leader. Organisations are open systems functioning within and interacting with other open systems. The complexity of the leadership context should preclude over dependence on any single variable. However, even if this were accepted, the question arises: which particular variable among the list of contingencies should good leadership development focus on? If the list of contingencies becomes infinitely large, the concept of contingency runs into the risk of losing all meaning and usefulness. Yukl sees the leader’s behaviour as the independent variable, acting in the short term to influence intervening variables as well as in the long term to change situation variables.  

To narrow this down even further, Vroom and Yetton have isolated the leader’s role in decision making.  

The foregoing does not present a definitive answer to our initial question: who is a leader? However, it gives three insights that will enable the argument to move forward. First, whilst there is not yet an agreed theory on leadership, there are some identifiable variables in the leadership equation. The first element is the domain—the particular social system in which leadership is being exercised. This could be a dyad, a small group,

\[\text{\textsuperscript{46}}\text{Ibid.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{47}}\text{Yukl, Leadership in Organizations, Kindle: 48-75; Clinton, A Short History of Modern Leadership Theory, 61.}\]

a family, an organisation, a country, or smaller social units within that country. The elements within that domain are interconnected, interdependent, and mutually contingent, however are relatively independent to other systems, that is, there are boundaries to a domain. The second variable is the person of the leader—the individual who functions within a domain in such a way his or her being, thinking, and behaviour can bring about system outcomes in a way that others in the system cannot. This ability to influence system outcomes might be due to a multitude of factors such as the responsibility, legitimacy, personal qualities, or learned abilities of the leader. The third element in the leadership equation pertains to the followers—other individuals in the system who constitute the domain. The fourth element is function—what the leader does or should do to bring about system outcomes. The fifth element has to do with the conditions—the structural conditions within and outside the system, and the context (historical, cultural, economic) in which the system operates which could cause, mediate, or intervene its outcomes. Finally, the last element in the leadership equation is the outcome(s): whether stated, intended, or unintended, it is desired for which the domain exists.

The second insight into the leadership equation is the interrelationship between the different components, which is what leadership scholars seems to disagree over. Agency and contingency theories see a causal or correlative relationship between the leader and system outcomes, but pure situational theories see none. Agency and contingency theories would disagree over the nature, strength, and reason for that relationship. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to settle on a theoretical
preference, but for the argument of this dissertation to proceed, it is necessary to assume that there is a relationship between the leader and system outcomes.

The final insight is that whilst there is little consensus on what leaders do, it can be said that a leader functions as an agent of change in a way that other participants in the system do not. It is unhelpful to consider everything that a leader does as a leadership function, nor is it helpful to simply focus on the formal functions of leaders. Leadership function presumably is what sets leaders apart from non-leaders in the system. If the leader (whether by attributes, behaviour, decisions, or being) could influence system outcomes, then he or she must be an agent of change in more than technical efficiency. Management, rather than leadership, is concerned with Technical efficiency.⁴⁹

A leader therefore is someone who, whether alone or with others, functions in a system that is likely to bring about a desired outcome. This might suggest that a good leader is able to bring about those outcomes, and that leadership development must involve building the capacity of a leader to do that. If this were true, then Hitler or someone who is effective in bringing about bad outcomes could be considered a good leader. The next section will consider briefly the idea of a good leader.

What is a Good Leader?

The question of the goal of leadership development is unassumingly complex. If not for anything else, the answer is value-laden and therefore contentious. The goal of

leadership development is to enable leaders to be better ones, but better than what? The object of comparison is often assumed and implicit. The object being the ability to produce good results.

The quality of leadership or of a leader is normally judged by the consequences, that is, the system outcomes. One of the difficulties and criticisms of leadership studies is that scientists could not find variance in system outcomes at the macro level attributable to individual differences.\(^\text{50}\) The major review by Stagdill in 1948 found that performance cannot be predicted on the traits, behaviours, or styles of leaders.\(^\text{51}\) Jago and Vroom has called this the leadership paradox, where “Intuition and some theories lead one to see stability and consistency in leadership behaviour and system outcomes, despite compelling evidence for the roles of situation and of context.”\(^\text{52}\) That is, leaders’ control of organisational outcomes has been overestimated, with observers affected by what is commonly known as the Halo effect.\(^\text{53}\) Scholars often refer to Cohen and March’s famous comparison of a leader’s role in an organisation “with that of a driver of a skidding


\(^{52}\) Jago and Vroom, “The Role of Situation in Leadership,” 23.

car.” For leadership scientists, good leadership must demonstrably produce good results. After all, there is no good reason to study unsuccessful leaders except as cautionary tales. The good is most commonly defined as organisational performance, and since most research is done in business schools, understandably performance means the economic success of profitability or productivity. The intellectual basis for this is seldom justified, however, it reflects an epistemological bias which has also impacted the underestimation of the relationship of wisdom and leadership.

The study of leadership has not been done in a historical and intellectual vacuum. For example, the focus on leadership behaviour corresponds with psychology’s interest in behaviourism. The rise of empiricism as the dominant epistemology, especially in the English-speaking world, has had a profound impact on thinking on leadership. Socially and politically, leadership is democratized. From the Enlightenment, focus would no longer be on headship, which is based on inheritance, usurpation, or appointment, but on leadership. Prior to this, there was no leadership, but only leaders.


They were not called leaders, however. Clinton, quoting the second edition of Stogdill’s text, states that words

meaning head of state, military commander, princes, proconsul, chief, or king are the only ones found to differentiate the ruler from other members of society . . .

The Oxford English Dictionary (1933) notes the appearance of the word “leader” in the English language as early as the year 1300. However, the word “leadership” did not appear until the first half of the nineteenth century in writings about political influence and control of British Parliament.  

Leadership research would focus on matters that are operationalisable, quantifiable, and statistically analytical. Empiricism has effectively ruled out of court all other way of thinking about leadership except that which could be established by the tools of empiricism. Since then, methodology from psychology and sociology has dominated leadership research. As a result, using Weber’s terminology, formal rationality (zweckrational), rationality that involves simple means-ends calculation, trumps substantive rationality (wertrational), and action that originates from “a conscious belief in the absolute value of some ethical, aesthetic, religious, or other form of behaviour, entirely for its own sake and independent of any prospect of external success.”

Apart from the philosophical and theological critique of empiricism, the recent and spectacular failures in the political, commercial, and social spheres has reminded society of problems and inadequacies of an empiricistic approach to leadership. A leader

58 Ibid.

59 The editors of The Handbook of Leadership Theory and Practice – A Harvard Business School Colloquium on Advancing Leadership appear to suggest that there is no research on leadership prior to the twentieth century when empiricism embraced the social sciences as a legitimate field of research. Nohira and Khurana, “Advancing Leadership Theory and Practice.” Kindle: Chapter 1.

60 Podolny, Khurana, and Besharov, “Revisiting the Meaning of Leadership.” Kindle: Chapter 3.
who is ineffective in bringing about good cannot be worse, or possibly even better, than a leader who is effective in bringing about evil. Profits, return on investment, or any other system outcome cannot be the criteria for deciding the quality of leadership.61

An alternative to performance is that of creation meaning as the goal of leadership.62 Podolny, Khurana, and Besharov propose that the leader’s role is to establish and infuse values and purpose for the organisation and to motivate and coordinate the followers to pursue that purpose. They argue that since the Industrial Revolution the institution of the market economy has been slowly seeking to replace older meaning-making institutions like religion, family, and community. In seeking to provide members with broader purpose, organisations have been trying to “elevate business to an activity that transcends the profane task of money-making and infusing it with a moral dimension.”63 Podony and associates note that “corporate significance for their members has become quasi-religious, as suggested by the importation of terms such as mission and values into the contemporary corporate lexicon.”64 Meaning is something that supports some ultimate end that individually personally values, and affirms the individual’s connection to community in which they are part.65


63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.
Recent popular leadership theories have taken seriously the meaning-creation imperative of leadership. James McGregor Burns distinguishes his transformational leadership from transactional leadership.66 Where the focus of the leader and follower relationship is an exchange, the leadership is transactional. A leadership is transformational when “the leader engages with others and creates a connection that raises the motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower beyond their own self-interest for the sake of the collective.”67 Transformational leaders would provide clear vision, build social architectures and create trust in their organisations so as to create meaning and infusion for their community.68 The development of leaders would therefore involve nurturing leaders to grow in self-awareness and capacity to change their perspective and thinking.69

Like Burn’s transformational leadership, servant leadership is another leadership theory that does not focus on performance when assessing the quality of leadership.70 The origin of theory is often attributed to Robert Greenleaf.71 The focus of servant leadership is not on the economic performance of the organisation, but on the wellbeing of the

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68 Ibid., 186, 196, 197.

69 Ibid., 204-205.


members and of the wider society beyond the organisation. Servant leadership introduces what is lacking in performance-focused leadership theories—the moral element. However, leadership theories that have meaning creation as the goal of leadership may not be all that different to the theories that focus on performance.

The search for meaning invariably succumbs to consequentialism. Podony Khurana and Besharov argue that no matter how meaningful the organisation is, it still needs to survive.\(^{72}\) Meaningfulness inevitably leads to corporate outcomes. Satisfaction, meaning, and social welfare are all desirable, but they need to yield profit.

The next chapter argues that a Christian account of leadership will provide a helpful critique of modern conceptions of leadership and the goal of leadership. It will also provide signposts for the development of an alternative theory of leadership. A Christian account of leadership can provide a better theoretical basis for leaders and for assessment of leadership development. However, before turning to a Christian construct of leadership, the issue of leadership development needs to be considered.

**Developing Leaders**

The last issues to be considered in this chapter on leadership are those of developing leaders. There are three general approaches to developing leaders: selection, training, and situational engineering.\(^{73}\) Organisational development is an additional approach to developing leaders. There has been a variety of delivery methods, from more

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\(^{72}\) Podolny, Khurana, and Besharov “Revisiting the Meaning of Leadership.” Kindle: Chapter 3.

\(^{73}\) Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations*, Kindle: Chapter 15.
formal off-the-shelf training based around single events or programs to more customise and personalize training while focusing on process.

The use of personnel selection is logically associated with the Great Man, Traits, and Fielder’s theories. To improve organisational leadership, tests, interviews, and situational exercises are used to select the best candidate for the leadership position in the organisation. Psychological testing on intelligence or personality (such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator) were developed and used from the 1920s to the 1950s for managerial selection. Testing and assessment is still routinely used today. However, whilst organisational leadership can be improved by selection, there is no question of developing the individual leader in traits theories.

Training is the most standard method for leadership development, and is particularly associated with the skills theories in which leaders would be trained in technical, conceptual, and human relations skills. Methods in skills training would include textbooks, seminars, workshops, cases studies, role playing, and business games. In contingencies theories, such as those of Hersey and Blanchard and House, development would involve training leaders in diagnosing the situation and selecting and using the appropriate behavioural response which would best fit the situation and the maturity level of the followers, or which would best fit the means of influence to goal

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75 Yukl, Leadership in Organizations, 382-383.
76 Northouse, Leadership: Theory and Practice, 44-47.
77 Yukl, Leadership in Organizations, 393-395.
achievement for the followers. For Vroom and Yetton, leaders are developed by training them in their normative model, learning decision rules and processes so they are able to use the right process in any situation to improve their leadership effectiveness.

The third general approach to development is situational engineering. Fiedler’s theory, for example, would view a leader’s style is basic to his or her personality and cannot be changed easily. However, a leader or an organisation can identify the situations that best match the leader’s style. Short of this, the role or job could be engineered to fit the individual. The type of engineering could be a change in the organisation of work and reporting relationship, an increase or decrease in the leader’s authority or span of control.

Organisational development approaches are designed to improve interpersonal processes in organisations. Methods such as 360 degree reviews, goal setting, sensitivity training (or T-groups), behaviour modelling, team building, and process consultation are used. Organisational development approaches tend to be associated with situational, contingency, and complex theories of leadership.

Education theories also impacts leader development. Adults learn best by observing and doing. This rationale links knowing with doing. Therefore, the dominant

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79 Vroom and Jago, “The Role of Situation in Leadership,” 22.
thinking in executive development currently is training *in situ* notably through action learning and coaching. A similar basis for most leadership development thinking is the value of experience. Most organisations recognise that appropriate and relevant experience, such as assigning leaders to projects, roles, and locations that they have not experienced before, though insufficient is necessary for the leaders’ development. Wisdom role in linking the abstract and general with the particular and situational is analysed in a later chapter.

The element of self-concept has been added to leadership recently. Each person attaches meanings to the self. These meanings are based on social roles, group membership, and personal traits. As an individual becomes a leader or as the leadership role changes, he or she must reevaluate their identity. Leadership development does not just involve the teaching of skills or knowledge, but must expand the leader’s sense of self. The focus will not be on what is taught to the leader but how he or she is taught to learn. Having considered some of the approaches to leadership development, one can draw several conclusions from the above discussion.

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84 Ibarra, Snook, and Ramo, “Identity-Based Leader Development.”
Wisdom for Leaders

In 1989, Yukl wrote that “the field of leadership is presently in a state of ferment and confusion.”85 He maintained this same conclusion twenty-two years later in 2011.86 In reality, what eludes researchers and practitioners alike is the “it” of leadership. J. Richard Hackman puts it this way:87

We’ve all had the experience of seeing a master leader in action—someone who know just what to do, how to do it, and precisely when to act to help a system achieve its purposes. We also have seen the opposite, individuals who have been carefully selected for leader roles, who have excelled in numerous leadership development courses, and who have amassed considerable leadership experience—yet who somehow manage to do the wrong thing at the wrong time in the wrong way . . . Even more mysteriously, masters often are entirely at a loss when asked to explain why they did at the time they did it...So what is the ‘it’ that master leaders have the rest of us do not? How did they get it? And what might we do to help others develop it?

“It” is as frustrating as it is desirable and valuable. “It” eludes identification and therefore predictability. “It” cannot be taught or trained because “it” is more than just the sum of accumulated knowledge. This dissertation postulates that the “it” is wisdom. The biblical conception of wisdom is more valuable than gold and silver, and yet available to all. According to one definition, wisdom is “the application of tacit as well as explicit knowledge as mediated by values toward the achievement of a common good through a

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balance among intrapersonal, interpersonal, and extrapersonal interests over the short term and long term to achieve a balance among adaptation to existing environments, shaping of existing environments, and selection of new environments.”

Wisdom might be the “it” of leadership because it enables a leader to navigate through the various components in the leadership equation—the domain, the criteria, the functions, the context, and the conditions.

Nurturing wisdom improves leadership development in the following ways. First, wisdom will allow room for the contingencies and agency in leadership. Wisdom is not just a trait, a skill, or a behaviour, but draws together all these components of agency and enables the agent to use them well. Vroom and Yetton have argued that leadership fundamentally involves decision making, and researchers have shown the same to be true. Further, wisdom recognises the impact of situational and contextual variables on leadership function. As a concept, wisdom could explain why leadership is so difficult to study and why there is such disagreement among leadership researchers.

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90 Yukl, Leadership in Organizations, 111-114.

Second, wisdom is not outcome-determined, but outcome-aware. A wise leader is one who considers the effect of their decisions and behaviour on parties outside the organisation. Wisdom has a moral dimension. Most importantly, wisdom is able to explain differences between individual leaders, and also why system outcomes cannot be guaranteed even under successful leaders. Wisdom does not absolutise leadership behaviour or traits.

Third, the concept of wisdom could provide a framework for explaining the success of leadership development tools and methods, and also how the tools can be used. Wisdom is multidimensional and integrative. It bridges the gap between knowing, doing, and being. The use of development tools—which, how, when, and on whom—itself requires wisdom.

Fourth, and perhaps the most promising aspect, is that unlike traits, skills, and intelligence, wisdom is accessible to all who are willing to acquire it. The next chapter argues that leadership is more democratic than what the leadership literature suggests. It is not a function for the elite, the gifted, or the extraordinary. Anyone can be called to a leadership function. The most obvious example is that of the important role of parents. Wisdom holds out promise to those who are daunted by this weighty calling that it is possible for even the ordinary, ill-equipped, and simple to lead the next generation well.

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CHAPTER 2

CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

It is important to consider the similarities as well as the distinctiveness of Christian leadership to the current understanding of leadership. This can be done by addressing three questions: What is Christian leadership? What might a theology of leadership look like using a biblical-theological approach? And lastly, what is the relationship between biblical wisdom and leadership?

**What is Christian Leadership?**

The burden of this dissertation is to consider whether the nurture of wisdom makes Christian leaders better leaders. First it is necessary to consider whether Christian leaders are different to other leaders, and whether the development of Christian leaders differs from general leadership development. The literature on Christian leadership and Christian leadership development assumes that there is a distinct Christian understanding of leadership, that is, Christian leadership is not just leadership exercised by Christians or leadership in an ecclesial context. Understandably so, for Christian epistemology is different to the epistemologies underlying the study of leadership in the academy.
Christian epistemology acknowledges that God has revealed Himself, so the methodology of the study of leadership itself would be different.

There appears to be little attempt to synthesise thinking on Christian leadership in the same way that general leadership research has.¹ Like the general study of leadership, Christian leadership has been studied under various disciplines: pastoral or practical theology, preaching, homiletics, biblical studies, systematic theology, dogmatic theology, missiology, ecclesiology, and church history. The trend now is to separate leadership as a distinct discipline and to rename pastoral training as leadership development.² There are now attempts to study Christian leadership in a more sustained academic way, but these attempts are in their relative infancy.³

There are several approaches to the study of Christian leadership. The first main approach is the exegetical and biographical approach. Before Christian leadership was treated as a distinct discipline, focus tended to be on the role, character, or specific function of the office of the pastor.⁴ This would normally be done through exegetical and

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³ For example, the publication by Regent University of the *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* (JBPL) from 2006. See http://www.regent.edu/acad/global/publications/jbpl/.

biblical studies, for example by studying what the pastoral epistles teach about the role of the elder or through historical studies on church polity and order.

The most common approach in contemporary Christian leadership literature is the biographical approach. Jesus is of course the exemplary role model, but the method has also been applied to other leaders—Moses, the apostles Paul and Peter, Philemon, Tychicus, and Onesimus, and Billy Graham. Another approach similar to the biographical approach is the study based on the personal and anecdotal experience of recognised public Christian leaders such as Bill Hybels or Max DePree. A third approach under this category is the examination of established leadership theories in light

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6 David Baron and Lynette Padwa, Moses on Management: 50 Leadership Lessons from the Greatest Manager of All Time (New York: Pocket Books, 1999).

7 Oswald Sanders, Spiritual Leadership (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974).

8 Walter C. Wright, Relational Leadership: A Biblical Model for Influence and Service (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 2002).


of the Scriptures. Scholars would read the Scriptures to glean principles on strategic and praxis-based constructs or assessment of leadership.

These approaches have yielded numerous conclusions. Some have identified essential leadership traits and behaviours from Jesus and other leaders. J. Oswald Sanders, for example, has articulated “the essential qualities of leadership as discipline, vision, wisdom, courage, humility, integrity and sincerity and being Spirit-filled.” Others see particular leadership functions from the role models: Jesus as a transformative leader or as the servant leader.

The second main approach is the inductive and empirical approach, for example William Diehl’s *In Search of Faithfulness: Lessons from the Christian Community*, which is deliberately modelled on Peters and Waterman’s *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America’s Best-Run Companies*. Diehl focuses on faithfulness, rather than excellence, as leadership goal. Another example is the work of George Barna. Barna, like the general researchers of leadership, wishes to account for individual differences in

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13 Ibid., 173-174

14 Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, chapter 8.

15 Ford, *Transforming Leadership*.

16 Blanchard, Hybels, and Hodges, *Leadership by the Book*.


leadership, that is, why is there a difference in outcome (growing and dying churches) between two pastors when they might be doing the same thing faithfully and relevantly preaching the Word of God? Barnas’ conclusion is:

I have spent the last fifteen years researching all facets of American life. Using nation-wide surveys among representative samples of large numbers of Americans…I have reached several conclusions regarding the future of the Christian Church in America . . . Nothing is more important than leadership.19

The third approach to the study of Christian leadership is the theological approach—the abstraction of empirical data (from biblical studies, social sciences, and personal experiences) to a theoretical level. Rather than applying general leadership constructs to the Christian context, this is an attempt to develop a distinctly Christian or religious leadership theory. An example is that of E. F. Schumacher who applied the doctrine Trinity to work.20 Corne J. Bekker has summarised some of the efforts to date.21

Like general leadership studies, Christian leadership study is “a vast and sprawling field with no clear contours or boundaries” to use Yukl’s phrase. Serious and sustained academic consideration is at its relative infancy. Most of the literature is at the general and popular level. Suffice to say, Christian leadership thinking predominantly mimics the approaches of general leadership studies.


20 Banks and Ledbetter, Reviewing Leadership, 83.

What is a Good Christian Leader?

George Barna and others are convinced that there is nothing more important than leadership. Barna concludes that in “this time of unprecedented opportunity and plentiful resources, the church is actually losing influence.” In the end, economic outcomes are substituted with ecclesial outcomes, and ecclesial outcomes are normally remarkably positive—productivity, health, and effectiveness rather than defeat, shame, suffering and death. Consequentialism therefore seems to hold sway in current thinking on Christian leadership development. The aim of Christian leadership development is for Christian leaders to produce these outcomes.

How to Develop Christian Leaders?

Approaches in Christian leadership development follow the approaches of general leadership development. Psychological testing, interviews, assessments, and other processes are the staple of ecclesial leadership selection and development. However, a spiritual element is added which is identified by different names: God’s calling or gifting, being Spirit-filled, or Spirit-led. The tools of Christian leadership

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22 For example, Hybels, *Courageous Leadership*, 26.


26 Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership*. 
development are also like those of general leadership development. Christian leaders are
developed through education and training in the knowledge, behaviour, and skills that are
considered necessary for effective leadership.27 Wisdom is sometimes included as one of
the many qualities that Christian leaders may need as they develop.28 It can be argued that
biblical wisdom is more integrative, and should be identified as something more than just
one of many skills.

A Biblical Theology of Leadership

It is beyond the purpose of this dissertation to fully argue for a general theology
of leadership. The remainder of this chapter seeks to describe leadership from what is
called a biblical theological perspective, that is, to seek to understand the concept of
leadership with the backdrop of the grand narrative of Scripture.29 The strength of this
approach is that it seeks to understand the subject of leadership from the whole Bible, and
the individual parts mentioning leadership will be understood from its salvation-historical
context. This approach has not been applied to leadership thinking so far. The method
involves examining words and concepts that are implicitly associated with leadership (as
has been identified by general leadership theories) in the unfolding story of salvation.

27 See for example the theory of leadership development by J. Robert Clinton, The Making of a
Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development, revised edition, (Colorado

28 Oswald Sanders, Spiritual Leadership, 57.

29 This approach is sometimes referred to as the canonical approach. See for example Gerhard
von Rad, Old Testament Theology, 2 volumes, (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1962); Brevard S. Childs,
Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments: Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible, 1st
Fortress Press edition, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); Graeme Goldsworthy, Gospel and Kingdom: A
Creation: Leadership Created and Commissioned

The words “lead” or “leader” do not appear prominently in the Bible. Among other things, it is already observed that the concept of leadership is a relatively modern one. Still, concepts, titles, and functions that relate to leading and leaders are replete in the Bible, even from the very beginning. Human beings are created to ‘rule’ or ‘exercise dominion’ (רָדָה (rā·ḏā(h)). The concept of dominion does not fit neatly into the current construct of leadership, but in fact, challenges it. rāḏā is notably strong in meaning to rule, subdue, subjugate, punish, or chastise, but also tread, trample (e.g. the wine press), and stamp.30

The domain of this type of leadership is the non-human living world, and notably does not extend to other human beings. The context strongly suggests that the task of dominion is associated with human beings being created in the image of God.31 Human beings are not mere pawns in the divine plan. God will bless all creation through human leadership (Gn 1:28). Blessing is God’s intent and purpose. He will bring all things into His Rest, and God will use human agency to bring about this outcome (Gn 1:26, 28). Human leadership is clearly contingent, most notably in the Word of God. God relates explicitly to human beings by His Word. What is implicit and later made explicit is the involvement of wisdom in rule. God creates and rules by His wisdom (Pr 8:27-31).

30 rāḏā means to “dominate, direct, lead, control, subdue, i.e., manage or govern an entity, people or government with considerable or forceful authority,” according to Francis Edward Brown, et al., The New Brown, Driver, and Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament (Lafayette, IN: Associated Publishers and Authors, 1981).

Human beings are to rule being dependent on God—this dependency is later identified as the necessary pre-condition to wisdom (Pr 1:7).

The creation account seems to support the importance of leadership. However, it also challenges leadership thinking. Human leadership function is far stronger than just influence. It is ruling, exercising dominion, and subduing, which carries all the connotation of conquest. Further, leadership in creation is remarkably undemocratic. There is no interest in traits, skills, behaviour, giftedness, style, role, or track record, but it is entirely by divine appointment. In this respect, leadership is truly democratic. All members of humanity can and must exercise it. Lastly, according to Starling, direction and purpose are fundamental to leadership: “A leader is someone who does the job of going somewhere, and taking others with them.”  

However, leadership is better understood as teleological rather than consequential, that is, it is concerned with purpose and telos rather than outcome or result. The direction is not established at the whim and creative imagination of the leader, the purposes of human leadership in the Garden are determined and commanded by the Creator. It is nothing short of the rest or Shalom of God, the flourishing of human and non-human world.

The Fall: Leadership Compromised

Like the Creation account, the Fall has much to say about leadership. The Fall is the repudiation of divine rule and the establishing of an alternate human rule. That

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32 Starling, UnCorinthian Leadership: Thematic Reflections on 1 Corinthians, 4.
repudiation is actualised by the disobedience of God’s Word, and the rejection of the will and purposes of the Creator. The consequences of this on leadership are significant.

Human leadership is now difficult and futile. Curse has replaced blessing. Human beings can now expect toil, frustration, and futility in their rāḏā. There is now enmity between the creature subject and their human leaders. Instead of rāḏā the human race will ṣūp(šūp) crush the creature (Gn 3:15). The non-human world now experiences fear and dread of human beings (Gn 9:2), and in turn, animals will devour crops and the children of Adam and Eve (Lv 26:21-22). The shepherds have now become butchers, and in the end, the fruit of human leadership is dust (Gn 3:19).

Further, human beings will now seek to dominate one another. Pre-Fall, the man and the woman were one flesh without shame. Post-Fall, interpersonal relationship is characterised by suspicion, vulnerability, and blaming. Leadership is now perverse. The woman’s “desire will be for” her husband, that is, she will seek to have mastery over him (Gn 4:7) and he in turn will rule (רָשַׁׁל(rā·šāl)) her.

The Fall explains the leadership experience in ways that general leadership cannot. Leadership is not neutral. Sin is part of the leader’s traits, behaviour, and identity. The proclivity in human leadership is not benevolence nor disinterested neutrality but exploitation, corruption, manipulation, wrangling, and strife. The Great Man is powerful but he will be a tyrant bent on conquest. Collectively, humankind will continue to seek to establish an alternate kingdom with individuals as head, seeking to replace God’s good purposes with their own. Yet all will come to nothing. Human work, including leadership, will be stifled, frustrated, and opposed. Failure and frustration will be the
normal expectation of leadership, with death robbing all activities of meaning, for this is the judgment of God on godless human leadership.

**Abraham and the Fathers: Promise of New Leadership**

God promises to reverse the curse and redeem the Fall in one man—Abraham (Gn 12, 15). The intent of the Abrahamic narrative, which is clearly important in the unfolding story of the Bible, is more than just leadership lessons. Divine leadership is clearly being underscored.

One of the emerging metaphors of God’s leadership in this period of salvation-history is God as shepherd (Gn 48:15). This pastoral metaphor is obviously intelligible to Joseph’s brothers as well as the apparent audience of the Pentateuch (Gn 46:33-34). Pastoral language was commonly used for human and divine leadership. This is true in a wide variety of historical periods, geographical regions, and literary contexts in the Ancient Near East—from the fourth millennium to the first, from Sumeria, Assyro-Babylonia, Mesopotamia, and Akkadia, to Egypt. The intent of pastoral imagery is to convey and emphasise the benevolence, wisdom, and power of the leader to provide

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34 Abraham was a semi-nomadic pastoralist, as were Isaac, Jacob, and his twelve sons (Gn 37; 47:3,4).

justice, prosperity, peace, and guidance for his flock. What is noticeably underplayed, though not absent, is human agency.

God will save the human race by creating a nation of Abraham’s progenies. That is, a domain has been promised, one that will be set aside from other domains. It will be ruled by God through His Word—the Word of His covenant. Furthermore, through the Abrahamic domain God will bless all other domains; this is the telos and purpose of the Abrahamic covenant. The human agent is strikingly passive, and participates in the divine work through faith and obedience. If Abraham were a Great Man, the trait that is to be emulated is his non-meritorious response of faith and obedience to God’s Word (Hb 11:8).

It is also worth noting that Abraham was chosen by God not to be a leader, nor a king or prince, but a father. Fatherhood and fathers have been entirely ignored in leadership thinking in both secular and Christian leadership literature. This is a significant oversight given the importance and emphasis of fathers as leaders and leadership training in the Old Testament. Derek Tidball notes that parents were the primary guardians of the faith of God’s people. Fathers are responsible for the spiritual

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36 Ibid., 66.

37 Non-familial leadership words and titles are clearly present (Gn 14:1, 8, 18, 21; 20:1, 2; 36:15, 31). Although the title of “prince” was attributed to Abraham (Gn 23:5), these are titles and functions that Abraham did not appropriate for himself nor were assigned by God in the scriptural narrative. This would be true of Isaac and Jacob (Gn 35:11). Although kingship was anticipated from the line of Judah (Gn 40:10).

38 Derek Tidball, *Skillful Shepherds: An Introduction to Pastoral Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Ministry Resources Library, 1986), 41.

39 Ibid., 42.
education of future generations of Israelites (Dt 4:9; 6:7.20; 11:19; 31:13; 32:46). In biblical thought, the father is the centre of the family. He is the source of life to his children and the generations to follow, even to nations and families of nations. Fathers are God-like, for God himself is called Father (Dt 32:6; Is 45:9-12; Ho 11:1-11). This observation is not to advocate a patriarchal view of leadership, but to highlight elements that are overlooked in current leadership thinking and theories.

There are two aspects of fatherhood as leadership that affront leadership thinking. The first is fatherhood’s sheer randomness. Anyone can become a father. There is no selection process, no psychometric testing, nor skills matrix. It is difficult to envisage a place in leadership theory for leadership by something as arbitrary, undemocratic, and potentially ineffective as fatherhood. The implication of this arbitrariness is that development is essential, but not selection. Anyone can be a father-leader, but once a man assumes that role, it is encumbered upon him to become a good one.

Second, the one essential trait involved in fatherhood as leadership is gender. Understandably this is difficult to accommodate in leadership thinking because it is prima facie misogyny writ large. However, fatherhood is not just a male trait. All males can be fathers, but not all males are. A man cannot become a father alone; a woman must be involved. Ultimately, fatherhood is a gift from God (Ps 127:3). Fatherhood as leadership adds to leadership thinking by highlighting what is now apparent: leadership is much more organic and non-linear as current thought. It cannot simply be explained or studied mechanically. Relational processes cannot be reduced to psychometric or personality factors in individuals, and training for leadership is holistic, involved, and personal.
Fathers do not just teach as teachers, nor just coach as coaches, nor rule as kings. Fathers father. Fathers lead in a similar way that the head leads the body.

Edwin Friedman has argued that leadership has conceptual and emotional dimensions. The function of leaders affects the institutions that they lead because of the systemic power of leadership. He contends that institutions should be conceptualised as emotional fields involving invisible systematic processes and cannot be explained by mechanical models. Friedman sees an analogical relationship between a leader’s connection with followers, and also between the brain and the body. The head is present in the whole body. So, in domains, whether institutions or families, the head can systematically influence all parts of the unit simultaneously. What counts, according to Friedman, is not techniques and know-how, or traits and behaviour, but presence and being. Leadership development is then not about training skills, but self-regulation and personal growth. This is what wisdom entails.

Israel and the Land

The amount of material on leadership and wisdom appears to have grown in this era of salvation-history. Leaders and leadership vocabulary and concepts, along with explicit references to wisdom, are profuse in the material from and concerning this period. Wisdom itself is not just a concept or a word, but has becomes a movement in

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41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.
Israel. Further, the link between wisdom and good leadership is made explicit in this period (Ex 18:21; Dt 1:13, 34:9; 1 Ki 3; Is 11:2).

There is a range of people who exercised leadership function among the Israelites. There are informal and extemporary individual leaders, such as Moses, Joshua, Caleb, the Judges, Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, David, Solomon, Josiah, and other men and women. God has used their decisions, courage, and skills to influence salvation-history. These individuals are often the subject of Christian leadership studies. This biographical approach to leadership as noted above seems to an application of Thomas Carlyle’s theory that “The history of the world is but the biography of great men,” and should not be uncritically adopted.

In this period of salvation-history, there are also formal, institutional, and publicly recognised leaders and elders (Ex 3:16), head (Ex 18:25; Dt 5:23), parents (Dt 6:7,8), Levites and priests (Dt 17:8-13; 33:8; Ez 44:23; Hg 2:11-13), prophets (Dt 18:14-22; 1 Kg 20:13,14), military officers (Dt 20:5), judges (Dt 16:18-20), kings (Dt 17:14-20), and wise men (1 Ch 27:32-33). Each role involves different constraints and situations. These leaders exercise their leadership in different domains (families, nations, law courts, the army, etc.). The function of some roles, for example, priesthood, are meticulously set out, while others are not. Each role is expected to produce different local outcomes, for instance, judges are to produce justice, while military leaders security and peace, but all these outcomes work together towards a grand outcome, the Kingdom of God on earth.

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Some are explicitly appointed by the Lord, sometimes by way of a prophet, and most are not, as in the case of military leaders, judges, and elders. The latter presumably become leaders by processes common to all cultures and nations outside Israel. Leadership in the land never took the form of a monolithic and static structure. It varied and over time it changed, and grew and continued to change and grow well into the later period when Judaism emerged. Several things can be added to the thinking on leadership.

First, although numerous titles and words are used for leaders, national leadership seems to be identified by the one metaphor of “shepherd.” As noted above, pastoral imagery was commonly used for divine and human leadership in the Ancient Near East to denote benevolence, wisdom, and power. This is also true of the use of pastoral imagery in the Bible.

Yahweh has been the shepherd of his flock, Israel (Gn 48:15; 49:24; Nm 27:17; Dt 32:10-12; Ps 23; 80). As the shepherd leader of Israel, God was present with them to save and protect, to feed and provide, and to lead and guide them to His rest. The national leaders of Israel were also shepherds: Moses (Ps 77:20; Ho 12:13), and more notably David (Gn 40:10; 2 Sa 5:1-3; 7:5-10). Israel’s shepherd leaders were under-shepherds, those whom Yahweh would use to lead His flock.

Spiritual apostasy, social injustice, and political adultery would eventually lead to the destruction of Israel and her exile. Yahweh held the leaders responsible (Jr 2, 3, 10, 21-23; Ez 34:1-10). The shepherds of Israel had rejected God’s leadership. They

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44 Tidball, *Skillful Shepherds*, 44, 45.
exploited rather than cared for His flock (Ez 22:27). However, salvation, another great Exodus, was promised. It would not be the shepherds of Israel who would save the flock, but the Shepherd Himself (Ez 34:11). He would personally come and seek and save the lost sheep of Israel by the hand of the Son of David (Is 9:1-7; 11:1-5; Jr 23:1-8; Ez 37:24-28). Human agency and divine power would merge in this one (Is 40). His rule would not be established by the conquest of horse and chariots, but by suffering and humiliation (Is 42). On that day of salvation, Israel would no longer look to human leadership, like the nations, for help but to their Shepherd, and on that day, the Servant of the Lord would restore God’s perfect and righteous leadership to all the world.

The use of pastoral imagery in the Bible assists in setting out some of the characteristics of leadership. The shepherds were appointed and used by God. There can be no authority on earth except that which God has established (Rm 13:1). Pharaoh, Nebukadnessar, Cyrus, and Pilate are tools in God’s hands, whether they are conscious of it or willing participants. Leadership, both within and without Israel, can only be exercised under the condition of God’s plans and purposes. All other conditions and contexts of leadership are peripheral to the point of irrelevance. Notwithstanding, human leaders are responsible. All human leaders will be held to account by God (Jr 50:18). The pastoral imagery highlights that interplay between divine will and human agency.

Second, the biblical data corresponds with the general experience of leadership—it is everything and nothing at the same time. Like the nations, Israel had words that signify and distinguish leaders from other people. However, there was no clear attempt to define leadership or construct a general theology of it. The narrative towards human
leadership is ambivalence if not cynical (1 Sa 8:1-22). Israel, like the contemporary society, had been intensely interested in leaders. This desire was negatively judged: “It is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king” (1 Sa 8:7). The reliance on leadership was an expression of their rebellion and distrust of God’s leadership. It is not that human agency had no role in salvation-history, nor that the “great men” of Israel were merely puppets of the divine will and plan, but to rely on human leadership was folly writ large (Is 31:1; Ps 20:7).

The Leadership of Christ and the Future of the World

God has revealed that He will finally and absolutely reestablish His leadership in the world in the person of Jesus. Jesus began his work by announcing the nearness of God’s kingdom (Mk 1:15). He is the anticipated Davidic shepherd-king. He is the one to whom the flock belongs (Jn 10). He is the Lord who has come to seek and save lost sheep (Lk 19:10) through the laying down of his life (Jn 15:13). And by his resurrection from the dead, God has declared him lord (Rm 1:4). The goal, purpose, and outcome of all his work is that the Father will be all in all (Jn 15:28) that is, the lordship of God will be established on earth—that grand purpose signified in the Garden of Eden. That work continues between the first and the final comeings of Jesus through the proclamation of his Gospel. Our understanding of leadership has been confirmed and progressed in several ways.

First, like leadership in the land, leadership in the New Testament never took the form of a monolithic and static structure. There was no attempt to construct a general theology of leadership. Contemporary Christian leadership literature often refers to the
“gift of leadership” in Romans 12:8. However, the words translated leader and lead in the New Testament are more akin to the idea of the role of manager, of management, and of administration. This is important because of the distinction made between the two. Even the most encompassing image for leadership in the Bible, that of a shepherd, was not intended to be a general theology of leadership. Pastoral imagery was after all only applied to the national leadership of Israel. However, none of the Old Testament national offices, such as king, prophet, or priest, have continued into the New. Pastoral metaphor is used in the New Testament but only for formal and public leadership of the church (Jn 21:15-17; 1 Pe 5:2). The Lord Jesus would care for his flock through the ministry of his under-shepherds.

Second, what is notable about the New Testament is the many warnings against bad leaders. In leadership thinking, good leaders are the successful and effective leaders who can produce system outcomes. Presumably bad leaders are those who are ineffective. Bad leaders in the New Testaments are not ineffective leaders. They are self-righteous, deceitful, hypocritical, blind guides (Mt 3:7-10; 15:14; 23:24; Lk 6:39), blood-thirsty usurpers (Mt 2:1-18), wicked and adulterous, unbelieving and perverse (Mt 12:39), white

45 See for example Hybels, *Courageous Leadership*, 27.


48 This is because the cult and the nation-state are no longer necessary in the New Covenant. God’s kingdom is everywhere that the Gospel is believed rather than centred on a single geographic location. The priesthood, the sacrificial system, and the temple are now fulfilled by the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus and his continuing ministry as the great high priest.
washed tombs (Mt 23:27), children of Satan (Jn 8:44), and ravenous wolves appearing as angels of light (Gal 1:8). Ultimately, they were bad leaders because they rejected the leadership of God in their failure to submit to Jesus’ leadership, and by perverting his Word. Bad leaders in the New Testament are not ineffective shepherds but false teachers (Rm 16:17; 2 Pe 2:1-3; 1 Jn 4:1-3; 2 Jn 1:7-11; 1 Tm 4:1-5; Col 2:8). The disciples of Jesus are warned of the certainty of bad leaders (Acts 20:29; 1 Tm 4:1-2). The difference between good and bad leaders could be seen in the fruit they bear (Mt 7: 15-23; Ju 12-14). Instead of love and holiness, they produce sin. Consequences do not determine the quality of leadership, but confirm or reveal it.

Third, the New Testament reveals that God redeems human leadership by human leadership. God has taken on sinful flesh to become the leader that Adam and Eve, the kings, priests, prophets, and shepherds of Israel should have been but were not and could not be. Jesus was perfect in his obedience to God’s word and in his wisdom. To study Jesus as a “great man” or for his leadership traits and behaviour would be to misunderstand that Jesus’ leadership is vicarious and substitutionary before it is exemplary. No one could lead like Jesus.\(^{49}\) Further, God redeems human leadership not just by providing the perfect leader, but by providing the perfect follower.

Jesus is not just the antitype of all leaders. He is also the perfect follower. He is the obedient Son, the faithful Israelite, and the perfect human being. That is, in Jesus Christ God has established the domain in which He will accomplish all His plans and

purposes in the world that is “to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ” (Eph 1:10). Conscious participation in God’s plans and purposes is through union with Jesus Christ, by faith and obedience to his Gospel in the power of the Spirit of God.\(^{50}\)

Fourth, the leadership of those who have been called, appointed, elected, stumble into, or come to leadership in whatever other manner is now centred around the Gospel. Leadership in the New Testament had to do with ordering within the church. Such order is called by a variety of names: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers (Eph 4:11), bishops/overseers (1 Tm 3:1-7), elders (Acts 20:17; 1 Tm 5:17-20; 1 Pe 5:1-4), older women (Titus 2:3-5), deacons (1 Tm 3:8-13), those who lead or govern (Hb 13:7,8,17). However, these names and titles lack technical precision. Arguably this is because the emphasis is on their primary function—the ministry of the Word (1 Pe 5:1-5). No particular order is prescribed by the New Testament, that is, leadership in the church is not limited to elders, bishops, deacons, etc. Order is functionally necessary so that the preaching of the apostolic witness might continue. Order and leadership is the “scaffolding” in time and space for the building up of the body of Christ through the ministry of the Word. In the Eschaton, order would no longer be needed, for the Lord himself will lead His people face to face.

Starling concludes that there is a difference between leadership and custodianship: a “custodian stands guard over what is, protecting something precious, keeping it here in

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\(^{50}\) Constantine R. Campbell, *Paul and Union with Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012).
its place, warding off threats. A leader heads off in a direction, and brings other people along or the journey.”\textsuperscript{51} The Christian leader leads the people of God on a mission, into the world to disciples of the nations. The Christian leader also leads the church, which is prone to become comfortable in the world at the present age, to continue her pilgrimage through the world.\textsuperscript{52} The final destination of the pilgrimage is the New Jerusalem, the new heavens and earth, the maturity of the Church, her holiness and purity for her marriage to the Groom (Eph 4:11-13; Col 1:28; 2 Cor 11:2). There is a clear direction and purpose to New Testament leadership. A direction that is given by the Lord, not of the invention of the leader. The means is the Word of the Gospel (Acts 1:7-8; Col 1:6; Rm 1:13).

Starling notes that Christian leadership, to lead the people forward towards the Promised Land, ironically involves “receiving an inheritance and following in that tradition,”\textsuperscript{53} which is the Gospel. The function of New Testament leadership within the church is therefore the ministry of that Word—to teach it, to live, and model it (Hb 13:7; Eph 4; 1 Tm 6:20), and to build scaffolding to enable that Word to be ministered. This ministry is not one of slavish repetition, but of faithful engagement in all the contexts, challenges, and situations that the people find themselves in.

In contrast to leadership theories, New Testament leadership has little concern for skills or traits. The only qualification mentioned for leadership has to do with character or

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{51} Starling, \textit{UnCorinthian Leadership: Thematic Reflections on 1 Corinthians}, 30.\\
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 31, 32.\\
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 58.
\end{flushright}
being (1 Tm 3). This does not necessarily mean that skills and traits are unnecessary or unimportant. All that a leader has is a gift from God for the good of His flock: natural abilities, learned behaviours, even circumstances, situations, and contingencies. These are simply assumed. What appears to be important is what a leader does with these gifts in the discharge of their function. A leader ought to lead faithfully (to the Word) and wisely (in matters that are not revealed).

God not only provides leaders to the church, but is the source of all leadership in the world: “There is no authority except that which God has established.” (Rm 13:1) God, who causes rain to fall on the just and unjust (Mt 5:45), has provided leaders for the good of society, the maintenance of order and the provision of justice, that quiet and peaceful lives can be lived (1 Tm 2:2). However, good order of society and peaceful lives is not the outcome of leadership—it is the means by which all people are saved and come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tm 2:3). That is, God in His wisdom provides leaders who may not yet be a member of His people and who may even actively oppose God’s plans and purposes to be His agents to bring about His purposes in the world, by enabling the Church to continue on her mission.

**Wisdom for Christian Leaders**

The Scriptures confirm many of the insights of general leadership theories. Leadership is a dialectic between the leader, the followers, and the context. Under God, human leaders are secondary causes for system outcomes. However, the Bible narrative also challenges leadership thinking and approach.
First, leadership is both more fundamental and yet less pivotal than what leadership theories suggest. Our very nature as human beings created in God’s image entails leadership responsibility. However, contra leadership thinking, success is not dependent on human agency. This cautions against embracing leadership as “a leitmotiv of our culture.” Leadership, Christian or otherwise, is always contingent on God. Modern dependence on leaders and leadership may reflect that ancient quest to be lead without God. Christian leaders would do well to remember that leadership outside of God is always doomed to evil, injustice, human suffering, and futility. This understanding of leadership should provide leaders and their followers with great confidence and power to be non-anxious. The leader’s responsibility is not to produce the system outcome but to participate in God’s work to bring it about.

Second, the biggest challenge to leaders, Christian or otherwise, is not context, situations, lack of skills, or ignorance, but the very human agents themselves. Whatever approach is taken in leadership development, failure to recognise and deal with this will prove fatal. In a similar vein, the salvation-historical account of leadership challenges the self-referential aspect of leadership studies. Good leaders are not just successful or effective leaders. The goal of leadership development cannot be simply to make them more effective. Good leadership conforms to the plans and purposes of God, whether consciously or unconsciously.

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54 Banks and Ledbetter, Reviewing Leadership, 15.

The post-Enron discovery that leadership must have a moral element is no surprise to Christians, for the Bible has always taught that human flourishing involves the intellectual, physical, emotional, relational, moral, and spiritual. Leadership development must therefore involve all these aspects of a person and not just the behavioural or the intellectual. In short, good leaders must be wise since wisdom is the right understanding of the context and contingencies of leadership, including an understanding of the leader themselves, so that the best decision can be made to produce the system outcome that would be good for the followers. Such understanding itself is contingent and constraint by the contours of God’s revelation in Christ Jesus.

Third, the Bible’s picture of leadership is far more democratic and organic than it has been conceived. There are categories of leaders, notably fathers and mothers, and domains, such as families, that leadership literature has completely ignored. The democratic understanding of leadership means leadership development is possible, despite Fiedler’s conclusions. Leadership and good leadership are not limited to the elite or the gifted. The organic nature of leadership means development is best done personally and holistically. Leadership training must be done in the context of the whole of life and for the whole of life. Good leaders are not just intelligent, knowledgeable, and effective people, but are virtuous, emotionally mature, and wise.

Fourthly, the biblical account of leadership provides the “it” of leadership, and it demystifies it, for “it” is wisdom and wisdom is available to all. Wisdom is the recognition of the place of human agency in the dialectic of leader, follower, context, and God. God is at work in in the world in and He works through all things to bring about His
good purposes (Rm 8:28). This is the doctrine of the providence of God (*de providentia Dei*), that is, God continuously acts in such a way by which all creation is preserved and governed for His purposes. As nothing can thwart God’s plans, their fulfilment does not require human participation nor would they be thwarted by human obstinance. However, in His mercy and goodness, God reveals by speech His plans and purposes to humans and calls them to consciously participate in those plans and purposes. Participation is primarily by hearing and obeying His Word, and this participation is moderated through wisdom.

Wisdom is the ability to make good decisions in the right context at the right time because of insight into how the world works. Israel was wise not because they were more intelligent than the other nations, but because they had the revelation of God. What is now apparent is that Jesus is the source of all true wisdom. In Christ, God has made known all wisdom and insight, which paradoxically appears to be foolishness to the world. Those ignorant of that revelation are still able to be wise because God’s world is an orderly and rational place. The just and the unjust share the same reality. Although marred by the Fall, the world remains God’s good and habitable Creation. The orderliness of Creation enables observation, analysis, and prediction, found in wisdom, but wisdom also includes recognising its limitations. Folly, the most common cause of leadership derailment,56 is not ignorance or stupidity, but hubris, the overconfidence in

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56 Ibid.
human’s ability to observe, analyse, predict, and manipulate the world without God. The relationship might be represented in the following way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>The desired system outcome (Kingdom of God (ultimately) and other penultimate outcomes (the Shalom of God, peace, good order, justice of society, etc.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independent variable</td>
<td>Leadership behaviour and character (being)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intervening variable</td>
<td>Decision making processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderating variable</td>
<td>Wisdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extraneous variable</td>
<td>All contingencies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A Christian construct of leadership would suggest that leadership development must involve the development of the knowledge of Christ and obedience to his Word, and also the nurture of wisdom. Starling observes that the development of Christian leaders is a craft which is more akin to apprenticeship, with patient, laborious repetition rather than the tertiary education of a professional that most seminaries are focused on.57 Quoting Stanley Hauerwas’ chapter “How we Lay Bricks and Make Disciples” in *After Christendom*:

> To learn to lay brick, it is not sufficient for you to be told how to do it; you must learn to mix the mortar, build scaffolds, joint, and so on. Moreover, it is not enough to be told how to hold a trowel, how to spread mortar, or how to frog the mortar. In order to lay brick, you must hour after hour, day after day, lay brick. Of course, learning to lay brick involves learning not only myriad skills, but also a language that forms, and is formed by those skills. Thus, for example, you have to

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57 Starling, *UnCorinthian Leadership: Thematic Reflections on 1 Corinthians*, 82, 83.
become familiar with what a trowel is and how it is to be used, as well as mortar, which bricklayers usually call “mud.” Thus “frogging mud” means creating a trench in the mortar so that when the brick is placed in the mortar, a vacuum is created that almost makes the brick lay itself. Such language is not just incidental to becoming a bricklayer but is intrinsic to the practice. You cannot learn to lay brick without learning to talk “right.”

The language embodies the history of the craft of bricklaying. So when you learn to be a bricklayer you are not learning a craft de novo but rather being initiated into a history. For example, bricks have different names—klinkers, etc.—to denote different qualities that make a difference about how one lays them. These differences are often discovered by apprentices being confronted with new challenges, making mistakes, and then being taught how to do the work by the more experienced.

All of this indicates that to lay brick you must be initiated into the craft of bricklaying by a master craftsman . . . The best teachers in a craft do not necessarily produce the best work, but they help us understand what kind of work is best. What is actually produced as best judgments or actions or objects within crafts are judged so because they stand in some determinative relation to what the craft is about.58

The balance of this dissertation focuses on wisdom. Following the set pattern of investigation, the next part considers what wisdom is. First, it reviews the study of wisdom in general. It then examines the understanding of wisdom from the grand narrative perspective of the Scriptures. Lastly, it observes why and how wisdom contributes positively to the task of leadership.

58 Ibid., 83, 84.
PART TWO

THE THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS
CHAPTER 3
IN SEARCH OF WISDOM

Having articulated some preliminary thoughts on leadership, this chapter seeks to understand the nature of wisdom. Unfortunately, like leadership there is little agreement on the definition of wisdom. This section first identifies and describes some of the current thinking on wisdom. It then sets out some features of wisdom identified by current research. Then it considers their application to leadership.

What Is Wisdom?

In order to argue that leaders could benefit from acquiring wisdom, it is necessary to understand what wisdom is. However, like leadership, wisdom is deceptively difficult to define. Perhaps this should be expected given the nature of wisdom itself. Robert Sternberg, one of the recognised leaders in wisdom research, has noted: to “understand wisdom fully and correctly probably requires more wisdom than any of us have . . . the recognition that total understanding will always elude us is itself a sign of wisdom.”

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There are various approaches to understanding wisdom. Current studies of wisdom can be categorised into three approaches: the historical and philosophical approach, the implicit approach, and the explicit approach.²

**Historical and Philosophical Approach to Wisdom**

Wisdom is a name given to a complex ontogenetic and cultural phenomenon. The importance of wisdom belies the amount of attention given to it in the academy in recent times. Wisdom is not explicitly nor intentionally taught in schools nor at universities. Students and potential employees are not assessed on their wisdom, and political leaders are not elected for it. Except for research psychologists, no profession has had a sustained interest in wisdom nor considers its pursuit necessary for the practice of their craft. Osbeck and Robinson recount Nicholas Smith’s observation that the entry for wisdom in the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy* “has come to vanish entirely from the philosophical map.”³ This reticence towards wisdom is a historical and cultural anomaly. Until recently, wisdom has been the capstone of human knowledge and life, and its pursuit both universal and extensive.⁴

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Those in the West would be familiar with Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and the wisdom of the Bible, but examples of wisdom abound across all civilisations from ancient Sumeria and Egypt, to the Mohenjo-daro and Chinese civilisations, from the Upanishads and Buddha to Lao-tzu and Confucius.\(^5\) Thinkers across time and cultures have tried to identify, differentiate, and study different mental processes. Wisdom is not simply collapsed into rationality, intelligence, knowledge, or experience, but there are personal, moral, emotional, and pragmatic elements to the thinking process.

Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde note that past thinkers have generally agreed that there are three dimensions entailed in wisdom: wisdom is a cognitive process, it is a virtue, and it is a personal good.\(^6\) Takahashi and Overton note that the Eastern understanding of wisdom emphasises and integrates non-cognitive domains of cognition, affection, and intuition.\(^7\) They describe Eastern understanding of wisdom as being pragmatic, transformative, and integrative.\(^8\) Pre-moderns have concluded that wisdom is the highest, most valuable, beneficial, yet elusive of all those processes. In the modern era, it is only mainly the non-Western cultures that are treating wisdom with the same respect as the pre-modern West.


\(^7\) Takahashi and Overton, “Cultural Foundations of Wisdom,” 36.

\(^8\) Ibid., 37.
The disfavour of wisdom is not a reflection of its obsolescence. It has been argued that its neglect is attributed to the epistemological turn and eventually predominance of empiricism. As noted already, this is the same intellectual movement that has impacted the study of leadership. When Kant erected the barrier between the phenomenal and noumenal worlds of things, he claimed that the only reality knowable to human beings is that which is observable. Aristotle thinks that there are five different conditions or states by which the truth is known: “art, scientific knowledge (episteme), practical wisdom (phronesis), philosophical wisdom (sophia) and intuitive reason.” Also, if the only knowable reality is the observable reality then wisdom is nothing more than a scientific understanding of the laws governing matter in motion, and sophia is synonymous with phronesis and episteme. It is telling that many current researchers in wisdom in leadership and management are only interested in the study phronesis. Notwithstanding, there is a recent resurgence in interest in wisdom. Initially in research psychology, the

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9 Osbeck and Robinson, “Philosophical Theories of Wisdom,” 61-63.


11 Osbeck and Robinson, “Philosophical Theories of Wisdom,” 67.


interest has been in investigating the positive aspects of ageing. The interest has since expanded to other academic disciplines, such as management, sociology, and education. There are various ways to categorise the current research into wisdom, for example, personal wisdom and general wisdom, or theories based on self-report measures or on performance measures. However, by far the most common categorisation of wisdom has been to group them under either the implicit theory or an explicit theory of wisdom.

Implicit or Lay Theories of Wisdom

The implicit theories study non-experts’ mental representation and belief of what wisdom is. The premise of the theories is that the thinking and language of a group of people or of a culture carry some representation of reality. Notable examples of implicit theories are the studies by Clayton and Birren, Holliday and Chandler, and those of Robert Sternberg. Typically, people of different ages and with different social backgrounds are asked to rate a large set of attributes (for example, smart, cheerful, 

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17 Bluck and Glück, “From the Inside Out,” 86.

18 Ibid.
helpful, loving, foolish, relaxed) according to the degree to which each is typical of people they believe to be wise. The studies have generally found that laypeople distinguish wisdom from other process, the lay construct of wisdom represents what they think are people at their best and wisdom is multidimensional.\textsuperscript{19}

Explicit or Expert Theories of Wisdom

Explicit theories differ from the implicit theories in two main respects.\textsuperscript{20} They tend to be based on performance measurement rather than self-reporting measurement. Further, wisdom is defined by experts. The definition may be based in part on implicit theories, but it also draws from philosophical, cultural-historical, and psychological approaches to wisdom. Explicit theories understand wisdom as an aspect of personality, post-formal dialectic thinking, or as an expanded form of intelligence and cognitive-emotional expertise.\textsuperscript{21} The best known explicit theory of wisdom is the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm.\textsuperscript{22}

Baltes, Smith, and others define wisdom as an “expert knowledge system in the fundamental pragmatics of life,” that is, in matters of life that are important but

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 87.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 89.
\textsuperscript{22} Baltes and Smith, “Toward a Psychology of Wisdom and its Ontogenesis,” 87-120.
uncertain. They validated their theory by testing subjects on situations or vignettes covering various types of life problems in three central task contexts: life planning, life review, and life management. These contexts were chosen because there is no recipe for their management. The subjects were invited to discuss and to give advice using the think aloud method. The quality of the answers was then scored by trained raters against a given protocol.

Both implicit and explicit theories of wisdom are constructs of cognitive scientists. Researchers from other academic disciplines have attempted to construct their own theories. An example is the Theory of Praxio-Reflexive Integrated Decision-Making (PRIDM) which was developed by the New Zealand researcher Ali Intezari. The research method is similar to that used in other Explicit Theories. Participants, in this case 37 CEOs and senior managers from both public and private sectors in New Zealand, were asked about their understanding of the concept of wisdom and its relationship with managerial decision-making. Using their responses and further feedback, Intezari identified four main sub-core categories to be associated with wise managerial decision-making: Multi-perspective Consideration, Cognitive-Emotional Mastery, Self-Other

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23 Ibid, 87.
24 Ibid, 97.
26 Ibid., 6.
Awareness, and Reflexivity. Intezari’s work evidences a burgeoning interest in researching how wisdom contributes to management and leadership.

**The Dimensions of Wisdom**

There is some agreement among wisdom researchers that wisdom is a higher, or the highest, level of mental function. Broadly, most researchers would agree that wisdom is a trait that enables its possessor to make good and effective decisions, however, there is not yet a consensus on the definition of wisdom. Notwithstanding, several observations can be made about the research effort so far.

**Wisdom is Multidimensional**

Researchers have concluded that wisdom is multidimensional. Holliday and Chandler identified five dimensions of wisdom which became the components used to measure it. They include: exceptional thinking, judgment and communication skills, general competence, interpersonal skills, and social unobtrusiveness. Sternberg has identified six: reasoning ability; sagacity, learning from ideas and environment,

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27 Ibid.


judgment, expeditious use of information, and perspicacity. 30 Webster recognises five: openness, emotional regulation, humour, critical life experiences, and reminiscence and reflectiveness, and Monika Ardelt has established three components: reflective, cognitive and affective.31 There are various components to wisdom in the Berlin Wisdom Paradigm. First, wisdom involves rich factual knowledge, such as the nature of typical events and decisions, vulnerability, emotions, and the needs of individuals. Second, a wise person has control over developmental goals across the life span.32 Third, wisdom has rich procedural knowledge, that is, it possesses a repertoire of mental procedures used to select, order, and use information for purposes of decision making and action planning.33 Fourth, the wise understands lifespan contextualism, in which they understand how lifespan contexts have implications for managing life goals, relativism, or the awareness of variations in values, goals, and life priorities, and have the ability to understand and manage uncertainty.34 Intezari suggests that wisdom in “managerial decision-making is achieved through an integration of multi-perspective consideration, self-other awareness, and cognitive-emotional mastery.”35


32 Baltes and Smith, “Toward a Psychology of Wisdom,” 100.

33 Ibid., 101.

34 Ibid., 98-103.

There is no question that wisdom is a cognitive process. It is a particular way of knowing. However, wisdom is different to knowledge, intelligence, and other mental processes and abilities. This is apparent from the responses of lay subjects in the implicit theories. It is also well understood by the pre-moderns. For Plato, sophia (highest form of knowledge because it is knowledge of things according to their true nature untainted by the shifting phenomena of the material world) is different to phronesis (practical wisdom of the statesmen and lawgivers) and episteme (scientific knowledge). Aristotle distinguishes theoreti̇kes (abstract or theoretical wisdom) from phronesis (practical wisdom). Augustine divides cognitive processes into sapientia (knowledge of the truth) and scientia (knowledge of the material world), while Aquinas distinguishes intellectual processes into wisdom, science, and understanding.

It is said that wisdom is different to other ways of thinking in that it is a distinctive way of knowing or an epistemological take on life. Wisdom is what psychologists have called metacognitive. Knowledge is knowing a mastery of isolated

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facts, or extensive data-base, but wisdom is knowing how.\textsuperscript{40} Intelligence entails the efficient ability to recall, analyse, and use knowledge, but wisdom is cognisant of the knowledge itself.\textsuperscript{41} Meachem contends that wisdom is not as much “the possession of cognitive skills or knowledge but a particular attitude towards knowing,”\textsuperscript{42} what he calls “a critical balance between knowing and doubting.”\textsuperscript{43} Wisdom understands knowledge as well as its limitations.\textsuperscript{44} Wise people know what they know and what they do not and cannot know. They also understand the significance of knowledge, lack of knowledge, and limitations. This is why an illiterate, uneducated person can be wise while a highly educated and intelligent person can be a fool. Mere knowledge or intelligence is not wisdom. Something more is involved.

Researchers postulate that wisdom has affective and conative dimensions.\textsuperscript{45} The wise person is one who can incorporate affective as well as cognitive dimensions of experience and make good decisions in the fundamental aspects of life. The common view is that a wise person is one who displays emotional mastery in his or her decisions


\textsuperscript{41} Sternberg, “Wisdom and its Relations to Intelligence and Creativity,” 153.


\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{44} Sternberg, “Wisdom and its Relations to Intelligence and Creativity,” 152.

\textsuperscript{45} Birren and Fisher, “The Elements of Wisdom: Overview and Integration,” 320.
and is not likely to be dominated by such passions as anger or fear. Kunzmann and Baltes, however, believe that emotions play a slightly different role in wisdom. They argue that the gaining of wisdom requires particular emotional experiences. For example, a person might have grown up in stimulating social environments, exposed to good education, and have a supportive family, however, the effectiveness of these environmental factors in developing wisdom is moderated by the person’s affective dispositions—his or her emotional stability, impulsivity, and neuroticism. Kunzmann and Baltes contend that certain emotions hinder or alternatively facilitate the activation of wisdom-knowledge and behaviour. Deidre Kramer holds a similar position. Others like Clayton and Birren understand wisdom as correlative to emotions—wise people are understanding, compassionate, sympathetic, empathetic, gentle, and peaceful especially in the face of adversity. Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura note that positive emotions are needed to motivate the acquisition of wisdom, and they are generated by wisdom.


47 Kunzmann and Baltes, “The Psychology of Wisdom,” 123.

48 Ibid.


Wisdom also has a conative dimension. A person has to consciously take action or make a decision given their cognitive and affective experiences. Wisdom is the integration and balancing of the various experiences and components.

Wisdom is multidimensional. Further, the relationship between these dimensions is important. Labouvie-Vief believes that wisdom is a balance between different kinds of thinking.\(^5^2\) Clayton and Birren conclude that wisdom involves the balancing of the cognitive, affective, and conative. Sternberg defines wisdom as the application of tacit knowledge as mediated by values towards the achievement of a common good through the balance among (a) intrapersonal (b) interpersonal (c) extrapersonal interests over the (a) short and (b) long terms, to achieve a balance among (a) adaptation to existing environments, (b) and shaping of existing environments, and (c) selection of new environments.\(^5^3\)

**Wisdom Is Virtuous**

The other aspect of wisdom that distinguishes it from other cognitive processes is that it has a moral element. Unlike other cognitive processes, wisdom is value-laden. Cunning, mere intellectual agility, is not wisdom.\(^5^4\) Plato writes that wisdom, more than anything else contains a divine element which always remains, and by this conversion is rendered useful and profitable . . . Did you never observe the narrow intelligence flashing from the keen eye of a clever rogue?\(^5^5\)

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\(^{54}\) Osbeck and Robinson, “Philosophical Theories of Wisdom,” 65.

The intelligent, knowledgable, and creative can be cunning or clever, but the wise will not be. Wisdom according to Plato enables a person to mediate the conflicting knowledge provided by instincts, habits, and reason to decide on the optimal course of action for the self and for others.\textsuperscript{56} For Aristotle it is \textit{theoretikes} that will lead to \textit{eudaimonia}, the “condition of flourishing and completeness that constitutes true and enduring joy.”\textsuperscript{57} Intelligence is necessary but insufficient to be wise, for the wise must be able to use the mind to be virtuous and adopt the “golden mean” in all the significant affairs of life.\textsuperscript{58} According to Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde, the wise is the one best equipped to judge (Aristotle, \textit{Metaphysics}), to keep the commonwealth in order (Aquinas, \textit{Summa}), to optimise the well-being of the community as the whole (Plato, \textit{Republic}).\textsuperscript{59} In the East, wisdom has also been considered a virtue. For Confucius, social good and harmony is accomplished by personal morality and virtue, cultivated by wisdom.\textsuperscript{60} For many modern researchers on wisdom, it is the moral element that distinguishes it from other cognitive processes.\textsuperscript{61} However, the problem for the modern wisdom theorists is their desire to maintain the values dimension of wisdom while maintaining a commitment to moral relativism or avoiding moral absolutism. This has resulted in the recent wisdom

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{56} Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde, “The Psychology of Wisdom,” 32.
  \item \textsuperscript{57} Robinson, “Wisdom Through the Ages,” 16, 17.
  \item \textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 20.
  \item \textsuperscript{59} Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde, “The Psychology of Wisdom,” 33.
  \item \textsuperscript{60} Birren and Svensson, “Wisdom in History,” 8.
  \item \textsuperscript{61} Sternberg, “Why Schools Should Teach Wisdom,” 231.
\end{itemize}
studies being focused on *phronesis* rather than *sophia*. This is a historic anomaly. The ancients consider virtue to be inextricably linked with transcendence.

Plato maintains that wisdom comes from the knowledge of the Good, a view shared by Indian and Chinese philosophy, and Christian theology. Wisdom should enable its possessor to transcend the particulars of “repressions, defences, bad faith, false consciousness, ethnocentrism, conditioned responses, suggestibility,” and other parochial interests and chart the way through the myriads of interests and choices to the right decisions. If wisdom is virtuous then it must be transcendent, personal, and pragmatic.

Wisdom must be transcendent. It is a seeking of truth. Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde call wisdom the “science of the whole.” When making choices to pursue a common good or the Good, a grander and broader view of life that transcends the concerns of self must be involved because a clearer view of reality is gained by climbing higher not deeper. Thus, wisdom is often associated with religion, both East and West, but is more or less now abandoned in the West. The ancients’ approach to knowledge tends to be cross-disciplinary, integrative, organismic, and synthetic while the modern approach tends to be highly segregated, specialised, mechanistic, and analytical.

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64 Ibid., 32.


Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde believe that the recent attention given to wisdom by psychologists such as Holliday and Chandler, and Meachem and Labouvie-Vief is an attempt to correct the modern epistemological bias.\textsuperscript{67} Wisdom is a holistic cognitive process requiring reflectivity and the capacity for self-examination in order to move knowledge beyond a fragmented and impassive relativity.\textsuperscript{68} Wisdom in this respect can be described as transcendent knowledge—the universal truth that is either Platonic immutable ideas, a systematic ecological consciousness, or the biblical vision of the Kingdom of God. If wisdom is virtuous, it must be pragmatic.

The Berlin Wisdom Paradigm is a clear example of this recognition. Wisdom is not just an exercise of the intellect. It is action oriented. Historically and cross-culturally, the pursuit of wisdom correlates with the good life.\textsuperscript{69} In some respect, this appears self-evident in a fool who might be intelligent and knowledgable but lacks common sense.\textsuperscript{70} Sternberg’s model distinguishes between academic and practical intelligence. The former is necessary but insufficient for the latter. Wisdom involves the application of tacit knowledge, which is action-oriented.\textsuperscript{71} Wisdom is a cognitive process that enables a

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid., 29.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 31.


person to recognise and successfully adapt and engage with the environment or context.\textsuperscript{72}

If wisdom is virtuous and pragmatic, it must be personal.

Wisdom is more than knowing about the Good. The knower must become the known.\textsuperscript{73} Wisdom is exhibited in knowing how to live through the actual lives of those who make good choices. It follows that the process of acquiring wisdom involves the transformation of self.\textsuperscript{74}

\textbf{Wisdom is Highly Desirable}

Wisdom has been recognised as the highest kind of intellectual attainment and therefore desirable. The current research into wisdom was initially motivated by the desire to find a positive aspect of the ageing mind, and to study and exploit an aspect of human strength.\textsuperscript{75} From a broader perspective, Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura see wisdom as the process of selecting worthwhile memes (information that is relevant to important life choices) in the process of cultural evolution and then transmitting them to a new generation.\textsuperscript{76} Solomon, Marshall, and Gardner add that wisdom is generative, that is, it enables its possessor to go beyond the current understanding of knowledge.\textsuperscript{77} They

\textsuperscript{72} Sternberg, “Foolishness,” 340.

\textsuperscript{73} Kupperman, “Morality, Ethics and Wisdom,” 247.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 248.

\textsuperscript{75} Baltes and Smith, “Toward a Psychology of Wisdom,” 87.

\textsuperscript{76} Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura, “The Role of Emotions in the Development of Wisdom,” 225, 226.

\textsuperscript{77} Solomon, Marshall, and Gardner, “Crossing Boundaries to Generative Wisdom,” 272.
describe wisdom as “worldmaking.” That is, the wise can integrate disparate ideas and materials from different contexts, which on the surface might appear unrelated and even inherently incompatible, and yet, when combined represent novel ways of responding to and shaping social contexts.\textsuperscript{78} The premise of this dissertation is that wisdom is the means to a greater end for Christian leaders. However, seekers of wisdom past and present would add that wisdom is not simply instrumental, but the pursuit of wisdom is a good in and of itself.

Holliday and Chandler describe wisdom as emancipatory—the pursuit of wisdom being itself the reward of an ecstatic joy and self-transcendence.\textsuperscript{79} Takahashi and Overton speak similarly of wisdom leading its possessor to a higher level of experiential realisation in the Eastern conception of wisdom.\textsuperscript{80} Past thinkers have characterised wisdom as a personal good, that is, a personally desirable state or condition. This is because the supreme good relativises and enables all other goods. Wisdom enables its possessor to be truly happy from health, fame, and wealth as Aristotle notes in \textit{Ethics} (X,8,1179a):

\begin{quote}
He who exercises his reason and cultivates it seems to be in the best state of mind and most dear to the gods . . . And he who is that will presumably be also the happiest: so that in this way too the philosopher will more than any other happy.\textsuperscript{81}
\end{quote}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[78] Ibid., 277.
\item[80] Takahashi and Overton, “Cultural Foundations of Wisdom,” 37.
\item[81] Quoted by Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde, “The Psychology of Wisdom,” 37.
\end{footnotes}
Wisdom is Elusive

Although wisdom is highly desirable, its value is in its scarcity. Wisdom is an uncommon commodity, possessed by few. Further, wisdom is uncommon not only in the sense that it is found in few, but that it is seen in the exceptional. Anyone can be wise as long as things are going reasonably well and are predictable. Wisdom can be captured and transmitted in rules, formulas, heuristics, and other cultural representations or in what Richardson and Pasupathi call “wisdom related action.”\textsuperscript{82} Rules, formulas, and heuristics can be learned, and wisdom related action can be emulated, adopted, and used to manage effectively difficult and complex issues of everyday life that one might not have encountered before. However, something else other than rules and formulas is needed with an exceptional issue or situation. Wisdom is needed because it is exceptional. Wisdom is displayed most evidently in the hard cases when difficult choices must be made, in areas of social relations that are “submoral” or when good choices cannot be made by simply following the rule.\textsuperscript{83} Brugman and others have insightfully called wisdom “expertise in uncertainty.”\textsuperscript{84} The fool always advances into danger, the coward always avoids it, but the wise knows when it is right to do one and not the other.\textsuperscript{85}

\textsuperscript{82} M.J. Richardson and M. Pasupathi, “Young and Growing Wise: Wisdom During Adolescence and Young Adulthood,” in \textit{A Handbook of Wisdom: Psychological Perspectives}, eds. Robert J. Sternberg and Jennifer Jordan (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2005), 139-159.

\textsuperscript{83} Kupperman, “Morality, Ethics and Wisdom,” 263.

\textsuperscript{84} Birren and Svensson, “Wisdom in History,” 17.

\textsuperscript{85} Osbeck and Robinson, “Philosophical Theories of Wisdom,” 68.
Wisdom is the deliberation of experiences and knowledge in order to produce the right solution or to have the right response in the particulars of the variables of the circumstance.86

Further, wisdom is also elusive not in the sense of scarcity, but in its vagueness and ambiguity. It has been observed that Western intellectual tradition values precise definition of concepts (the explicit theories of Wisdom confirms this point), but non-Western understanding of wisdom tends to be vague.87 Wisdom has been expressed most commonly in proverbs—prevalent in pre-modern, Eastern, African, and other more “traditional” societies. Proverbs, and wisdom in general, defy systematisation. They are ambiguous, and can conflict with one another. Proverbial wisdom does not measure up to the most basic Western criteria for serious thought, but it is argued that wisdom should not be judged by its internal coherence as a system of ideas, but by its power to connect with the incoherence and complexity of life.88 It is the ambiguity of wisdom that gives it its power and renders it elusive. Specialised knowledge shows immediate effects in declarative certitudes. Wisdom compares, raises questions, and suggests restraints.89 It is descriptive not prescriptive. It is living in a way that corresponds to reality. It is not mere knowledge nor moral admonition. Wisdom involves deep insight into the functioning,

86 Ibid., 67.
87 Takahashi and Overton, “Cultural Foundations of Wisdom,” 36.
meaning, and purposes of existence along with the ability to discern how to live correspondingly.90

Wisdom Can be Acquired

Both the past and present thinkers on wisdom agree that wisdom can be acquired. Acquisition of wisdom requires time and experience, but time and experience do not automatically result in the gaining of wisdom. In the lifespan studies on wisdom, the evidence confirms what is apparent that wisdom and age are not directly related, but wisdom can increase with age.91 The challenge for ancient and moderns alike is the acquisition of wisdom.

In Greek philosophy, wisdom is gained through contemplation of the Good (Plato) and the Final Cause (Aristotle).92 Whether wisdom is constructed as a feature of adults’ personality development, post-formal dialectic thinking, or as an expanded form of intelligence and cognitive-emotional expertise, the common belief view is that it can be acquired or developed.93 For some wisdom can be acquired by cultivating the right affections or emotions. For others, wisdom is nurtured through the learning of wise heuristics such as proverbs.94 Jordon identifies several factors that have been found to


facilitate the acquisition of wisdom. First, development of moral reasoning can facilitate the acquisition of wisdom because moral reasoning creates a more reflective and evaluative way to perceive life experiences into one’s own knowledge base. Second, professional training and practice in fundamental life issues can help the nature of wisdom. Last, wisdom can grow through contact and discussion with a valued other. Staudinger, Dorner, and Mickler argue that wisdom-related behaviour can be developed by nurturing moral reasoning, positive mood-induction, and relaxation.

**Wisdom for Leaders**

From the foregoing, some observations can be made of how wisdom can add value to leadership and the development of leaders. First, wisdom will enable leaders to balance, integrate, and moderate. One of the most difficult tasks of leadership is the challenge of conflicting interests of self, those being led, those outside, and those who are yet to come. This is the function of wisdom. Wisdom is reflective and integrative. The wise leader leads for the benefit of others and the self. Wisdom enables a leader to integrate the great width (empathy), height (intelligence), and depth (reflectivity) to form a more complex and concrete perspective on problem and to chart a course of action through it. The wise person gains rich life experience through spontaneous and affective

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involvement with the world and brings clarity and form to this experience by finding an intellectual distance.\textsuperscript{97}

Further, wisdom enables a leader to be trusted. Those who are led are invited to trust the judgment, actions, and thinking of their leader. A wise person is trustworthy because they can give good quality advice based on real world experience, rather than simply applying pre-learned formulae. A wise person can be trusted not allow their personal agenda and interest to compromise the common good. To be wise is to be able to balance competing interest and have a wider and longer term perspective. A wise person will not be caught up in the anxiety of the situation; they are able to have clarity, seeing through the clutter to focus on the ultimate goal. Wise leaders are critical, independent thinkers. They are world makers, that is, they are able to cross accepted wisdom, procedure, and thinking.

Second, wisdom enables leaders to address difficult problems. Another significant challenge of leadership is that of complexity and uncertainty. As suggested above, a leader must both manage complexity and initiate change. An ordinary leader can effectively apply formulas, heuristics, principles, and logic to common problems, but a wise leader is able to make good judgment when confronted with uncertainty and intractable difficulties with no clear-cut solutions. Further, because wisdom is the ability to apply the general to the particular, and because every domain in which a leader leads is different, wisdom will distinguish a good leader from ordinary ones. A good leader

\textsuperscript{97} Csikszentmihalyi and Rathunde, “The Psychology of Wisdom,” 35.
recognises the particularity of the domain rather than uncritically applying pre-
determined formulas, processes, and solutions. Furthermore, a wise leader will also be
able to recognise when to apply past solutions and long-standing practices rather than
simply ignoring them for novelty, progress, or innovation.

Third, wisdom can be acquired. Good leadership is not limited to the genetically
blessed, those with access and resources, or the privileged. The capacity for good
leadership is available to all.
CHAPTER 4

WISDOM FROM ABOVE

The writers of biblical material are greatly interested in wisdom. There are significant sections of the Scriptures devoted to articulating, studying, and teaching it. Further, there is great coherence and integration of the wisdom material in the Scriptures. This chapter considers an understanding of wisdom from the Bible. It will also compare and contrast the biblical and general understandings of wisdom. Lastly, it will explore how the biblical conception of wisdom might relate to leadership.

Biblical Wisdom

It has already been observed that there has been a strong link between wisdom and religious traditions, including Christianity. Contemporary thinkers of wisdom have largely sidelined or bypassed the Christian account and understanding of wisdom principality because they think it has to do with faith in revealed truth, rather than being rationalistic or evidentialistic.¹ A more careful and deeper reflection on the biblical material on wisdom, however, shows that biblical wisdom corresponds with many of the

insights from wisdom research, but it also questions, challenges, and adds to those insights. The Scriptures provide an alternate perspective that could enrich the understanding of wisdom.

There is great interest in wisdom in the Bible. This is clearly evidenced by the amount of material in the Canon that can be characterised as wisdom—the book of Proverbs, sections of the Psalms, Job, Ecclesiastes, and possibly Songs of Songs. Together they are often referred to as the Wisdom Literature, considered to be a distinct genre. In the inter-testamental period, two other books were added to the wisdom corpus, the Book of Wisdom, also called the Wisdom of Solomon, and Sirach. Apart from the longer compositions, wisdom is also expressed in shorter forms—in maxims of aphorisms, proverbs, and psalms. The subject of Old Testament wisdom is varied. It could be high minded and spiritual, such as poetry about the Creator and His creation (Pr 8), but it could also be mundane, earthy, and irreligious, such as advice about friendship: “Do not make friends with a hot-tempered person, do not associate with one easily angered” (Pr 22:24), or life lessons from the smallest of God’s creatures (Pr 6:6; 30:25).

Two aspects of Old Testament wisdom have troubled scholars: first, its similarity to

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contemporary non-Israelite wisdom, and second, the lack of explicit reference to the salvation-historical narrative.

Biblical wisdom is also remarkable similarity to non-Israelite wisdom. Sumerian and Babylonian wisdom appears to be older than the Bible’s. The Egyptian’s *Wisdom of Amenemope* is often considered to be the origin of part of the Proverbs (Pr 22:17-23:11). There are also similarities between the longer more complex wisdom compositions, for example, the Babylonian Ludlul bēl nēmeqi is often compared to the book of Job. Israel might well have borrowed, or perhaps more accurately, learned it from her neighbours. There is evidence internal to Scripture that there might have been cross-fertilisation of ideas (1 Ki 4:29-34; 10:1-9).

This is consistent with what Christians have understood about the process of enscripturation and the doctrine of inspiration. Christians believe that God is neither silent nor absent. They are convinced that God can be known, but only by God. The knowledge of God comes by revelation, not by discovery or contemplation, and it comes to the human knowers in time and space, through God’s special intervention with His creation in great acts of power. Christians are also convinced that God is not absent in the universe. He continues to rule and sustain the world in secret and hidden ways. Whether

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4 Ibid., 42-43.
5 Ibid., 43.
through acts of special intervention or through the mundane operation of providence, the meaning of God’s activity can only be understood by God, through His special revelation. It should not be surprising that Israel could learn from her neighbours. After all, they all belong to the same humanity. They face the same challenges of personal and social interaction, trying to learn to live in harmony with their environment and each other. As Goldsworthy observes, Israel’s wisdom might have been part of a wider movement of “common human activity to learn about life and seeking to pass on the gathered wisdom to successive generations.” What differentiates Israel’s wisdom from that outside is her experience of Yhwh.

Biblical wisdom is fideistic, but it is also evidentialistic. Wisdom is not co-terminus with revelation. Like her neighbours, the Israelites sought to understand the world through observation, reflection, and contemplation (Pr 24:32). Nevertheless, they were convinced that the result of these activities can only be properly understood in light of their experience of Yhwh, that is, in light of revelation.

The tapestry of Old Testament wisdom material can be weaved together into a coherent and unified theme. Old Testament wisdom is concerned with “what life consists of and how one can best live the authentic life.” Mundane and sublime, sacred and profane, earthly and heavenly are false dichotomies in biblical wisdom. To live well, a person must know humanity and the world. one only truly knows the world by knowing God, its creator. The theme of wisdom continues into the New Testament. Jesus is

\[\text{\textsuperscript{10}}\text{Ibid., 42.}\]
\[\text{\textsuperscript{11}}\text{Ibid., 45.}\]
portrayed as the wiseman. It is not insignificant that he and his work are called the Wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24-30).

The Bible is a coherent volume that grew over time. A development of thinking on wisdom is therefore to be expected resulting in a textured and variegated unity. It is therefore reasonable to anticipate that wisdom is not a concept with a single and narrow meaning in the Bible, but a textured and variegated theological concept. A biblical theological approach, the same approach that was applied above to understand leadership, will be applied to seek to understand the concept of wisdom in the balance of this chapter.12

Wisdom in Creation

The God of the Bible is wise (Is 28:29; Rm 11:33-36). His wisdom is revealed in His work of creation (c.f. Pr 3:19; Job 28:25-27). In His wisdom, God created the world, and continues to sustain it. Human beings are created to live in God’s world, and to do so in wisdom. In fact, wisdom is fundamental to their ontology. Wisdom, as an integrative and generative intellectual process to achieve the good, is arguably the outworking of the cultural mandate of Genesis 1:26-28. Further, human wisdom is dependent and contingent.

Human beings are not created omniscience or omnipotent. They know only by revelation. It is true that human beings are created to know by discovery. Discovery is part of their role as God’s image-bearer. Human beings are created as participants in the

12 Goldsworthy, “Gospel and Wisdom.”
divine’s purpose of moving all things towards His rest. They are to do this by using their minds and senses to uncover the hidden and glorious realities of universe, their interconnectedness, to name them, and to give glory to the Creator. Discovery of the universe is by the scientific method as well as through music and art, which is seen the fact that the wise in later salvation-history are the craftsman and artisans (Ex 26:1). It is also discovered through leadership, as kings know how to reign by wisdom (Pr 8:15,16). Still, the knowledge by discovery is limited and contingent.

Human knowledge is purposefully limited. The limitation is implicit in fact of creation and explicit in God’s prohibition against eating from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Gn 2:15). The limit on knowledge creates a scaffolding for the relationship between God and human beings. Human knowing is to be done in relationship, and human beings must pursue knowledge as contingent beings, dependent on the Creator and His Word. The pursuit of knowledge beyond this relational boundary and the knowledge that results from this pursuit is no longer good. The nature of this limitation to knowledge is epistemological, spiritual, and moral. Thus, not all human knowledge is wise, primarily when it fails to recognise its limitations and dependency. Such knowledge will bring about harm rather than good.

Wisdom and the Fall

The account of the Fall has much to add to the concept of wisdom. The serpent is described as crafty (ʿā·rūm, that is, tricky or cunning), a perverted wisdom. His inducement to Eve was the promise of God-like knowledge. However, presumably Adam and Eve already knew good and evil, obedience and disobedience. To know in this
context must mean something else. It is suggested that to know good and evil meant to be
the determiner of good and evil, that is, epistemologically, morally, and spiritually
independent from God.\textsuperscript{13} Ironically, the result of human rebellion is the distortion of the
human capacity to know.

Sin is fundamentally foolish; it is the rejection of the Creator and His word. As a
result of sin entering into the world, human beings cannot truly understand themselves
and the world they live in. Theologians speak of the noetic effect of sin. Human
knowledge is tainted because the person of the knower is compromised and biased.
Human sin is not neutral ignorance of reality, but an active suppression of the truth (Rm
1:18-25). Notwithstanding, God remains God and the world remains His good creation (1
Tm 4:4).

Since the Fall, human beings must accommodate the reality of their diminished
capacity in the task of fulfilling the Cultural Mandate. Human beings must now navigate,
by the grace and providence of God, through life towards death in the context of
uncertainties, travails, and dangers, operating between the freedom of human
responsibility and conditions of divine purposes.

Wisdom in Israel

Israel was deeply interested in wisdom. As noted already, there is considerable
similarity between the wisdom of Israel and contemporary cultures—in content and in
form. Wisdom has been crystallised in proverbs, aphorisms, riddles, and parables of the

\textsuperscript{13} Herman Bavnik, \textit{Reformed Dogmatics: Abridged in One Volume}, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids,
people of Israel. The purpose of wisdom in Israel is to enable its possessor the mastery of life, to think and act in such a way that makes for a truly human existence, the blessed life or Shalom. Wisdom is a technical term for a way of thinking. It is a way of writing, and a way of educating. There is no attempt to seek a single overarching definition of the concept of wisdom. It might be helpful to think of a wisdom as a movement in Israel, perhaps going through an evolutionary process from folk sayings to adoption for educational purposes to sustained intellectual contemplation.\(^\text{14}\) However, Israel’s relationship with wisdom is different to that of the Nations. Wisdom was at the core of her self-identification. Israel considered itself to be wise (Rm 3:9). The possession of wisdom was part of her witness to the nations, and she would bring them to know and worship the only wise God by her wisdom (Is 2:2-4; Mic 4:1-4).

Several things can be said about the wisdom of Israel. First, wisdom was clearly linked to leadership in Israel, but the relationship was not absolute nor always positive. Wisdom has been attributed to Moses (Acts 7:22), and was one of the key qualifications of Israel’s leaders in the Exodus (Ex 18; Nu 11; Deut 1.15). Joshua, Moses’ successor, is described as a man of wisdom (Gn 41:8,33,39; Ex 7:11; Dt 42.9; Jos 1:8). When a monarchy was anticipated, the king to be chosen had to have been wise (Dt 17:15). The leaders of God’s people outside the land were also characterised by wisdom. Joseph (Gn 37-45, c.f. Ac 7:10) was a wise man. He understood dreams (an ability of the wise men in the ancient world, c.f. Gen 41:8). He governed well (Gn 41:33). He brought blessings to

Egypt and dealt compassionately with his brothers. 15 Daniel another leader outside the Land, this time in exile, is noted for his wisdom (Da 2:20-23; see also 1:20, 2:14, 5:11,13). Ezra, a post-exilic leader of Israel is said to be a man of wisdom (Ezra 7:25). Although the Old Testament records different categories of leaders: priests who taught the Law, wise men who instructed the young and the ignorant, and prophets who spoke the Word from the Lord (Jer 18, c.f. Matt 23:34), the wisdom of God is associated with all of them (Dt 7:5-6).

The highpoint of the wisdom movement in Israel is the beginning of the monarchy period with David and Solomon. 16 The nation was politically and theologically united under David. This provided the ground for the growth of wisdom under Solomon. Solomon’s leadership of Israel began with a prayer for wisdom indicating his recognition of its necessity for the national leadership of Israel (1 Ki 3:7-9), the recognition confirmed by Yhwh; the narrative of Solomon was constructed to portray his wisdom. An example of his simple and elegant judicial deliberation was recorded (1 Ki 3:16-28), as well as a description of his wealth and the security he was able to provide to Israel (1 Ki 4). The crowning display of Solomon’s wisdom was his interaction with the nations, personified in the visit of the queen of Sheba (1 Ki 10). The lack of historical reference in the wisdom corpus has already been noted. The only reference is to Solomon (Ps 72, 127;


16 Goldsworthy, “Gospel and Wisdom,” 386.
Pr 1:1-22:16; Ec 1:1-18; and So 1:1). Israel’s wisdom movement would become synonymous with Solomon (Pr 1:1; Ec 1:1; So 1:1).

Second, the wisdom of Israel is ambivalent and eschatological. The association of Israel’s wisdom with Solomon is significant. Solomon was an exemplar of Israel’s wisdom, but also of her folly. The nations would come to Solomon for his wisdom, as his exceeded theirs (1 Ki 3-10). Yet, Solomon’s heart was turned against the Yhwh by the daughters of the surrounding peoples (1 Ki 9:7). Because of Solomon, Israel became the very antithesis of her calling to be the wisdom of God for the Nations in Deuteronomy 4:6. In time, false wisdom would become institutionalised under the corrupt national leadership. Old Testament wisdom is eschatological.

The prophets denounced the false wisdom of Israel (Is 29:13b-14; Jr 8:8-9), and anticipated a period of renewal where wisdom would be redeemed in the untrammelled rule of God of His restored people. The rule would be brought about by One on whom the Spirit of wisdom would rest (Is 9:6; 11:1-3). This one would reign with wisdom of the Lord and therefore in His righteousness (cf. Is 32; Mt 12.42). The *summum bonum* of Old Testament wisdom is not an abstract platonic ideal, but the concrete righteous rule of God on earth.

Third, Israel’s wisdom is a result of her experience of Yhwh, particularly in the great salvation events of the Exodus and of the cutting of covenant at Sinai. It follows that there is an extensive connection between wisdom and the Law, and therefore the cult,

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the priesthood, and the Temple. Later the prophet Jeremiah pronounced that the keeping of the Law is wisdom and its rejection, folly (Jr 8:7-0).

The apostle Paul would later explicate the pedagogical function of the Law (Gal 3:24). The purpose of the Law was to train Israel in holiness as it stipulates the conduct of life, and Israel was to learn to express her faithfulness to Yhwh and her witness to the nations by obeying the Law. However, not every possible contingency of life is stipulated in the Law. The good life cannot be achieved in the mechanical application of formulas and heuristics. The Law expresses broad principles, such as the principle of love (Lv 19:18). It then sets out instances or examples of the application of that principle. Those principles and instances must be understood in light of the historical narrative that accompanies the Law. Something additional is needed to apply the generalities of the Law to the particulars of life’s many situations, that is, wisdom. Wisdom is gained by the fear of the Lord (1 Ki 8:43).

As the current researchers into wisdom have identified, wisdom is affective. Whatever else the fear of Yhwh involves it has an affective content. That is, to be wise one must feel rightly towards Yhwh. Of course, to fear Yhwh is not just an emotion. There are cognitive, conative, moral, and spiritual dimensions to the fear of Yhwh. To fear Yhwh is to trust Him (Ex 14:31), to lovingly obey, serve, and worship Him (Dt 6:2; 10:12, 20-21). To fear Yhwh also involves hating evil. The phrase “The beginning of wisdom is the fear of Yhwh” is a constant refrain in the wisdom literature (e.g. Pr 1:7; 18 John Goldingay, “Wisdom on Death and Suffering,” in Understanding Wisdom: Sources, Science and Society, ed. W.S. Brown (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundational Press, 2000), Kindle: Chapter 5.
2:4-6; 9:10; 15:33; Ps 111:10; Job 28:28). If wisdom were transcendent knowledge, it is impossible to know reality other than knowing the One who has created and sustains that reality, and to be in correct relationship with Him. It is the beginning of wisdom for the Israelite. To fear God is to approach the task of discovery of knowing and living from the posture of humility, acknowledging dependency. The fear of Yhwh however is also the goal or point of arrival of wisdom (Pr 2:5). This accounts for the similarity and differences between Old Testament wisdom and its pagan counterpart.

As the rest of humanity, the Israelites were concerned with the natural sciences, human behaviour, ethics, commerce and trade, politics, and social relationships. Still, these were studied in the context of her experience of Yhwh. The fear of Yhwh is not a statement of law nor an admonition to the obvious but a revelation of the subtle. It speaks concretely to illuminate a wide range of situations. There is an openness with the idea of fearing Yhwh. Its power is its ability to connect with the incoherence and complexity of life. The power of this maxim is demonstrated in the way it was developed and applied in salvation-history. The development is captured by Professor Hubbard’s aphorism: “Proverbs seem to say, ‘These are the rules for life, try them and find that they work.’ Job and Ecclesiastes say, ‘We did and they don’t.’”¹⁹

The book of Proverbs contains the most basic and perhaps the earliest expression of wisdom in Israel’s wisdom movement. It is full of short epigrammatic sayings, usually two lines couplets set in poetic rhythm that describe in declaratory fashion the moral and

¹⁹ Quoted by Goldingay, “Wisdom on Death and Suffering.”
social “facts of life.”

This is normally done by pointing to the cause and effect of particular acts and attitudes (e.g. Pr 10:16) or by comparing and contrasting in parallelism (Pr 12:1). The usefulness of the proverbs lies in their ambiguity and openness, and even in their apparent contradiction (Pr 26:4-5). The usefulness of the Proverbs is not their internal coherence but their connection with reality.

The primary purpose of the Proverbs is education in a school or a home “for giving prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young.” (Pr 1:4) The proverbs are not laws. They are prescriptive not declarative. Or to put it another way, the proverbs teach “knowing how” more than “knowing that.” As Adam puts it, Proverbs “are more than good advice for a happy life . . . They invite their readers to know God and receive life, and to warn them of the foolishness that produces death.”

The Proverbs give the Israelites “practical advice on how to love the Lord their God with all their heart, with all their soul, and with all their strength, and on how to love their neighbours as themselves (Dt 6:5; Lev 19:18).”

There is almost no appeal to revealed knowledge in the Proverbs. The method of the Proverbs is that of the scientific method: observations, hypothesis, and testing. Nevertheless, unlike the current scientific method, Proverbs prefers ethics over

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21 Ibid.


23 Ibid., 20.
metaphysics and epistemology, induction over deduction, illustrative over the abstract, and communication over thought. The epistemological assumption, the assumption that enables the task of pursuing wisdom, is that there is an orderliness in the universe that reflects the wisdom of the Creator God whom Israel had experienced as Yhwh, their Saviour.

The grounding in creation is reflected in wisdom’s characterisation of sin. Sin is not the breaking of the Covenant but the repudiation of wisdom, an act against the created order. The Law says, “no murder” and “no adultery.” The Proverbs would say, “Murder and adultery are foolish because they will lead to destruction.” Likewise, salvation is not the reward of wisdom. The blessing of wisdom is wealth, health, and the good life. This connection with creation renders the book of Proverbs optimistic. Wisdom is within the grasp of anyone who would take it. Life and life to the full can be had by all who fear Yhwh.

The book of Job serves as a counter-point to the optimism of Proverbs. No longer is wisdom expressed in short pithy sayings, but in a longer literary work. This allows for comparison and a more sustained exploration of ideas. If the wisdom of Proverbs is the road map to life because of the orderliness in creation, then Job is the part of the journey where the map is smudged. Wisdom calcified into a rigid interpretation of reality will invariably clash with experience. There are exceptions and contradictions to the general observable causal relationship between actions and outcomes. This too is part of wisdom

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24 This is what Nussbaum has suggested to be the methodology of wisdom compared to the methodology of empiricism.
because it embraces reality including the chaos and the disconnect between cause and effect. The contradictions in the world remind the student of wisdom in that they do not have the vantage point to see the whole. The concept of wisdom in the Bible, which modern researchers have confirmed, involves the acceptance that there is a limit to human knowledge and understanding. Israel’s experiences with Yhwh gave her the assurance that she could move through this uncertain, contradictory, and unjust world with confidence because there is one who sits above it. Job develops the wisdom of Proverbs—that the fear of the Lord must involve an epistemic humility. Job warns against the hardening wisdom into rigid formulas.

The other counter-point to the optimism of Proverbs is present in the book of Ecclesiastes or Qohelet. Qohelet raises a problem that is essentially disregarded in past and present pursuits of wisdom—the problem of death. Death makes living well futile or hebel—the idea of trying to capture something that cannot be captured and that may destroy the seeker in the attempt.\(^{25}\) Joy brought by philosophical contemplation and altruism is meaningful, but only for a moment. Much of human existence is marked by labour and toil with dust as their reward, rendering joy and altruism as vanities. This was anticipated in Genesis 3. The effect of the curse would now be spelled out—framed in terms of creation rather than covenant and law, as was common in the wisdom tradition of Israel. Human folly at the Fall now issues in futility, vanity, and frustration. Qohelet’s observation is not simple.

At points Qohelet appears to suggest that the answer to futility is not in wisdom. Qohelet uses the scientific method to prove that the method itself is inadequate. The search for reality is thwarted by the actuality of death (Ecc 2:14, 15). The challenge to the search for wisdom is none other than reality’s hiddenness. There is a futility and frustration to the search. Nevertheless, Qohelet still affirms the value and pursuit of wisdom. Wisdom can still powerfully enable life to be lived well before death. It is wise to recognise that wisdom is dependent, uncertain, tentative, and penultimate. It is foolish to make joy, altruism, the Good, or even wisdom itself the ultimate. Wisdom is sub-metacognitive. Qohelet forces all those interested in wisdom to look to the future. The logic and nature of wisdom is such that it is always in danger of putting its own pursuit in jeopardy by trying to adopt a comprehensive view of the world of experience without God. Death, the judgment of God on human hubris, is a real and concrete reminder of the limits of wisdom. The pursuit of wisdom can only be satisfied when the problem of the curse of death is resolved in the physical and phenomenal world, and not just ignored, rationalised, or speculated away. Qohelet counsels the wise to fear the Lord who is the wellspring of life. God will and can deal with death.

Biblical wisdom is the domain where redemption and creation converge. Righteousness, judgment, and salvation are often understood only in moral, spiritual, and judicial terms. Righteousness in the wisdom corpus is expressed in terms of the created order in the universe. The God of the nations and of the universe is none other than Yhwh, the God of Israel. The restoration of creation, compromised by human sin, is an integral part of salvation (Is 32:15-18). The Old Testament prophets look forward to a
time in the future when the knowledge of God and his righteousness will reign untrammelled in the world. Order will replace chaos. Life will replace death. A good life is one that is lived in wisdom and righteousness. Most of the time a wise life will ensue in blessings, but sometimes it does not. The wicked sometimes flourish, and the righteous wise do not. In the end, the wise and the wicked are met with the same destiny—death.

The Redemption of Wisdom

All the expectations, aspirations, and questions of the Old Testament are fulfilled and answered in the New. The focal point of the fulfilment is a single person (Ep 1:9-10). Jesus Christ mediates God’s rule and wisdom. He is the true wise man for he is the one who understands and lives according to reality. There is a coherence between the Old and New Testaments, in that they are centred around the person and work of Jesus Christ. This is the claim of Jesus himself (Lk 24:44). This unity in Scripture applies not only to redemption, but also to wisdom.

There are three aspects to wisdom and Jesus. First, the Gospels present Jesus as the wise man. He is greater in wisdom than the wisest in the Old Testament (Mt 12:42). He is the one to whom the wise of the nations come to pay homage (Mt 2). Jesus taught as one who is wise using the methods of Old Testament wisdom - proverbs, aphorisms, and parables (Mt 5-7, esp.7:24-27; Lk 14:10; Mt 13:4; 5:44; 29:12). Jesus is the wise son of David—the one who fears the Lord (Jn 6,15; Hb 5:8). He perfectly obeys his Father’s will. As a result, he lived according to reality, making right decisions in the right way in the right context at the right time.
Second, Jesus is the wisdom of God (1 Cor 1:24,30). God created the world through the Son (Col 1:15-19, c.f. Prov 8). Jesus reveals God (Jn 14:8-9; Hb 1:1-3), and will bring redemption to creation (Rm 8:18-21). In and through him, God is restoring creation to its proper order. That is, Jesus is the beginning and end of reality. Wisdom in the New Testament must be found in Jesus. “The fear of the Lord” now means faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Third, not only is Jesus wise, he offers wisdom to those who come to him (Lk 10:21,22). If the Fall has had a noetic effect on the human mind and the human attempt to understand reality, then the salvation of Jesus involves the redemption of the human mind and the transformation of their capacity to grasp reality. Paul asserts that in Jesus is “hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Col 2:3). It is a remarkable claim that biblical wisdom belongs to everyone who comes to Jesus: “For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1 Cor 1:22-24).

The loci of God’s wisdom are found in the crucified Jesus. Further, it shows that human wisdom outside of Jesus, albeit powerful, cannot provide a true understanding of reality nor enable human beings to live according to it. Jesus of Nazareth and his death on a Roman cross enables an alienated humanity to be restored into a right relationship with God. Jesus answers the yearning of Qohelet. He deals with the epistemological and existential problem of death and suffering by overcoming it. He promises to do the same
for anyone who puts their trust in him. Work and life in the meantime does not need to be
vanity (1 Cor 15:38).

The wisdom of the gospel of Jesus is not a new philosophy to rival Athens, but a
new way to reconnect with reality. Christian wisdom is equated with righteousness,
holiness, and redemption (1 Cor 1:30). Justification is an intellectual as much as a moral,
affective, and conative concept with consequences for all aspects of the person. The
justified will think, feel, live, and will well. Staring notes, “There is such a thing as
Christian wisdom, and it is essential to the task of leadership among God’s people. But
. . . it must be genuine Christian wisdom—a wisdom that thinks and speaks and acts with
fear and trembling before God, that boasts not in itself but in him, and generates pattern
of speech and life hat fit with the message of the crucified Christ.”

If wisdom is transcendent knowledge, then the gospel of Christ is wise in an
unparalleled way. For in Jesus Christ “God has made known all wisdom and insight the
mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the
fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth” (Ep
1:9,10). That is, Jesus reveals God’s ultimate plan for all human and natural history, a
revelation secured by the Resurrection and the sending of the Spirit (Rm 1:4; Ep 1:14).
Wisdom is the ability to assess all present reality against that goal, and to align oneself
with it.

26 Starling, UnCorinthian Leadership: Thematic Reflections on 1 Corinthians, 56, 57. Italic
original.
Paul does not suggest that there is no validity in knowledge outside the Gospel. First Corinthians 1:22-24 itself bears the marks of an emotive, hyperbolic, and memorable wisdom saying. Paul is saying that human intellectual and moral achievements are ultimately relativised by Jesus Christ. It follows that worldly wisdom may still be wise in its domain. Worldly wisdom, in the sense of making observations about the world and human experience, is necessary because the cultural mandate is still current. Human beings are still to exercise stewardship of God’s world, but wisdom becomes folly when it usurps its place by laying claim to ultimate reality. As Starling observes:

Secular wisdom is “secular” in the sense that it pertains to the tasks and structures of this age, but it is not “secular” in the sense of being value-free, or devoid of spiritual content or religious content . . . There are certain lessons about leadership that can be learnt from the secular business and political sphere, just as there are lessons that can be learnt from the ants (Prov 6:6) and the birds (Matt 6:26), but in seeking to learn those lessons we must not forget that our measurements of what makes leadership “effective” and “successful” are relative to what we value and worship.”

The biblical account of wisdom is similar to the general observations of wisdom discussed above. Biblical wisdom would also say that wisdom is a cognitive process with an affective component. It is a pragmatic and personal virtue of transcendent knowledge. It is uncommon, but can be acquired. Further, biblical wisdom provides a coherent account for these features of wisdom.

Wisdom is virtuous and desirable because it connects with the reality of God. It mimics the very character of God, and it helps living well in God’s world. In fact,

27 Ibid., 50,51.
wisdom is what human beings are created for. Since God made the universe in wisdom, it is attainable. Wisdom is practical because God is committed to the material world. The fundamental difference between biblical and worldly wisdom is not between discovered and revealed knowledge, but the point of reference. The biblical account of wisdom takes the experience of God by Israel and the person of Jesus of Nazareth seriously. In biblical wisdom, God is the start and the goal. In the future, He will judge the quality of human actions and attitudes as wise or foolish.

God has created human beings to function by the integration of two sources of truth. They are not equal sources which operate side by side, but are complementary. The first source of truth is revelatory. God reveals what is impossible for limited creatures to know by their own minds and senses, that is, the real nature of the order of the universe. The second source of truth is that of reason and senses, however reason itself is not a source of truth as a way of programming information. Reason is unable to process information correctly if it has a distorted view of reality, including the knowledge of the self. This is why smart people can be so “stupid.”28 Reasoning is not intelligence or memory, but a moral and spiritual choice.

### Wisdom for Christian Leaders

Several conclusions can be dawn about the intersection between biblical wisdom and Christian leadership. First, the pursuit of wisdom is a human task, not just a leader’s task. Wisdom is especially beneficial to a leader’s function because his or her role is to

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participate in God’s work, and wisdom would enable a leader to perceive reality and to act according to it. Further, biblical leadership is democratic—anyone can be a leader, and any leader can be a good leader because anyone can acquire wisdom. Not all are good leaders because few make the choice to acquire wisdom. Also, if leaders are to act virtuously then wisdom is necessary because it is the only mental process that has a moral component.

The truly wise leader must learn to relate to God, to their fellow human beings, and the whole creation. In the process, they must come to terms with the reality that that order has been complicated by the intrusion of sinful chaos. The leader who fears God is not one who retreats into some fake spirituality. The wise leader can see that a life being lived to the full ultimately can only come with the restoration of all relationships interrupted and confused by sin.

Second, if sin and folly are two different ways of describing the same problem, then the biggest challenge to leaders must be to redress their foolishness. This might explain why highly intelligent, knowledgable, and effective leaders fail or experience derailment. Wagner has suggested that intelligent and knowledgable leaders have a bias in the acquisition of information. They process information according to what Stanovich has referred as *dysrationalia.* Wisdom is the ‘tree of life’ (Pr 3:18), and it is freely offered to all (Pr 8:1-9). However, the acquisition of wisdom is arduous and “morally and

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behaviourally demanding.”\textsuperscript{30} If wisdom has an affective element, then it must also be affectively insistent. Leaders may resist the seduction of Lady Folly (Pr 9:13-18), but this will require “prudence, discretion, self-discipline, integrity, humility, sound judgment, hard work, acceptance of correction, keeping promises, generosity, and wise and honest speech” and the eschewing of “foolishness, erratic behaviour, pride, arrogance, ambition, dishonesty, laziness, evil behaviour, and destructive speech (Pr 8:12-14, 12:1-28, Ps 15).”\textsuperscript{31}

Third, a biblical account of wisdom explains why the biblical concept of it is not uniquely for Christians. Adam notes that “People are given [God’s] wisdom even if they do not know God,” quoting John Calvin’s commentary on 1 Corinthians in support:

For what is more noble than the reason of man, by which he stands out far above all animals? How greatly deserving of honour are the liberal sciences, which refine a man so as to make him truly human! Besides, what a great number of rare products they yield! Who would not use the highest praise to extol statesmanship, by which states, empires, and kingdoms are maintained? —to say nothing of other things! I maintain that the answer to this question is that Paul does not utterly condemn either the natural insight of men, or wisdom gained by practice and experience, or education of the mind through learning; but what he affirms is that all those things are useless for obtaining spiritual wisdom.\textsuperscript{32}

Calvin’s comment reflects his understanding of providence, a subject that this dissertation later addresses.

The benefit of biblical wisdom is not restricted to Christian leaders. Neither are Christian leaders restricted to wisdom from the Bible. Christian leaders can and should


\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 10-11.

\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 10.
learn from the world. Human beings are created to live in God’s creation, investigating, analysing, reasoning, creating, and working to discover its mysteries. The observations of the nations can be entirely legitimate and helpful in this task. However, as Israel must integrate the wisdom of the Nations with their knowledge of Yhwh, so Christian leaders must seek to understand the discernment of the world as refracted by the lens of the gospel. It must be noted that there is no promise that Christian leaders with a Christ-informed wisdom will be more successful or more effective in this age. Because the assessment of the true worth and character of their action and decision will come in the age to come by the Judge of the world (1 Cor 4:5).

There are similarities between the general constructs of wisdom and Biblical wisdom. There are also significant differences. There is a different vision of the Good. Goodness is wider than morality and ethics. It is the order that underlies creation. The Biblical construct of wisdom takes seriously the claims of the Bible, Israel’s experience of Yhwh, and the person, actions, and words of Jesus of Nazareth. In this respect, biblical wisdom asserts its claim over all domains, even over the world outside the Bible and those who reject its claims. It is a bold claim and many will judge it as folly. The Bible’s own invitation is for an assessment of its claim based on wisdom.
CHAPTER 5
HOW WISDOM COULD HELP LEADERS

The first part of this dissertation demonstrates that leaders are agents of change in their domain, but are at the same time constrained by their domain’s conditions and their own internal factors. The Scriptures suggest that good leadership is that which conforms to the plans and purposes of God. It follows that good Christian leaders would intentionally participate in those purposes. Both biblical and general wisdom are considered to be a way of knowing. It is a virtue which involves the affective, the conative, and the cognitive. Wisdom seeks to navigate through a multiplicity of factors to bring about the good. This chapter completes this part by seeking to provide an explanation on how wisdom is able help leaders become better leaders. It will argue that wisdom can improve leadership because wisdom uniquely helps leaders to function in uncertainty and complexity.

Leadership Deals with Uncertainty

There is a growing recognition that leadership must deal effectively with uncertainty and ambiguity. Uncertainty occurs when an outcome cannot be accurately
predicted because of limited knowledge. Ambiguity is when a solution or an opportunity to be exploited is vague and the alternatives are difficult to define. Up until recently, the assumption is that leadership operates in the domains that are certain, knowable, and controllable. Frederick Taylor’s scientific management, which has dominated management education and thinking for much of the twentieth century, is illustrative.¹

Keith Grint describes the method as “Simply apply science properly and the best solution will naturally emerge.”² Taylor suggests that if organisations are made more regimented, more standardised and repetitive, their operations will be more consistent, effective, and controllable, which in turn will enable the organisations to produce better results. The method has proven to be successful in producing this type of results. Scientific management is therefore adopted as standard leadership practice. However, this method is now being challenged. According to Jay Hays:

The challenges confronting humanity today are many, stubborn, competing and tangled. They may be more complex and far-reaching than challenges posed at any time in the past. The modern age is turbulent and fraught with uncertainty and unpredictability. To make matters worse, the pace of change is relentless and accelerating.³


Globalisation, technological innovations, and a myriad of other changes and challenges have been disruptive to the operations of organisations. These disruptions have made leaders and those who are responsible for training them increasingly cognisant of the reality of uncertainty and the need to accommodate it in leadership. Leaders cannot simply do what they have always done, even if they could do it better than what they had previously done.

It has already been noted that leadership scholars distinguish between leadership and management. Leadership rather than management is needed in the realm of the unknown, the unknowable, the uncertain, and the ambiguous. Management can deal with a situation or a problem, no matter how complicated it is, as long as it has been faced before and a process has been successfully applied to resolve it. Leadership is needed for insolvable problems that have no clear relationship between cause and effect. Keith Grint has coined the phrase “Wicked Problems” to describe the type of situation leaders must deal with when entering into the unknown.

According to Grint, Wicked Problems and Tamed Problems are distinct. Tames Problems are those that have occurred before and are solvable by unilinear acts. Wicked Problems are also unique to Critical Problems, which are issues that clearly require decisive decision or action. David Snowden and Mary Boone have proposed an

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5 Ibid., 13-14.
analogous typology. They suggest that different types of environments require different leadership response, namely: Simple, Complicated, Complex, and Chaotic. The Simple Context, like Grint’s Tame Problems, has clear cause-and-effect relationships. In this context, “the knowns are known,” so the leadership response is to use tried and proven methods and processes. The Complex Context would pertain to Grint’s Wicked Problems, where there are no known solutions. Rather than applying formulaic answers, the leader should identify emerging patterns or create an environment in which creative and innovative answers are found. According to Grint, leadership is required because Wicked Problems by definition cannot be solved by individuals, but require collective engagement.

Critics of Taylor’s scientific management contend that the method assumes order and rationality. It assumes a discoverable underlying relationship between cause and effect in human interaction, and that an understanding of this relationship in past behaviour would allow a leader to define the best practice for future behaviour.


8 Ibid.

9 Ibid., 3-5.


12 Ibid., 462, 464-466.
critics argue that these assumptions should be questioned. New theories are being formulated to account for complexity, uncertainty, and unknowability, what some have called “the science of complexity.”13 Rather than positing rigid explanations and predictions from cause-and-effect, the science of complexity studies patterns.14 When many agents and factors are involved, the cause and effect relationship defies categorisation or analytic techniques. When dealing with complexity, leaders must identify patterns and then integrate them. Kurtz and Snowden note that emergent “patterns can be perceived but not predicted.”15 In other words, patterns may repeat, but there is no certainty that the repetition will continue.16 They argue that the root causes of the patterns are not really observable. Therefore, there is a need to study the integration of emerging patterns, which will enable an observer to see farther, wider, and deeper.

Complexity is brimming with uncertainty, ambiguity, and unknowability. Therefore, complexity evokes and elicits wisdom. Keith Grint argues that a leader needs wisdom, more specifically phronesis, because wisdom allows the leader “to recognise that each situation was unique and thus not susceptible to expert resolution but sufficiently familiar for the leader to deploy an array of techniques that might help


15 Ibid., 469.

16 Ibid.
reframe the problem and galvanise the collective to action.”\textsuperscript{17} Grint further observes that wisdom enables good leadership because wisdom is related to the skill of apperception, which is “the ability to relate new experiences to previous experiences, in other words to recognise patterns in situations that facilitate understanding and resolution . . . to frame or reframe situations so that what appeared to be one thing might actually be another.”\textsuperscript{18}

A Neurobiological Account of Wisdom

Neuroscience has made a foray into the study and understanding of wisdom and confirms much of what history, psychology, philosophy, and theology are saying about the importance of wisdom.\textsuperscript{19} In a 2009 review of the literature, Lewis reports that insight on wisdom from neuroscience comes from three sources.\textsuperscript{20} First, insights have been

\begin{multicols}{2}
\textsuperscript{17} Grint, “Wicked Problems and Clumsy Solutions,” 23.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.


\end{multicols}
gained from biology and what it says about the process of brain development from formation, maturity, and then decline.\textsuperscript{21}

The second insight into wisdom from neuroscience is from brain scans of the parts of the brain that researchers think are responsible for traits or subcomponent associated with wisdom. Swartz and Tidsell note that “Meeks and Jeste [have identified] the prefrontal cortex and the limbic striatum as the parts of the brain that are commonly activated to produce subcomponents of wisdom.”\textsuperscript{22} These two areas of the brain “balance each other’s activities to produce subjective awareness and emotional self-regulation, which are precursors to wisdom.”\textsuperscript{23} Meeks and Jeste also recognise that the anterior cingular is involved in other components of wisdom.\textsuperscript{24} The importance of the interconnection between parts of the brain in understanding wisdom is also recognised by Elkhonen Goldberg. Goldberg sees wisdom as the ability to solve problems by recognising patterns.\textsuperscript{25} The part of the brain responsible for problem solving by pattern-recognition are the neo-cortical regions.

Cozolino explains the process of integration as the brain develops and ages.\textsuperscript{26} As the brain ages, Cozolino argues, it loses cortical cells. However, this effectively prunes

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{22} Swartz and Tisdell, “Wisdom, Complexity, and Adult Education,” 324.
\bibitem{23} Swartz, “Wisdom, the Body, and Adult Learning Insights from Neuroscience,” 18.
\bibitem{24} Ibid. Swartz and Tisdell, “Wisdom, Complexity, and Adult Education,” 324.
\bibitem{25} Swartz and Tidsell, “Wisdom, Complexity, and Adult Education,” 324.
\bibitem{26} Swartz, “Wisdom, the Body, and Adult Learning Insights from Neuroscience,” 20.
\end{thebibliography}
unused networks and increases connectivity in what remains.27 That is, cognitive processes might slow when a person ages, but multiple parts of their brain are simultaneously activated, enabling them to see a bigger picture and solve more complex problems by a process of pattern recognition.28

The third area of insight of wisdom from neuroscience comes from studying the plasticity of the brain.29 The brain is shaped or sculptured by experiences or external stimuli. Lewis referring to a neurological study of taxi drivers reports that it takes an average of two years for expertise to developed.30 And that it generally takes ten years to develop experts in fields such as music, painting, and chess.31 Appropriate and healthy social relationships, especially in early childhood, help to shape the prefrontal cortex to regulate emotions and make complex social decisions.

There is ample evidence from the physical sciences that there is a clear biological basis for wisdom, which neuroscientists have explained as serving evolutionary imperatives. It is often observed that wisdom is needed for human adaptation.32 It is “a composite of relational abilities . . . a long term survival mechanism.”33 Reflecting on the

27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
32 Swartz, “Wisdom, the Body, and Adult Learning Insights from Neuroscience,” 16.
33 Ibid., 19.
findings of Meeks and Jeste, Swartz observes that the components of wisdom are
“prosocial behaviour and attitudes of empathy, compassion, altruism; rational decision
making based on the pragmatic knowledge of life; emotional stability’ insight/self
reflection; tolerance of divergent values systems; decisiveness when acing uncertainty.”34
However, many reviewers of the neuroscience literature on wisdom recognise that the
experience and existence of wisdom is more than just biology. Swartz notes that wisdom
is “an emergent property of integrated brain functioning . . . This means that knowing the
components, the associated brain areas and chemicals, and genetics is not enough to
understand wisdom . . . How [wisdom arises from the interaction of the parts of the brain]
is a mystery.”35 Lewis’ conclusion from his review is “The literature on neurobiology is
strikingly nonreductive in that it does not seek to explain away wisdom as nothing but
electro-chemical activity in the brain.”36 The physical sciences are recognising and
confirming what the social sciences, philosophy, history, and theology have identified as
crucial for human flourishing.

It is argued above that wisdom is needed for leadership because of the nature of
the task of leadership. Abilities and methodologies that are developed based on a
straightforward relationship between cause and effect could not deal with complexity,
uncertainty, and ambiguity. The ability to recognise patterns and integrate information is
needed. It is further argued that empirical investigation in the physical sciences confirms

34 Ibid.
35 Swartz, “Wisdom, the Body, and Adult Learning Insights from Neuroscience,” 17.
the need for wisdom. It is important to consider how theology accounts for wisdom in leadership.

**Human Participation in the Divine Plan**

The suggestion that good leadership is the conscious participation in God’s plans and purposes predicates on the notion that human beings can meaningfully participate in that plan. Against deism, Christians confess that God is not absent in the world, but rather He is at work in and through all things to bring about His good purposes (Rm 8:28). Theologians of the past have brought this under the doctrine of the general providence of God (*de providentia Dei*), that is, God continuously acts in such a way by which all creation is preserved and governed by his purposes. Providence is an expression of the Creatorship of God.\(^{37}\) This is to be contrasted with special providence, where God directly and immediate intervenes in the world. God orders, directs, or controls the world and history through secondary causes whether they are necessary (laws of nature), free (exercise of human will), contingent (unforeseen), or miraculous.\(^{38}\)

Against pantheism, Christians believe that the fulfilment of God’s plan involves human participation. All Christian traditions agree that God graciously acts through human agents by allowing them to participate in the fulfilment of His purposes. The various traditions differ on the nature, the extent, and the implications of the divine-human co-operation. Notwithstanding, both Catholic and Protestant traditions adopt the

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\(^{38}\) Ibid.
view that human beings act as secondary causes. Catholic theological tradition emphasises the idea of mediation. John Calvin and the Reformed tradition do not emphasise on secondary causes, but nevertheless clearly adopt it. Calvin notes:

Meanwhile, nevertheless, a godly man will not overlook the secondary causes . . . But especially with reference to future events he will take into consideration inferior causes of this sort. For he will count it among the blessings of the Lord, if he is not destitute of human helps which he may use for his safety. Therefore he will neither cease to take counsel, nor be sluggish in beseeching the assistance of those whom he sees to have the means to help him; but, considering that whatever creatures are capable of furnishing anything to him are offered by the Lord into his hand, he will put them to use as lawful instruments of divine providence.⁴⁰

The Westminster Confession provides that:

Although, in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first Cause, all things come to pass immutably, and infallibly; yet, by the same providence, He orders them to fall out, according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently⁴⁰

The Christian doctrine of divine providence therefore makes room for human freedom, responsibility, and participation.

Human beings do not simply become passively dependent when they trust in God, that is, when they begin to fear Yhwh. God has revealed His will to human beings, and what is revealed by God is sufficient for the human agent to relate rightly to God, other human beings, and the rest of the created world. Within the framework of revealed knowledge, human beings are to actively pursue the understanding of life, learning from their experiences and those of previous generations in order to live well in the world. This

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⁴⁰ John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, Book 1, Chapter 17, Section 9.
is the God-given mandate to humanity to exercise dominion. Human beings have a unique and special place in carrying out God’s sovereign plan and purposes. The task of exercising dominion cannot be done by following and obeying legal precepts. It involves having a proper view of reality as a whole. That is, the exercising of dominion involves human agents exercising their minds, wills, and being. They are to investigate, analyse, reason, invent, create, feel, and act, but within the bounds of their creatureliness. This is the God-ordained means by which human beings are to exercise their dominion.

The theological position taken in this dissertation is that God has graciously revealed His otherwise hidden plans and purposes to the human race. Outside of this special revelation, God’s will is mysterious and beyond the reach of His creatures as Moses testified to the Israelites before entering into the Promised Land: “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Dt 29:29).

This dissertation has also adopted the position that that revelation is fully and finally in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ (Ep 1:10). The person of Jesus is clothed by the words of his gospel, to which the whole of the Scriptures testifies. Christians therefore believe that the revelation of the Scriptures is sufficient for life and godliness (2 Pe 1.3, 2 Tm 3:16,17). The Word of God is only truly understood and believed by the illuminating power of His Spirit (Eph 1.17-19, c.f. Ps 119.18; Cor 2.10-13; 1 Jn 2.20,27). God, however, has clearly not revealed everything in the Scriptures.

This is not to say that what is not revealed in Scripture is insignificant. Although the Scriptures are fully sufficient for faith and practice, they are not exhaustive. For
example, they do not reveal how to fix plumbing, operate a computer, which antibiotic to use to treat a particular infection, who should be appointed to lead a church, or whether to be married or remain single (1 Cor 7). In seeking to explain this phenomenon, theologians speak of God’s “two wills.” Calvin, for example, notes:

If it be objected, that it is absurd to suppose the existence of two wills in God, I reply, we fully believe that his will is simple and one; but as our minds do not fathom the deep abyss of secret election, in accommodation to the capacity of our weakness, the will of God is exhibited to us in two ways . . . But as I have elsewhere treated this subject fully, that I may not be unnecessarily tedious, I only state briefly that, whenever the doctrine, which is the standard of union, is brought forward, God wills to gather all, that all who do not come may be inexcusable.41

Calvin’s point is not that God has two wills but that He exhibits His single will in two different ways: His secret will and His revealed will. The former is also referred to as God’s sovereign or decretive will.42 If God were sovereign in all things then there is “no circumstance—from the numbering of hair of a person’s head to the great movements of nations—that is not in every respect work out the plan of God.”43 In this respect, it is impossible for anyone to be outside the will of God. However, God’s secret will is knowable in retrospect. It is secret and hidden until it comes to pass. The second way in which human beings experience God sovereignty is God’s will of decree, also called His


will of command, His moral or perceptive will.\textsuperscript{44} This aspect of God’s will is not secret because it is revealed in the Scriptures. God’s revealed will is not unique for each person, but is true for all. Some have argued that there is another aspect of God’s will—what is called His individual will, that is, God’s plan for a person at a particular time and a particular context that is known in advance.\textsuperscript{45} Smith notes that God’s individual will is “an extension of God’s moral will,” but is “temporary and content specific.”\textsuperscript{46}

If good leadership were a matter of participating in God’s will which has been revealed in the Scriptures, then it follows that good leadership must involve knowing and acting consistently with biblical teachings. However, conscious participation in the aspect of God’s will that is not known in advance poses a significant challenge. A human agent could consciously reject God’s will, but they could only reject God’s moral or revealed will. It is impossible for the human to reject God’s sovereign will. The very act of rejection gives effect to God’s sovereign will. A person could unknowingly or unconsciously participate in God’s will, but a good leader is one who has the ability to bring about a desired outcome, that is, the agency of the leader is necessary and effective. There are at least three positions that could be held on how a leader might effectively participate in God’s plans and purposes in leadership decisions.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 4.


\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 5-6.
One position that has been taken is that God’s individual will, including His will on leadership matters, is knowable in advance.\(^{47}\) The task of leadership is to earnestly seek God’s individual will regarding those leadership decisions that are not addressed in the Scriptures. It is believed that God will reveal His will to the one who seeks it and those who seek and act according to God’s “perfect will” will always produce superior leadership results. When results are unsatisfactory, known in retrospect, the fault lies with the human agent—either because of their own sin or a lack of faith.\(^{48}\) The problem with this view is that there is no scriptural support for it. Further, it is difficult to see how this position, with the possibility of a less than perfect or second best decision, sits with the idea of God’s sovereignty. Also, if God were not sovereign, then what value is His guidance on human decisions? In addition, this position makes the sufficiency of the Scriptures unnecessary. If God’s special individual guidance is normative then why would a leader need the Bible at all? Lastly, there is no theological or biblical basis to suggest that God’s hidden will will be revealed in advance. In fact, the contrary is true. God has revealed that His desire is for His people to trust Him (Hb 1.6). Trust and hope would be stunted if the specifics of God’s decreed plan were known in advance.

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\(^{48}\) Ibid., 129.
A second position on how leaders might effectively participate in God’s plan is exemplified by Thomas Aquinas. Curran explains that Aquinas understands Divine Providence to work in and through Natural Law. However, human participation in the divine plan is not just simply the obeying of God's law. Aquinas’ doctrine of divine providence is to be understood “teleologically and in light of reason and not of will.”

The divine plan is discoverable through reasoning reflecting on human nature. Human being is the *imago Dei*, meaning that human beings are “endowed with intellect, free will, and the power of self-determination.” The human agents are to pursue their telos by “being the principle of one’s own action through intellect and will.” The difficulty of Aquinas’s doctrine of divine providence and human participation is already identified above: the weight placed on human reason to achieve the telos.

A third position on how leaders might effectively participate in God’s plan in discharging their leadership responsibilities is the way of wisdom—what Smith has called the “modified wisdom view.” The modified wisdom position holds that God can

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50 Ibid., 46.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid., 45.

53 Ibid., 44.

54 Ibid.

and does reveal His individual will, but it does not follow that He would reveal His will. That is, special guidance is possible, but not normative. However, contra to Smith’s thesis, it is more correct to say that God illuminates rather than reveals His special will. God helps the human agent to see how already known information, from both special revelation and from general revelation, brings to bear on situations of life. The implication for leadership of the wisdom position is that leaders should not seek out God’s individual will even though they might be receptive to special guidance in leadership situations.56

The normative way for the human agent to participate in God’s secret will is the way of wisdom. Paul’s teaching on celibacy and marriage in 1 Corinthians 7 is an example of how wisdom and God’s special revelation operate. The Scriptures deal extensively with the nature and ethics of marriage, but within those parameters, the Scriptures do not reveal who the “right” person to marry is, nor whether to marry at all. In a similar way, a leader will face many good choices, all ostensibly right. The Scriptures deal with many issues that a leader may face, but in any given situation many of the leadership choices are not explicitly dealt with. The decision between two “rights” is a matter of wisdom. Contra the individual will position, the “right” choice is not normally knowable in advance within God’s sovereignty for the human agent to seek out, rather the human agent is to make a wise choice trusting that God is working out His

56 Ibid., 11.
sovereign purposes through it. In many ways, how leader participates in God’s plans by wisdom is comparable to the doing of ethics.

Like leadership issues, many ethical issues are explicitly dealt with in the Scriptures, but at the same time, many are not. Carrying out ethics, similar to the task of leading, sometimes involves choosing the best from many good and right alternative choices or from many bad options. Ethical decisions cannot be made by following rules and codes, what is often called “deontological ethics.” The approach to ethics by English Christian ethicist Oliver O’Donovan, is helpful in understanding how wisdom helps leadership, particularly wisdom as pattern recognising.57

O’Donovan uses the idea of “pluriform moral field” to capture the complexity of reality in which moral dilemmas are faced.58 There is an orderliness to the reality, but it is as complex as “the ingredients of each new situation are . . . always slightly different, and each new situation that confronts us is differentiated from the last.”59 The moral field is an ecological system like the complex systems in the natural world. The moral ecology is pluriform.60 That is, moral truths are often similar in the moral ecology, but the moral ecology shows to be plural because the truths apply differently in specific situations. Like

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59 Ibid.

60 Ibid.
formulas and rules, moral codes are helpful for instruction and training, and they can be applied in most situations, but with slight changes. What is needed to apply moral truths is wisdom:

The items in a code stand to the moral law as bricks to a building. Wisdom must involve some comprehension of how the bricks are meant to be put together.61

Wisdom is the perception that every novelty, in its own way, manifests the permanence and stability of the created order, so that, however astonishing and undreamt of it may be, it is not utterly incommensurable with what has gone before.62

The structure of God’s created world is good, and it remains good despite the Fall because it has been redeemed by the death and resurrection of Jesus, and is now awaiting to be remade at the return of the Son. Human agents can participate in the good order of the world by joyfully responding to the moral field before them.63 Participation is done through wisdom, that is, by “discovering in closer detail what human beings already knew in broad outline.”64

O’Donovan’s understanding of ethics is applicable to wisdom. Proverbs, maxims, heuristics, and rules help, but a vision of the order and the Good is necessary to apply these to specific situations. If Christian ethics can be summed up by love,65 then biblical wisdom can be summarised as the fear of Yhwh or faith in Jesus Christ. Faith in Jesus

61 Ibid., 9.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid., 11.
64 Ibid.
65 Ibid.
interprets and unifies all the wisdom in the Scriptures. The proper response for a leader in a difficult situation is to have faith in Christ.

Wisdom enables leaders to be better ones because it recognises the human responsibility and limitations of living under God. In God’s providence, He has purposed the unknown and unknowable, but has also revealed the structure of reality. Leading well is to lead wisely which involves understanding the true nature of things and of the self as well. This understanding enables a leader to make a decision that is most likely to achieve the desired outcome in a given context of ambiguity and uncertainty. Leading well must involve the use of God-given intellect and affections, and the exercise of the will to uncover the mystery and beauty of the created universe. However, acting wisely is more than just acting rationally and it is more than just following the rules or the application of principles, formulas, algorithms, or heuristics. It starts with a vision of reality.

Wisdom does not diminish the ambiguity and vagueness of a decision nor does it enable the human agent to plump the depth and mystery of God’s secret will. It does, however, enable the leader to live well and to help others to live well albeit penultimately. The way wisdom helps leaders is not to prescribe what to do in any situation or challenge, but to train him or her in prudence through the experience and reflection of others. Ultimately, wisdom according to the Bible involves relationship with Jesus of Nazareth as Lord and Saviour. He presents nothing less than a new way to be human, and therefore a leader. He upends, reshapes, reimages, and renovates everything that is known about being a human. Furthermore, being “in Christ” means a change in identity (2 Cor 5:17). Leaders will love as they are loved.
Participation as Performance in the Theodrama of Redemption

Kevin Vanhoozer adopts the analogical model of drama to describe salvation-history.\textsuperscript{66} He casts the task of participation in the will of God as “the drama of discipleship.”\textsuperscript{67} Discipleship is “to teach people how to keep the faith [and one] keeps faith by following Jesus’ words rather than merely knowing faith’s content.”\textsuperscript{68} In drama, the actors need to both adhere to the script as well as creatively interpret it. Similarly, discipleship is analogous. Participating in the will of God is no “seeking literally to duplicate past scenes [of the divine drama,] but rather by continuing to follow Jesus into the present in ways that are both faithful and [necessarily] creative.”\textsuperscript{69}

The Scripture is not the dramatic script, that is, “a detailed blueprint or action [or the future].”\textsuperscript{70} Nonetheless, it is the authorised script for the church, “a divinely commissioned and authorised written witness of the ongoing drama of redemption.”\textsuperscript{71} The church’s role is to live the Bible, to embody and enact “the way of Jesus Christ in the concrete situations that comprise the world,”\textsuperscript{72} that is “to minister the reconciling word of


\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 3.

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 23.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid., 22, 23.

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 170.
the gospel in speech and action in the interactive theatre of the world.” 73 Vanhoozer observes: “Disciples are to imitate, not to replicate, Christ. To replicate is to make an exact copy. To imitate means to continue a pattern.” 74 He continues, “Imitation requires both fidelity and, in some cases, creativity if one is continue the same pattern in a different situation.” 75 Disciples must not be “replicators or innovators, but improvisers.” 76

Vanhoozer gives homoousios as an example of theological improvisation that enabled Athanatius to move forward in fidelity to the Scriptures and the contemporary needs, disputes, and dangers of his context. 77 Improvisation requires not only scientia (textual exegesis), but sapientia, that is, wisdom. Vanhoozer contends: “Disciples need more than knowing that (knowledge); they need to know how to live out their knowledge of Jesus Christ (wisdom). Wisdom is lived knowledge, the ability to transpose what we know here to that problem over there.” 78

73 Ibid.
74 Ibid., 188.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid, 188, 189.
78 Ibid., 204.
PART THREE

THE STRATEGY
CHAPTER 6
TEACHING FOR WISDOM: GOALS AND PLANS

Having reviewed the literature on leadership, leadership development, wisdom, and how it helps leaders in their function, the attention now turns to how Christian leaders can be nurtured in wisdom. Since the growth of interest in wisdom arose, various attempts have been made to operationalise the concept, particularly in trying to teach wisdom. The development of wisdom involves gaining knowledge, training in analytical thinking, cultivation of creativity, insight, sagacity, and practical intelligence, but also more specific and intentional strategies that are unique to the nurture of wisdom. The final part of the dissertation will focus on possible strategies and methods of developing wisdom in Christian leaders. The first chapter in this part considers some of the strategies already used to nurture wisdom in other contexts. The second chapter considers how these strategies could be applied to nurture wisdom among Christian leaders.

Wisdom Curriculum and Procedures

Robert Sternberg notes that there are programs seeking to develop skills in analytical-thinking, dialogical thinking, critical-thinking, and moral reasoning, which are all necessary but insufficient for the development of wise thinking. The nurture of
wisdom requires more specific strategies. Sternberg contends that wisdom cannot be
directly taught,¹ but must be indirectly acquired. The key to acquire wisdom is Michael
Polyani’s idea of tacit knowledge.²

For Sternberg, wisdom is “the application of tacit knowledge as mediated by
values toward the goal of achieving common good.”³ Polyani recalls the “well-known
fact that that the aim of a skillful performance is achieved by the observance of a set of
rules which are not known as such to the person following them.”⁴ Swimming, bicycle
riding, playing of a musical instrument, and connoisseurship are examples of this fact.
Polanyi calls this unspecifiable skill “personal knowledge.” The knower knows more than
they can tell, or they know how to do something without thinking about it.⁵ In a review of
literature of tacit knowledge, McAdam, Mason, and McCrory define tacit knowledge as
“being understood without being openly expressed or knowledge for which we have no
words.”⁶ These skills are learned through observation, such as what an apprentice artisan,
“by watching the master and emulating his efforts in the presence of his example, the

¹ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Faith Speaking Understanding: Performing the Drama of Doctrine*

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., 227.

⁴ Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (London:
Routledge, 2002), 51-52.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Rodney McAdam, Bob Mason, and Josephine McCrory, “Exploring the Dichotomies within
the Tacit Knowledge Literature: Towards a Process of Tacit Knowing in Organizations,” *Journal of
apprentice unconsciously picks up the rules of the art.”

Tacit knowledge is contextual, that is, tacit knowledge that applies in one context might not necessarily apply in another. Sternberg observes that tacit knowledge is often acquired without direct help from others. He believes that this indirect acquisition can be made through the provision of “scaffolding.”

Scaffolding is “providing the foundation for learning to occur.” It is impossible to anticipate and train a course of action for every possible situation that a leader may face in their role. It is argued that to develop tacit knowledge, which for Sternberg is the core of wise thinking, the learner would need to be provided with “mediated learning experiences rather than direct instruction as to what to do and when to do it.”

Sternberg suggests that this learning experience can be provided through case studies they will give the learner the opportunity to “actively experience various cognitive and affective processes that underlie wise decision making.”

McAdam, Mason, and MacCognitive observe that “Tacit knowledge is made up of mental models, values, beliefs, perceptions, insights, and assumptions,” and are normally conveyed through “metaphors, analogies,

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9 Ibid., 230.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
demonstrations and stories.”

Also, the epitomes of tacit knowledge, such as mental models and skills, are “artifacts to help us articulate the diffuseness of tacit knowing to make it more explicit.”

That is, in addition to case studies, tacit knowledge can be taught via these artefacts.

Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura contend that wisdom is not simply “a dialectic between personal experiences and reflection or between affection and cognition,” but rather it is in “the relationship between an inquiring mind and the results of the inquiries of bygone minds.”

The hard-learned lessons of the past are passed on in cultural values, behavioural patterns, myths, fire-stories, proverbs, songs, ritual dances, artefacts, and more recently in literature, encoded in memes. Wisdom sifts through the past and seeks to apply those lessons to present conditions. Being wise involves selecting the worthwhile memes and transmitting those relevant to life choices to new generations. The memes must be worth remembering and are independent of special conditions or training.

Education in general involves this inculcating of the past through the teaching of history, literature, or philosophy. The training of Christian leaders routinely involves the teaching of doctrine and dogmatics, church history and liturgy.

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13 McAdam, Mason, and McCrory, “Exploring the Dichotomies within the Tacit Knowledge Literature,” 45.

14 Ibid., 51.

An example of indirect teaching of wisdom through curriculum is a course designed to foster wisdom among retirees in New York State. Bassett describes the process of developing wisdom as follows: first, the participants in that New York State study were invited to learn wisdom from the reading of literature in philosophy, religion, and psychology. Second, they were encouraged to practice qualities connected with wisdom, and to journal their attempts. They would then be invited to share their experiences with others.

A second example of indirect teaching is provided by Robert Sternberg himself. The Sternberg experiment involves Middle-school students being nurtured in wisdom using an infused curriculum. A twelve weeks wisdom-related curriculum was used covering topics such as “What is wisdom,” “Famous examples of wise individuals,” and “Applying wisdom in students’ daily life.” Teachers were supported by in-service training before and during the running of the curriculum which was integrated or infused into other subjects like history or mathematics.


17 Ibid., 40.


19 Sternberg, “Why Schools Should Teach for Wisdom,” 238-240

20 Ibid., 240.

21 Ibid., 241.
Six procedures were used to teach wisdom.22 First, students were encouraged to read and reflect on classic works of literature and philosophy.23 During the reading, the students would be encouraged to reflect on their own “cognition, emotions and beliefs” to increase their metacognition.24 Sternberg gives the example of the Enlightenment and Benjamin Franklin by reading Poor Richard’s almanac.25 The students were encouraged to discuss how Franklin’s maxims could apply in situations in their own lives. They would then be encouraged to formulate their own maxims from their experiences so as to develop reflective thinking.

The second procedure was to “engage the students in class discussions, projects, and essays that encourage them to discuss the lessons they have learned from the literary and philosophical works they’ve read, and how these lessons can be applied to their own lives and the lives of others.”26 This procedure would help the students to see the link between their own past experiences and the contemporary problems they face, and to develop dialectical and dialogical thinking.27 The latter involves the ability to see a complex issue from multiple reference points. Sternberg gives the example of the study of the Boston Massacre, which is an activity that develops dialogical thinking in the

22 Sternberg, Reznitskaya, and Jarvin, Teaching for Wisdom, Intelligence, Creativity, and Success, 150-156.
23 Ibid, 151.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., 151-152.
26 Ibid, 152.
27 Ibid.
The students read multiple accounts of that same event. They would then discuss and write their own account of the event, considering how their reference point influences their understanding of the event.

Dialectical thinking involves “thinkers understanding that ideas and the paradigms under which they fall evolve and keep evolving, not only from the past to the present, but from the present to the future.” An activity to develop dialectical thinking would be the study of the American colonial independence movement from different perspectives: two opposing views and a compromised solution that attempted to reconcile the divergent positions. The activity aims to develop the students’ ability to synthesise and reconcile conflicting perspectives.

A third procedure is to encourage “students to study not only ‘truth’ but values, as developed during their reflective thinking.” Students were asked to identify values from their study of Franklin’s work. They would need to consider how to apply them to their own lives, and to monitor changes to their behaviour and character for a period of time. The purpose of the procedure is to enable the students to reflect on how they formulate and apply their own values.

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28 Sternberg, Reznitskaya, and Jarvin, *Teaching for Wisdom, Intelligence, Creativity, and Success*, 152.

29 Ibid.


31 Sternberg, Reznitskaya, and Jarvin, *Teaching for Wisdom, Intelligence, Creativity, and Success*, 153.

32 Ibid., 153, 154.
The fourth procedure is places “an increased emphasis on critical, creative, and practical thinking in the service of good ends that benefit the common good.”33 An activity to develop creative thinking among students is the study of the slavery in America by analyzing the reasons underlying the decision to import slave labour into America. They are then invited to consider and debate those reasons, and to formulate their own responses.34

The fifth procedure is designed to “encourage students to think about how almost any topic they study might be used for better or worse ends, and about how important that final end is.”35 For example, students were asked to consider the consequences for different parties in the slave trade as a result of technological advancement, such as the cotton gin, and to consider how the use of technology in the current time could likewise result in divergent outcomes for different people.36 The intent of the procedure is to help students understand that different courses of action will impact different people in diverse ways, and that ideas and knowledge can be used for good or bad ends.

The last procedure that Sternberg describes is to “remember that a teacher is a role model.”37 Wisdom must be embodied and modelled to be developed. The teachers were encouraged to use situations as opportunities to demonstrate wise thinking, and to invite

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33 Ibid., 154.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., 154, 155.
37 Ibid., 155.
students to learn by reflecting on how the teacher dealt with the situation. For example, a teacher would use an event, like a conflict between two students, to demonstrate the teacher’s own response to and judgment on the situation. The students could then be invited to consider how they might deal with situations of conflict.

Sternberg also applied the integrated learning model in a tertiary context at Tuff University. A curriculum was developed for a leadership minor that implemented his wisdom, intelligence, creativity synthesised or WICS model. Leadership is infused into various disciplines that the students study. The curriculum includes courses specifically on leadership, such as the psychology of leadership. Students would then undertake cross-department courses, such as the study of leadership through Macbeth. The last tier of the curriculum would involve a leadership practicum. The students would be involved in a practical leadership experience and then reflect on their experiences.

In addition to the above, there is a growing movement in infused or integrated curricula. Two examples are worth noting. The first example is Caroline Bassett’s

38 Ibid.


40 Ibid, 29.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

“transformative learning.”

According to Bassett, nurturing wisdom would involve “a process of examining, questioning, validating, and revising perceptions that seeks to create a deep structural shift in basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions . . . a shift in consciousness that dramatically and permanently alters our way of being in the world.”

Students would be taught to “discern what is important; to take with compassion the perspective of people [and creatures] different from ourselves; to know clearly towards what ends our actions are directed, for what reason, and whose interests they serve, and to realize that we are simply parts of a larger whole.”

The transformative learning process starts with a problem, perhaps a Wicked Problem, and involves four steps which are “the experience, critical reflection on assumptions and biases, reflective discourse and then action.”

A second example is what is known as “phenomenon based learning.” Rather than teaching through disparate subjects such as maths, English, and geography, students approach learning from the starting point of a real-world phenomenon, such as the Brexit and the EU. Different disciplines are then brought to bear and applied on that event.

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46 Ibid., 4.

47 Ibid.

Learners can develop the integrative and reflective skills required to deal with situations that they may face in the future.

The above-mentioned methods have sometimes been used in the training of Christian leaders, for example the use of case studies. What can be added perhaps is a more intentional nurturing of wisdom through a wisdom curriculum, a more integrated approach to leadership development that might enable Christian leaders to consciously develop their dialogical, dialectical, and reflective thinking. Also, a wisdom approach will arrest two tendencies in Christian leadership development.

First, there is a tendency to institutionalise the past and calcify the present by absolutising the particularities of successful church leaders. The goal of Christian leadership development in this instance is to train leaders to replicate the cultural meme. From a wisdom perspective, Christian leaders must be taught content, the knowing “what,” as well as the knowing “how” so that they can connect the past with the present and the future.

Second, there is great pressure on Christian leaders to acquire more and more content and skills. As a result, more subjects are being added to the teaching and training curricula, or there is pressure to replace dogma, church history, Greek and Hebrew with current, specialized, and skills-focused content. The danger here is that cultural memes or wisdom could be eliminated and a generation of Christian leaders will not have the raw data with which to connect the past with the future. A wisdom approach to training would see training curricula populated with doctrine, church history, literature, and art.
Learning Proverbs

In addition to stories and case studies, proverbs should be included as another important artefact to help transmit tacit knowledge. Historically, proverbs have been a universal method of transmitting wisdom and other cultural norms from one generation to the next.⁴⁹ According to Stan Nussbaum, proverbs “may be the world’s oldest interactive education resource, evoking both intellectual and emotional responses.”⁵⁰ Schwartz and Power say that they are metaphorical “clothes hangers” on which to hang concepts.⁵¹ Proverbs are pithy, memorable, illustrative, practical, common, subtle, and cleverly expressed with varying thought-provoking and declarative overtones and undertones. They are like a tool kit for a person to use to fit any situation by a process of correlation.⁵² Proverbs stand between grand theory and particular cases, and they present the collective societal wisdom about how to deal with cases of a distinct kind.⁵³

By quoting a proverb, one shows that the situation is not unprecedented and it need not disorient or overwhelm. The wise is prepared and equipped with time-tested

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⁵¹ Schwartz and Power, “Maxims to Live By.”

⁵² Nussbaum, “Profundity with Panache.”

tools to meet uncertain, ambiguous situations. Proverbs and maxims are disfavoured in the West as a teaching tool because the Western intellectual paradigm favours “metaphysics and epistemology over ethics,” “the deductive over the intuitive,” “the abstract over the illustrative,” “the written over the oral,” and “the elite over the common.”\(^5_4\) This is an overstatement. As most ancient cultures progress from oral to written societies, they seem to develop systemisation of the wisdom in Proverbs. The wisdom corpus in the Bible is a case in point. Notwithstanding, the point still stands that proverbs or maxims may be a useful, but neglected tool in training of Christian leaders.

Schwartz and Power set out three learning contexts and one learning process in which proverbs or maxims are learned: discovery learning, guided learning, self-learning, and finally memorisation.\(^5_5\) Discovery learning occurs in a context where the student hears a maxim from another person within a specific social situation without the speaker’s formal attempt to teach the meaning of the proverb. The level of emotional attachment between the speaker and hearer significantly impacts on whether the hearer learns, memorises, and applies the proverb. Guided learning occurs when the speaker of the proverb guides the leaner in comprehending the proverb beyond its literal meaning. One example of guided learning is the direct instruction method where: the proverb is explained, is modelled, activities are conducted to help student to memorise the proverb, the student is tested, and finally, retested. Self-learning occurs when a learner self-identifies proverbs and maxims that are important and useful to themselves. mental cues

\(^{54}\) Nussbaum, “Profundity with Panache.”

\(^{55}\) Schwartz and Power, “Maxims to Live By.”
and reminders help in memorization which can be done auditorially, visually, or kinetically. The key is to make the maxim meaningful to the learner—either because the maxim itself is meaningful, or person who taught the proverb is significant, or the maxim triggers a meaningful event.

Christian leaders use proverbs in ministry, a recent example being the blog by Jared Wilson titled “5 Pastoral Proverbs that Stuck with me.”\(^{56}\) Wilson recounts “good words” from Bill Hybels, Mike Ayers, Ray Ortlund, Andy Stanley, and Steven Taylor that “have stuck with me since I heard them and have proven truer and truer over the years.” Christian leaders can be nurtured in wisdom by creating the contexts for learning proverbial wisdom. For example, discovery learning and guided learning of proverbs and leadership maxims can be done in the context of mentoring relationships. Some of the processes by Sternberg can be used to foster self-learning. For example, leadership training could involve the reading of proverbial savings and maxims. The learners would then be asked to discuss and write papers reflecting on how they could apply in leadership situations. They could then be asked to formulate their own maxims from leadership situations.

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Interaction with Significant Others

Almost all researchers on wisdom agree that wisdom must be embodied. For example, Sternberg notes that the teacher is significant in the development of wisdom. To nurture wisdom, teachers cannot simply be distant instructors of information, rather they must be exemplars of wisdom. Swartz and Tisdell refer to Swart’s own research studying nurses’ embodied knowledge and embodied learning suggesting that “When combined with self-reflection, embodied practices can enhance the development of qualities associated with practical wisdom,” such as emotional regulation, decisiveness and altruism. Nancy Sherman observes that to make virtuous living a goal, and virtue being a component of wisdom, one needs to think about virtue actualised in a person or persons with whom one can identify and appreciate as sharing some of one’s life circumstances, because “We learn through the concrete, through the narratives, stories, and drama of someone who has been there faced the music and made choices.” Jordon notes the correlation between the presence of others and the development of “interactive minds,” or the influence of one person’s cognitions by the cognitions of others. For

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57 Sternberg, Reznitskaya, and Jarvin, Teaching for Wisdom, Intelligence, Creativity, and Success, 153.


Aristotle and Eastern philosophers, wisdom must be embodied and therefore the development of wisdom requires an exemplar.\textsuperscript{60}

Wisdom is nurtured through identification with one who is relevant and accessible, who has been through the narratives, stories, and made choices.\textsuperscript{61} Mentors are able to help individuals synthesise their life experiences in a way where the experiences become catalysts for the development of wisdom. Mentors can also guide individuals to choose the best course of action when facing uncertainty. Therefore, the nurturing of wisdom involves mentoring. The mentor is to embody the virtues to be emulated, the good to be achieved and personal, relational, and intellectual processes to be applied. Mentoring will involve various activities. Swartz notes the importance of storytelling among peers to share emotional and embodied experiences.\textsuperscript{62} Daloz highlights recognition, challenge, support, inspiration, and presence as the main functions of mentoring.\textsuperscript{63} He adds that mentoring is ultimately about cultivating a faithful relationship, one that includes action as well as words.

Wisdom can be embodied in a group as much as it can be in an individual. In fact, the influence of a group can be a more powerful way to nurture wisdom than the influence of an individual. Every group a person is part of, whether it be a group of

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{62} Swartz, “Embodied Learning and Trauma in the Classroom and in Practice,” 321-326.
friends, coworkers, seminary students, or internet forum members, becomes a school of formation of wisdom or folly. All groups will form and shape the individual who is part of the group—for good or for ill, or wisdom or to folly (Ps 1:1; 2:1-3). The training for wisdom can therefore be done in wisdom communities (Pr 13:20,21), and likewise, foolishness can be cultivated in communities of folly. The apostle Paul teaches that “bad company corrupts good character” (1 Cor 15:33). The way of wisdom is to avoid foolish company (Pr 22:25) and to keep company with the righteous and wise. The nurturing of Christian leaders must therefore be done in a wise community to form wise habits and patterns of thoughts and feelings.

**Learning Pastoral Imagination**

The report of Christian Scharen and Eileen Campbell-Reed on pastoral training and effectiveness is worth noting. It provides helpful suggestions on procedures and processes for the development of Christian leaders that could include the nurture of wisdom. Rather than focusing on the pedagogies and curricula of seminaries, which for them is to focus on teaching and teachers, Scharen and Campbell-Reed focus on studying and students, their learning trajectories beginning in childhood and extending through seminary into ministry leadership beyond. Their conclusion is that “Pastoral Imagination” is key to Christian leadership development.

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Pastoral Imagination is a person’s capacity for seeing situations of ministry “in all its holy and relational depths and responding with wise, fitting judgment and action.”\textsuperscript{65} They believe that \textit{Phronesis}, that is practical wisdom, is needed with Pastoral Imagination, and agree with the analysis of Craig Dykstra of the history and pattern of theological education that has simply followed the European university four-fold organisation of theological studies. Theological education is thus divided into the theoretical areas of exegesis, dogmatic theology, church history, and the practical or applied theology of preaching, teaching, and pastoral care.\textsuperscript{66} To these are then added the new disciplines of counselling, social work, teaching, management, and leadership.

They further note the increasing pressure for specialisation, professionalism, and narrow focus of research in theological education. In their view, the training of Christian leaders lacks genuine integration of contextual components of learning, spiritual formation for ministry, and continuing education for pastors beyond seminary. Scharen and Campbell-Reed interviewed fifty ministry leaders from ten different schools in different denominations, traditions, and regions of the United States. The study participants were interviewed and observed for over a five year period as they moved from their seminaries to ministry contexts. Members of their congregations or clients in their organisations were also interviewed. From the study so far, Scharen and Campbell-Reed draw six conclusions:

\textsuperscript{65} Ibid, 5.

\textsuperscript{66} Ibid, 6.
First, it can be seen that learning pastoral imagination happens best in formation for ministry that is integrative, embodied, and relational.\(^{67}\) This has been achieved for the study participants by immersion in fruitful ministry practice and experiences, and in formal learning that has the horizon of ministry, rather than the horizon of the scholarly field of the faculty, explicitly in view. Procedures that enable this include: case studies, experiential-contextual learning, and ministry practice exercises related to the content.

Second, learning pastoral imagination centres on integrated teaching that understands and articulates the challenges of the practice of ministry today.\(^{68}\) The personal character and ministry experience shared by faculty is essential for participants. These faculties are to be apt at teaching “junior versions of the whole game.”\(^{69}\) They should engage their students for ministry, and more importantly, as ministry.

Third, learning pastoral imagination requires both the daily practice of ministry over time and over critical moments that may arise from crisis or clarity.\(^{70}\) Knowing how to act in a moment requires cultivating wise practices. The key to cultivating wisdom practices is the integration of the conceptual and the general with the applied and the particular. Pastoral imagination emerges and grows over time as a leader accumulates multiple instances of pastoral situations, and, by repeatedly doing what is needed throughout the day, the experience of how to do it becomes intuitive. However, ministry

\(^{67}\) Scharen and Campbell-Reed, “Learning Pastoral Imagination,” 18-23.

\(^{68}\) Ibid., 23-28.

\(^{69}\) Ibid.

\(^{70}\) Ibid., 28-33.
and leadership habits are also formed from moments of crisis, which can best happen if emergent leaders are mentored so that they have the relational and reflective space to process their experiences.

Fourth, learning pastoral imagination requires both apprenticeship and mentors who offer relational wisdom through shared reflection and making sense of a situation. Learning to lead is not a matter of following a set of rules or replicating someone else’s leadership model. The relational wisdom of mentors help emergent leaders to translate the knowledge and skills learned in seminary into new leadership situations.

Fifth, learning Pastoral Imagination is complicated by the intersection of social and personal forces of injustice. Leadership contexts expose leaders to experience injustice, wrong, disappointments, opposition, conflict, and sin. Seminaries do not always prepare Christian leaders to deal with them, and yet, like the third finding regarding the role of crisis in leadership formation, these experiences can be transformative for the learner. And lastly, learning Pastoral Imagination is needed for inhabiting ministry as a spiritual practice, opening up self and community to the presence and power of God.

From these findings, Scharen and Campbell-Reed suggest five implications for theological education. These implications can form important part of the scaffolding for the nurture of wisdom among Christian leaders. First, Christian leadership development should shift from a textual paradigm to a contextual paradigm. That is, to develop wiser
and better Christian leaders, development should move the context of ministry practice from the margin to the centre with reflective learning across a range of topics and concepts to support learning in context. Second, Christian leadership development must consider the education and formation of the whole person. Leaders can learn best by apprenticeship to the world in which they live in. Third, developing Christian leaders must have a far horizon. Learning support over a lifetime must be structured into the development process. Learning is best done through an iterative process of learning in practice over time. Peers and senior colleagues can help significantly in this process. Fourth, it is necessary to cultivate teachers who know the game of ministry. Lastly, relationship to God is at the heart of forming wise Christian leaders.

**Cultivating Wise Affections**

Csikszenmihalyi and Nakamurastated note that wisdom involves “the relatively rare inclination and ability to manage a dialectic: the willingness to turn to cultural traditions for answers, and simultaneously the willingness to question traditional answers in light of personal experiences—and enjoy doing both.” However, many of those who theorise about wisdom do not seem to explain the motivation for that inclination. Sternberg and associates define wisdom as the balancing of interests for a common good, but they have not pointed out the motivating force for why a person would pursue the common good or to act virtuously. Csikszenmihalyi and Nakamura contend that that willingness is fuelled by emotions.

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Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura argue that wisdom thrives on joy. The best recipe for the spread of wisdom they note is “the encouragement of curiosity, respect for the accomplishments of the past, coupled with a burning desire to improve on them done within a concept of self that extends to other people and beyond.”75 The necessity of the right or appropriate emotions for wisdom is also recognised in philosophy and Christian theology. Aristotle believes that a virtuous and wise person would have emotions that are appropriate and well-regulated by the judgments of good reason.76 For example, a person should be angry when he or she perceives injustice. Emotions involve the judgments a person makes about the good and bad in the world. The book of Proverbs counsels that the beginning of wisdom lies in the “fear” of the Lord (Pr 1:7). The challenge for Christian leadership development is how to nurture that emotional component of a learner. Sternberg, as noted above, suggests that the laying of scaffolding can enable a learner to “actively experience various cognitive and affective processes that underlie wise decision making.”77 There is firm support for this approach from philosophy.

Aristotle believes that emotions can be developed by critical habituation, that is, critical practice that develops cognitive skills constitutive of wise decision and action.78 For instance, if a leader were to practice “overlooking an offence” (Pr 19:11), they are in effect taking on the semblance of patience so that it can take hold and rub off on their

75 Ibid.
76 Sherman, “Wise emotions.”
77 Sternberg, Reznitskaya, and Jarvin, *Teaching for Wisdom, Intelligence, Creativity, and Success*, 151.
78 Sherman, “Wise emotions.”
inner state. The Scriptures enjoin believers in similar terms. Paul exhorts the Colossians to put on the virtues of “compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience” (Col 3:12). However, emotions cannot just be developed by an external behavioural change. There must be a fundamental change in evaluation or cognitive content of the emotion, that is, changes must be made in perception or beliefs resulting in a shift in the person’s gestalt.79 Christian theology would go further, that is, a change in the cognitive content is necessary but insufficient.

Like Aristotle, Augustine understands a person’s mind is intertwined with their emotions. He sees the human knowledge-relationship with the world to be “touched and tinged by loves.”80 Augustine’s understanding of the Bible’s teaching has led him to conclude that sin is voracious, intense, obsessive, and destructive human love or attachment to aspects of God’s creation, or as Paul calls it: “the passions of our flesh” (Ep 2:3).81 He further believes that this inordinate love is so tacit that it distorts the human perception so that they are unaware of their loves. As Jeremiah the prophet laments, “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?” (Jer 17:9).

Furthermore, because of this self-deception, all the nurturing of values in the learner are expected to be compromised. In Augustine’s view, the only way to escape that entrapment is by changing the love for creation to love the One who can transform

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79 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
destructive love to constructive love. This change of love is only possible after one has first experienced the love of God in Jesus Christ. The apostle John expresses, “We love because he first loved us.” (1 Jn 4:19). When this change of love has occurred, one can change perceptions, beliefs, and one’s gestalt. This experience of love must be continuously cultivated and experienced, awaiting its final consummation (1 Cor 13:8-13). According to the apostle Paul, the cultivation of the knowledge of God’s love requires the supernatural intervention of the Spirit of God in the human agent:

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. (Eph 3:16-19)

As a person grows in their knowledge of God’s love for them, the shift in their gestalt will be maintained.

**Jesus-Centred Leadership**

The New Testament writers do not reduce wise living into a reductive formula, a series of decisions, or a list of rules or values. For them, wisdom begins and ends with the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus does not merely teach people to be wise. This is insufficient. Jesus shows a new way to be human, and enables those who follow him to become like him in this new humanity. The main question for Christian leaders, therefore, is not “Is this wise?” but “How am I responding to Jesus Christ in this?” The processes and strategies to be adopted to nurture Christian leaders must ultimately serve to teach them to follow Jesus Christ, imitate him, identify with him, and in short, to be his disciples.
Following Jesus means many things including participation in his life, death, and resurrection through faith in his Gospel, to pray in his name, to renew one’s mind by understand oneself, others, and the world in reference to him, to obey his teaching, to take on his virtues and character, to love as he loves, to emulate his pattern of life, to reject sin and the inordinate and perverse loves, to be grafted into him, to be indwelt by his Spirit and to keep in step with him, to participate in his new community and to wait for his return. The followers of Jesus live to serve others because he came to serve and not to be served. Their service is to be clothed in kindness, compassion, graciousness, and love. They are now free to put off the foolishness that has previously enslaved them—malice, envy, and hate. In following Christ, a gestalt shift occurs for the Christian leader. The Christian leader, being a new person, has a different love with a different Good.

Prayer

A Christ-centred wisdom developing process must involve prayer. James exhorts his readers as much: “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.” (Jas 1:5) Wisdom from above cannot be grasped, but is given as a gift. Before turning to other wisdom processes, Christian leaders must learn to pray for it and trust that the Lord will give it for his own glory.

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CHAPTER 7
IMPLEMENTATION AND PROCESSES

This chapter seeks to consider how wisdom might be nurtured by reference to three leaders at a mainline local church in Sydney, Australia. Each leader has demonstrated different abilities and has faced different challenges. A plan is proposed to nurture each leader in wisdom.

The Context and the Challenges

Lee is an ordained minister at St Gyle’s, a medium-sized Anglican church located in an extremely multicultural part of Sydney, Australia. St Gyle’s has a long history extending back more than 150 years. The context of ministry has changed in its history. The area which was once traditionally strongly Church of England is now populated by migrants—initially from North and South-East Asia, and lately from the Middle-East and South Asia. Lee himself is North Asian and has the responsibility at St Gyle’s to minister to the North Asian congregation. He became a Christian while studying at university in Sydney, and decided to pursue vocational ministry a few years after graduation. He did adequately well at college, and is highly regarded by the denominational leadership. This is his third year in ordained ministry. Lee is meticulous, hardworking, teachable, and
loyal, yet he appears to struggle in ministry. He faithfully applies the ministry methods from campus, runs weekly Gospel classes, and conscientiously preaches and teaches the Scriptures.

He is devoted to the pastoral needs of the congregation, and has baptised 40 new believers each year in the time he has been with St Gyle’s. Yet, there is a 20 percent turnover of membership in his congregation each year. Most of the lay leaders in his congregation admire him, but would privately confess a lack of confidence in his leadership. There is recurrent infighting among the lay leaders with some recently deciding to step down from leadership and moving to other congregations within St Gyle’s. For some time, Lee has attributed all the problems to the congregation, but recently he acknowledges that he might be contributing to the malaise. Lee is keen to grow in his ministry.

Stephen is in his thirties, and professional training is in software engineering. Stephen is intelligent, assiduous, effective, and practical. His analytical skills and problem solving are outstanding. However, despite early promise he has not been progressing well in his career. His is overqualified for all the positions that he has taken after graduation. Stephen has demonstrated faithfulness and promise in key lay leadership roles at St Gyle’s, and after having been retrenched from his most recent IT job, St Gyle’s invited Stephen to join the staff as their executive pastor with the view of him becoming ordained after attending Bible college. Those close to Stephen see his joining St Gyle’s staff as a step forward, but they are concerned about his interpersonal abilities. Stephen has previously led ministry projects at St Gyle’s, persisting even well after the use-by
date of the projects. He expresses disappointment at the difficulty with which to motivate members of the church to be involved in ministry. Like Lee, Stephen is eager to grow in his ministry, however, he is undecided whether his future is in vocational ministry.

Carole is a second-year Bible college student at St Gyle’s. She came to Christ with her husband at the church, and she has a clear passion and a strong sense of calling for evangelism and mission. She has led evangelism teams and mission projects at St Gyle’s with positive outcomes, and has demonstrated that she is able to work with people who feel alienated and excluded by the church. Carole is energetic, warm, and determined, but is often hampered by anxiety and other health issues. Her health appears to affect her functioning in ministry. She is unable to complete all her college assessment tasks on time, even after having been granted many special dispensations by the college. Her relationship with team members of mission projects and ministries is cordial, but often strained. Projects would proceed to completion, but often at the cost of broken relationships. Carole is not sure where exactly, but she is certain that God has called her to the mission field. She is determined to finish her studies to enable this. However, she is considering a transfer to a college that is less academically demanding.

The Plan

Lee, Stephen, and Carole are established or emergent Christian leaders. The leadership roles they occupy or might be called to occupy are very different, as are their gifts, training, and development needs. The evidence from system outcomes shows that there are obstacles and impediments to their current and future roles as leaders of God’s people—the loss of confidence among lay leaders, broken relationships, and the
unwillingness for people to follow. The obstacles are not obviously theological or technical in nature. Whilst theological education and ministry skills training are necessary for Lee, Stephen, and Carole and should be pursued, these might not be sufficient to overcome the obstacles and impediments.

For example, Lee has already gone through the normal pathway of leadership of the denomination, which includes processes of selection and placement, psychometric testing, ministry practicums, formal theological education, and post-college supervision, and assessments, but these procedures and processes have not curbed his unique obstacles and impediments. It could be argued that affirming Lee in his role might have exacerbated them. Formal theological education is not enabling Carole to be a better leader. It is functioning as a *de facto* process of sifting her out from being a leader. The challenge of the obstacles is that they are difficult to specify or categorise. The integration of their theological, technical, and personal knowledge and skills as well as good judgment are needed to overcome these obstacles. The nurture of wisdom is intended to provide the capacity to undertake this integration and exercise good judgment.

It has been noted above that wisdom is not directly taught nor acquired. Rather, learning is indirect, mediated through learning experiences, or scaffolding. Of the three leaders, Stephen may be the easiest to devise process and plans to nurture him in wisdom, partly because he is the youngest and has the least baggage. More importantly, he is at the earliest stage of his leadership pathway and his development can be customised more easily. Stephen’s role as executive pastor of St Gyle’s provides the perfect context in
which he should understand his future education and training. He will be able to draw on
his experiences in ministry later when he studies theology, biblical studies, church
history, pastoral ministry, and other topics and disciplines. What might be crucial for
Stephen is the presence of constructive supervision or mentorship and that he be given
space and opportunity to reflect on his leadership experiences. More so than in Bible
college or seminary, Stephen can be apprenticed in the art of Christian leadership by an
older and proven Christian leader. Stephen should be invited to observe and reflect on
how his mentor motives and leads change. He should then be given the opportunity to do
the same.

For instance, Stephen might be tasked with facilitating prayerfulness at St Gyle’s
by developing technological support for members to share prayer needs. However, the
project would be a waste of his effort if the members do not use the technology. The real
challenge, therefore, is to motivate the members to more faithful prayerfulness, and if
useful, through the help of technology. In addition to material on communication, change
management, and teaching on prayer, Stephen could be provided with case studies of
churches that are evidently faithful or that have become more faithful in prayer. He could
then consider what wisdom could be learned from these case studies and how it could be
applied at St Gyle’s. His efforts should then be analysed and critiqued with his mentor
and supervisor. It is important to not only find those with appropriate skills and
experience, but those with whom the leaders could develop an open and trusting
relationship. It is also essential that the mentors are deeply interested in and committed to
the growth and development of the leaders.
For Carole, her supervisor at St Gyles identified that interpersonal communication is an area of development for her. A process of nurturing wisdom for her might involve the study of proverbs or maxims on interpersonal communication, such as: “When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise” (Pr 10:19), “A fool finds no pleasure in understanding but delights in airing his own opinions” (Pr 18:2), “He who answers before listening— that is his folly and his shame” (Pr 18:13), “The heart of the discerning acquires knowledge; the ears of the wise seek it out” (Pr 18:15), “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (Jas 1:19), or “listen to understand not to respond.” She could consider the meaning of these proverbs and how they have been effectively applied by others, and then be led to reflect on how she might apply them in leadership situations where she has experienced communication challenges.

When Carole is more familiar and confident with the process, she would be invited to self-identify proverbs, maxims, or heuristics that are important and useful for her in situations involving communication challenges. Carole would need to apply her learnings in future situations and reflect on the outcomes. What might also be helpful is for Carole to develop critical habituation of the wisdom necessary for good communication. She could, for example, be encouraged to continually practice “listening to understand not to respond” and to keep “words few” in every conversation. The person who undertakes this process with Carole is important. They must be someone who embodies the virtues that Carole is trying to learn, and whom she respects. It may be her supervisor at St Gyle’s, or a mentor who should undertake this task.
Lee has been scoring poorly on his leadership in his annual reviews. There are different aspects of his leadership have been identified as requiring development: his ability to prioritise his time and tasks, to have broader and longer perspective than those he leads, having independent thoughts, his ability to motivate church members to follow, and his ability to provide an executive presence. Lee is the oldest of the three leaders and is much further along on his leadership journey. The process to learning proverbs and maxims on leadership described above could also be effective in nurturing wisdom in Lee, as his North Asian background has meant that his preference for learning is memorisation and application of his learning in careful reproduction and replication of learned knowledge and methods. Lee could study and reflect on the proverbial saying and how it might apply to leadership situations past and future: “Do not pay attention to every word people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you—for you know in your heart that many times you yourself have cursed others” (Ec 7:21,22). What is challenging, and again because of Lee’s educational background, is the critical application of past wisdom into new contexts. It is necessary for him to develop that critical ability, to become aware of, and then critically reflect on the assumptions and values underlying the leadership philosophy he has been applying.

A process to nurture wisdom in Lee might involve getting him to apply his knowledge of Scripture, theology, and pastoral theology to analyse and deal with case studies of leadership situations that involve the aspects of leadership that he seeks to develop. Lee’s knowledge can be supplemented by readings on leadership which focus on motivation, problem solving and critical thinking, and time management. He will then
reflect and study how others have dealt with similar situations and the outcomes through documented biographical accounts, for example how James Hudson Taylor dealt with the conflict with Lewis Nicol and Hudson Taylor’s eventual decision to dismiss Nicols from the field. If possible, Lee should also consider the incident from the points of view of Nicols, William Berger, director of CIM in London, other missionaries, and the local Chinese. Alternatively, Lee could be invited to study the decision and methods of a leader who displays the qualities that he aspires to, such as the English reformer Thomas Cranmer. Cranmer is a man of paradox—gentle and unambitious and yet was responsible for leading England into Protestantism. Lee could be encouraged to exercise his imagination by inserting himself into Cranmer’s situations and experiences, such as his decision to support the theology and policies of Henry Tudor or his decision to sign the six recantations that led to his martyrdom by Queen Mary. What would Lee say that he would have done if he were in Cranmer’s shoes facing those situations?

**Summary and Conclusion**

This dissertation seeks to argue that the nurture of wisdom among Christian leaders will enable them to be better leaders. This dissertation has sought to consider the main literature on the subject matters of leadership and of wisdom, and has posited a positive relationship between the two. There is still much territory to be explored. Further must be done to test the hypothesis that wisdom is a moderating variable between leaders and system outcomes.

In exploring the relationship between wisdom and leadership, it is necessary to define more clearly some of the key concepts and terms. Leadership is often assumed in
the discourse on Christian leadership and leadership development, regarding whether its definition, what it should be, and therefore the goals of developing leaders are straightforward, understood, and agreed upon. A review of the literature on leadership shows that this is far from the case. Theories of leadership have developed over time and can be broadly grouped into three categories: pure agency, pure situational theories, and contingency. There is still much disagreement on what leadership is. However, the intent of this dissertation is not to formulate a theology or comprehensive theory of leadership, nor is it necessary for the argument of this dissertation. There is currently no general comprehensive theory of leadership, and there may never be.

Leadership, as many have observed, is art-like. There are patterns, components, and variables. It is perhaps uncontroversial to suggest that the leader can bring about system outcomes in a way that others in the system cannot. It can be said that the leader is expected and entrusted with the task of doing this. What the literature cannot satisfactorily provide is what “good” leadership should be, beyond consequentialism. What is needed is a telos, a goal or purpose, and a more complete picture of how everything fits. This task falls outside the scope of leadership studies into the realms of philosophy and religion. Christian theology and biblical studies, therefore, have much to add to the discussion.

This dissertation then seeks to consider leadership from the grand narrative of the Bible, and how a concept of leadership constructed from that can be compared and contrasted with the general constructs of leadership, which has served to clarify its concepts and terms. There is no comprehensive theology of leadership, however, the
grand narrative of the Scriptures highlights a number of elements in the leadership equation that leadership studies could benefit from. For example, human leadership is relativised in salvation-history. Anyone and everyone can be called to be a leader. This suggests that the task of developing leaders and emergent leaders is as critical, if not more so, than leadership selection. The biblical material has also identified that the most significant pushback against good leadership is within the leaders themselves. Developing leaders must therefore involve more than just a change in behaviour or learning skills and acquiring knowledge. Lastly, a consideration of leadership from biblical material suggests that good leadership involves the conscious and intentional participation in the plans and purposes of God.

Literature shows a growing focus on wisdom, and recent study began in the cognitive sciences. The interest in wisdom has now spread to management studies, neuroscience, education, and other academic disciplines. Like leadership, there is no consensus on what wisdom is. However, also like leadership, certain components and variables in wisdom can be identified. Wisdom is multidimensional, involving the cognitive, the affective, and the conative. It is an integration and balance between these elements to achieve certain life goals. Wisdom is virtuous and transcendent.

Wisdom finds a comfortable home in the grand narrative of the Bible. It is fundamental to creation and to human beings because the One who created them did it in wisdom. Wisdom enables its possessor to connect with reality. As a result, the wise can see the bigger picture and the particulars in the context of the whole. It follows that wisdom enables its possessor to connect the particulars with the novel and the
unexpected. According to the Bible, the connection with reality is impossible outside of a right relationship with God. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” is a constant refrain in the Scriptures. If it is possible to connect with reality through wisdom, wise leaders can lead well.

Until recently, approach to leadership and leadership development is epitomised by Frederick Taylor’s “scientific management,” where leaders apply the “best practice” to system problems, that is, methods, processes, and solutions that are tried-and-true and can often bring about the desired system outcomes. However, the tried-and-true method would sometimes unexpectedly fail. In 2013 as Stephen Elop was making the announcement that Nokia has been acquired by Microsoft, he famously said: “We didn’t do anything wrong, but somehow, we lost.”¹ The scientific management approach to leadership functions well if the context is orderly, predictable, and known or knowable. It deals less effectively with contexts that are uncertain, ambiguous, and unknowable, for example when a leader is challenged by disruptive innovation. The scientific management approach is unable to help leaders bring about system outcomes through change into the unknown. What leaders need is the ability to recognise patterns and apply past experiences to new situations. It is argued that wisdom will give leaders that ability.

Christian theology provides a account for the experience of order and disorder. God has created the universe to be good and orderly, but the human observer of the order is limited, contingent, and sinful and therefore often cannot perceive the orderliness.

Further, the order of the creation has been compromised by human rebellion. Perception of the hidden order is only possible by God’s intervention. God in His grace has revealed the vision of reality—most fully in Jesus, who has revealed the hidden order and promised its full realisation sometime in the future. The journey of wisdom in “the fear of the LORD” must now involve faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Wisdom provides the sign posts for the journey home.

Finally, this dissertation discusses some procedures and processes that could be applied for the nurture of wisdom. Wisdom, as Robert Sternberg argues, cannot be taught directly. Scaffolding must be built, and an environment established for wisdom to be acquired directly. Other processes for the nurture of wisdom include the process of transformative learning, the learning of proverbs and maxims, cultivating pastoral imagination and wise affections, interacting with wise significant others, and establishing wise habituation. These procedures are then “embodied” in a particular context of ministry, the development of leaders and emergent leaders at St Gyle’s.

There are strong empirical and biblical grounds for a positive relationship between wisdom and leadership, and therefore support for the thesis that the nurture of wisdom will enable Christian leaders to be better leaders. Wisdom is not just one more element to be included into the curriculum or program of Christian leadership development. It is a different way of seeing and doing things. If this were true, then the nurture of wisdom in fact represents a paradigmatic shift in thinking and practice of leadership development. The final words of this dissertation will belong to the wise, Qohelet, cautions them, “Do not be overrighteous, neither be overwise—why destroy
yourself?” (Ec 7:16). He then observes that “Wisdom makes one wise man more powerful than ten rulers in a city” (Ec 7:19) Wisdom is indeed powerful, able to make leaders strong, and a wise leader will use that wisdom wisely.
Figure 3

LEADERS

TEACHERS

Figure 4

LEADERSHIP

SERVANTHOOD


Bekker, Corne J. “Towards a Theoretical Model of Christian Leadership.” JBPL no. 2 (Summer 2009): 142-152.


