

Abstract

Contemporary leaders are engaged in a far reaching quest for ethical guidance to direct their practices in an increasingly global, complex, multi-cultural environment. There is no richer source of wisdom than Scripture, and this work investigates the lessons from Acts 8:26-40 through an examination of the ideological texture of socio-rhetorical analysis (Robbins, 1996). Beginning with a review of the interpretive challenges of the Ethiopian eunuch conversion narrative, exegetical work focuses primarily on early church and current western ideological perspectives, how they taint both the interpretation and attention given to the passage. Through the study, interpretive challenges of the pericope and the somewhat modest attention to the unique characteristics of the Ethiopian eunuch in prior research raise ethical questions and offer guidance for Spirit-led leaders to bridge cultural chasms and remove barriers that inhibit justice. The Scriptural leadership lessons revealed by the ideological exegesis are then considered in the context of contemporary leadership theories and the Biblical instructions to witness to the ends of the earth.

Keywords: Spiritual leadership, Christian leadership, servant leadership, Acts 8, leadership, socio-rhetorical, ideological, Biblical leadership, transformational leadership, ethical leadership.

Redefining the Leadership Calling: When the Ends of the Earth Are Nearby

Contemporary Christian leaders often struggle with their calling, concerned that their interest in leading may be driven by ambition rather than guided by the Spirit (Sanders, 2007), but Scripture is bursting with lessons to allay that concern; lessons on other-focused leadership that operates with compassion and a servant-like perspective to glorify God and witness to the world. Harvesting such lessons from God's Word to direct the Christian leader and allay concerns over their calling requires solid exegesis (Bekker, 2006). This paper explored one pertinent pericope, the narrative of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-40, from an ideological perspective to uncover lessons capable of informing contemporary leadership practices. Socio-rhetorical analysis, specifically interpreting the ideological texture of the text, was employed to discover how ideologies of both the early church and contemporary readers can shape the interpretation (Robbins, 1996). Acts 8:26-40 is a particularly encouraging and somewhat unusual narrative of early evangelism involving acts of the Spirit and an Ethiopian eunuch of position, but as Martin (1989) observed, despite the rich imagery and uniqueness, the story has received little scholarly attention, especially in exploring the Ethiopian's identity. Beyond the more commonly practiced theological exegesis methods, fresh lessons were revealed through the ideological interpretation of the passage. Such lessons can inform leaders as they seek direction in an ever more diverse, multi-cultural environment.

Ideological Texture of Socio-Rhetorical Analysis

Socio-rhetorical interpretation approaches the text through multiple perspectives that consider the way language is used and how social systems affect the analysis (Robbins, 1996). Robbins (1996) identifies five perspectives or textures that can be applied when exploring the text: inner texture, intertexture, social and cultural texture, ideological texture, and sacred texture

(p. 3). The complex and unique character of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8:26-40 introduces questions of geography, ethnicity, and religious position that make exploring the ideological texture of particular interest. The ideological texture of socio-rhetorical analysis focuses on how interpreters' and groups' individual values, assumptions, beliefs, biases, stereotypes, opinions, and presupposition color the interpretation, and viewing the ideological texture often reveals deeper underlying issues and lessons (Robbins, 1996). Analyzing the ideological perspectives of the early church, contemporary society, and present-day leadership, the author within his own ideology approached Acts 8:26-40 seeking fresh insights for contemporary leaders.

The Ethiopian Eunuch Conversion Narrative of Acts 8

The story of the Ethiopian eunuch was contained in the Book of Acts which continued Luke's Gospel and described the history of the early church as the Gospel was spread from Jerusalem to Rome (DeSilva, 2004, p. 348). Acts 1:8 summarizes the overall theme of Acts as Jesus instructed his disciples, "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (English Standard Version). Acts then was intended to reveal how through the power of the Holy Spirit, the early church answered the call to witness and spread the Good News even to the ends of the earth (Keener, 2009).

Acts 8:26-40 is a particularly colorful narrative, rich in imagery and presenting the Ethiopian eunuch, a royal treasurer or chamberlain in the court of Candace (Martin, 1989), as the subject of Philip's evangelistic outreach. Candace was a traditional title for queens, similar to the use of Caesar by the Romans (Jabini, 2012). Each Candace would rule on behalf of her son the king because the king was considered too holy to deal with secular matters (Longenecker, 1981). In the story, the Ethiopian was returning from worship in Jerusalem and while seated in his

chariot, he was reading Isaiah 53:7-8 aloud, a practice common in the ancient world (Longenecker, 1981). Philip was prompted by the Spirit to run to him and offer help in interpretation. Beginning with the Isaiah teaching on the suffering servant that the eunuch was reading aloud, Philip shares the good news of Jesus and upon arrival at some water, baptized the eunuch. Philip was then whisked away by the Spirit to continue his evangelism and the Ethiopian proceeded on his journey with joy (Rosica, 1994). It was unsurprising that the Ethiopian would require some clarification of the Isaiah periscope because Judaism would likely apply the suffering text to Israel or gentile nations and not to the messiah, the true “suffering servant” (Longenecker, 1981).

The Ethiopian conversion narrative contained little in terms of geographical details suggesting that Luke’s focus was primarily theological, concentrated especially on the divine Spiritual intervention in the encounter (Longenecker, 1981). Martin (1989) observed that scholars have focused primarily on four key theological themes: 1) the actions of the Holy Spirit in evangelism, 2) witnessing in the early church, 3) joy as a manifestation of faith, and 4) Old Testament prophecy fulfillment. These theological observations are important, but may have been narrowed by scholars’ ideological notions, thereby ignoring other meaningful teachings (Martin, 1989). Before exploring additional insights, a further understanding of the more traditional theological themes will be helpful.

The divine encounter between Philip and the Ethiopian was initiated by the Lord, “Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, ‘Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.’” (Acts 8:26, English Standard Version). Philip responded to the instruction by the Lord and when he arrived at the appointed place, the Ethiopian was in his chariot and the Spirit directed Philip to join him (Acts 8:29). After sharing the good news of

Jesus and baptizing the eunuch, Philip was transported to Azotus to continue his evangelism (Acts 8:39-40). The Spirit initiated the divine encounter, directed the action, and even terminated the meeting demonstrating the work of the Holy Spirit in the spread of the early church, a theme consistent with the message of the remaining Book of Acts (Shauf, 2009). As when the Lord dispatched Elijah to the widow of Zarephath (Strelan, 2001), sent Jonah to Ninevah, or like the numerous other examples of divine guidance in Scripture, the timing, technique, and results of the Ethiopian conversion were perfect.

Shauf (2009) suggested that the theological focus of the Ethiopian narrative was primarily on the geographical expansion of the church, because being a eunuch prevented the Ethiopian from being Jewish, so the other potential theological theme, the dispute over whether gentiles must be Jewish to join the Christian community, would not have been the central issue. Philip represented the perfect vehicle for the non-Jewish outreach due to his prior evangelical mission to Samaria (Jabini F. S., 2010). Scholars disagree however on how the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch fits within the overall missionary movement. That is, did this conversion represent the ends of the earth calling of Acts 1:8 even though Luke did not indicate any Ethiopian church growth after the Ethiopian conversion (Shauf, 2009)? Ethiopia, also referred to as Cush, was certainly referenced often in Scriptural calls for all nations to turn to the Lord including Psalm 68:31, “Cush shall hasten to stretch out her hands to God” and Zephaniah 3:10, “From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers, the daughter of my dispersed ones, shall bring my offering.” (Rosica, 1994). Longnecker (1981) noted that Irenaeus wrote that the Ethiopian eunuch became a missionary to the Ethiopians, but it is unclear whether Irenaeus knew that factually or if he inferred the missionary role from the Acts 8 narrative. The Ethiopian narrative also illustrated the power of Scripture in faith conversions as the eunuch was pondering Isaiah

when Philip leveraged the prophetic verses to share the good news of Christ, “So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ” (Romans 10:17).

Joyfulness connected to faith as a theological concept was also illustrated as the Ethiopian “...went on his way rejoicing.” (Acts 8:39b). Such joy as a natural consequence of faith in God was depicted throughout Scripture and especially in Acts (Acts 8:8, Acts 16:34). Faith and joy were linked in Paul’s writing as well, “May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.” (Romans 15:13), and in Peter’s, “Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory,” (1 Peter 1:8b). The description of the eunuch’s joy supported the genuine nature of the faith conversion and the success of Philip’s evangelism of the Ethiopian in the continual spread of the Good News.

Prophecy fulfillment was also foundational to Philip’s message of the Good News since the Ethiopian was reading the Isaiah 53 prophecy of the suffering servant which was fulfilled in Christ (Martin, 1989). Martin (1989) also suggested that the Isaiah 56:3-5 prophecy that eunuchs would not be cut off but accepted into the Kingdom, was fulfilled through Christ and the Ethiopian eunuch faith conversion demonstrated the new truth. The theological messages in the Ethiopian eunuch narrative are important and enlightening, but in interpreting the passage has Biblical scholarship been constrained by ideology? An examination of the ideological perspectives of the early church and more contemporary researchers can offer some further texture to the traditional theological treatise.

Ideological Perspectives of the Early Church

Martin (1989) argued that the early church was affected by ideological biases, and significant ideological questions remained unanswered such as; the eunuch condition of the

Ethiopian, the Ethiopian's ethnicity, the position of the Ethiopian eunuch in fulfilling the call to share the good news to the ends of the earth, and how the eunuch conversion varied from that of Cornelius and the outreach to Rome (Kartzow & Moxnes, 2010). The main subject of the narrative (Carson, 1997), the Ethiopian, was rich in characteristics to include nationality, race, position, apparent wealth from the ownership of a carriage, religious connections as evidenced by having a copy of Scripture, and his status as a eunuch (Kartzow & Moxnes, 2010). Most interpreters, scholars and common Bible readers view those categories based on their own individual, ideologically filtered perspectives (Kartzow & Moxnes, 2010). To better understand the Ethiopian conversion narrative, the early church ideological perspectives will be explored.

Jew or Gentile

Whether the term "eunuch" was a condition or title is a matter of debate and would affect whether the Ethiopian narrative described the expansion of the church to the gentiles or to the ends of the earth. The Ethiopian's status as a eunuch physically was as important as race, prestige, or religious following (Carson, 1997). While Longnecker (1981) supported those who argue that term "eunuch" in the Acts narrative was actually a position title as was a common practice in ancient writings, most scholars conclude that using eunuch in such a way would be redundant since he was already clearly described as a court official in charge of the treasury (Shauf, 2009). That is, most posit that "eunuch" described the Ethiopian's physical condition (Shauf, 2009).

That the eunuch "...had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah." (Acts 8:27b-28) suggested he was a "Proselyte of the Gate" (Longenecker, 1981, p. 362) or near-proselyte. Luke may have viewed the Ethiopian as more Jewish than gentile which would have explained his lack of emphasis on the narrative

(Longenecker, 1981) as Acts told of how the early church reached the ends of the (gentile) earth. Longenecker (1981) argued that the placement of the narrative within Acts and the possession of a scroll of Isaiah by the Ethiopian supported the conclusion that he was more Jew than gentile. Other researchers have argued that it was the eunuch condition and the Jewish prohibition against eunuchs being accepted into the community that positions the eunuch as a non-Jew and therefore the first conversion of a gentile in Scripture (Kartzow & Moxnes, 2010; Shauf, 2009). Such an interpretation would of course further intensify the question of why would such a momentous event, the first gentile conversion, receive such scant attention (Shauf, 2009).

Many scholars have proposed that eunuchs were stigmatized not just by the Jewish religious community (Kartzow & Moxnes, 2010; Longenecker, 1981), but much like orphans or bastards have been in many societies (Kartzow & Moxnes, 2010). The eunuch traveled to Jerusalem to worship and join into the community, but as a eunuch, he was likely rejected (Carson, 1997). Yet through Christ all who believe are welcomed to the feast, so guided by the Holy Spirit, Philip was sent to overturn the rejection and confirm the invitation to all including the eunuch as Isaiah had prophesied in Isaiah 56 (Carson, 1997). The importance of the Ethiopian's status as a eunuch was therefore important since within the Jewish community's ideology, the conversion of the Ethiopian would demonstrate Christ overcoming their religiously based prohibitions. The eunuch condition of the Ethiopian was perhaps simply a metaphor for how grace is available even to the barren, physically or spiritually.

Ethiopia and Ethnicity

The Ethiopian eunuch narrative holds a relatively modest position in the Book of Acts, receiving far less attention than narratives such as the conversion of Cornelius the centurion (Shauf, 2009). What is unclear is whether the difference in attention was due to geography,

religious position as discussed in the prior section, or ideological biases throughout history (Kartzow & Moxnes, 2010; Martin, 1989; Shauf, 2009). That is, was the focus of Luke in the narrative primarily on the conversion of the non-Jew from far off, suggesting the ethnicity and nationality were included simply as descriptives, or were those characteristics of the Ethiopian more meaningful and simply minimized by scholars and readers within their ideological contexts?

Ethiopia represented the ends of the earth in the early church era and therefore, the eunuch story, which followed relatively closely Philip's work in Samaria, could simply represent the next step in fulfilling Acts 1:8 in reaching Samaria and the ends of the earth (Kartzow & Moxnes, 2010; Martin, 1989). Commentators and readers alike tend to view Peter and Paul's work in reaching the Romans as that theological fulfillment of Acts 1:8, so the minimization of the Ethiopian eunuch narrative suggests ideological factors may have been influential (Martin, 1989; Robbins, 1996). Martin (1989) suggested that underappreciating the ethnicity of the Ethiopian may be due to lack of clarity on the ethnicity of the Ethiopian, a focus on other theological concerns such as the interaction of eunuch status and the Jewish religious community, or simply ignoring or minimizing the black nature of the Ethiopian (p. 110-111). It is not atypical for ancient writings to omit or minimize the Ethiopians and their culture; even many Biblical geographical references are guilty of neglecting the region (Martin, 1989). With Rome as the center of civilization and cultural attention, darker races were often marginalized (Martin, 1989).

For those who would claim lack of ethnic clarity was the cause, there is compelling evidence that Ethiopians were known as black as evidenced by their characteristics of color, hair and lips being depicted in ancient art as well as within classic Greek and Roman literature

including writings by Homer and the historian Herodotus (Martin, 1989, p. 111). Ethiopians were described as having dark skin, of being the most black (Martin, 1989), and Jeremiah wrote “Can the Ethiopian change his skin...” (Jeremiah 13:23a) alluding to the racial aspect of Ethiopians that readers of Luke would have customarily recognize. Luke in fact mentioned another black in Acts 13:1 when referring to “...Simeon who was called Niger...” emphasized an awareness of color.

Scholars differ as to how Ethiopia and blacks were viewed in the early church era. Kartzow and Moxnes (2010) suggested that Ethiopia was a remote, almost mythical location used in the Acts narrative to depict the reach of God to even the most distant, difficult to reach corners of the earth. Shauf (2009) claimed that the Ethiopian blacks were viewed as wealthy, wise and mighty, an almost “revered ethnic group”, while Kartzow and Moxnes (2010) described the view of blackness as immoral or evil, much like more contemporary ideologies (p.192). It is therefore unclear how black Ethiopians would have been viewed by the contemporary readers of Luke’s narrative, and perhaps like today, ideological groups existed that had varied perspectives.

Some insight into the theological contribution of the Ethiopian nationality in Luke’s narrative may be harvested from the fact that ancient Greek and Roman writers identified Ethiopia with the ends of the earth, describing the nation as “the edges of the inhabited world” to the south (Martin, 1989, p. 118) supporting the position that the narrative inclusion of the Ethiopian official actually depicted the Acts 1:8 fulfillment beyond Samaria to the ends of the earth. The remoteness view would suggest that the Ethiopian nature of the eunuch was more about geography than race. If so, the question remains as to the disparity in emphasis as compared to the Cornelius conversion (Shauf, 2009).

The Eunuch, Peter and Cornelius

It is uncertain how early church ideology may have affected the placement, attention, and influence of the Ethiopian narrative, and whether the ancients, like the current western cultures, suffered a bias toward western matters (Kartzow & Moxnes, 2010). Various interpretations of eunuch lead to different conclusion on whether the story represents the first gentile conversion (Longenecker, 1981; Shauf, 2009), but there is strong support for the view that Ethiopia was considered, at least toward the south, as the ends of the earth and therefore a portrayal of an Acts 1:8 fulfillment (Kartzow & Moxnes, 2010; Martin, 1989). Then why was far more attention placed on Peter's ministry in the conversion of Cornelius the centurion in Acts 10 (Shauf, 2009)? Cornelius was described as devout, God-fearing, alms-giving, righteous, and prayerful which suggested that he was arguably even more Jewish than the Ethiopian eunuch (Shauf, 2009). So if the focus was on gentile conversion, elevating the Cornelius conversion for that purpose would not make sense given the Cornelius' religiosity (Martin, 1989; Shauf, 2009). Other evidence, such as the neglect of African geography and the focus by Peter and Paul toward Rome suggested that, whether due to Rome being the center of power, the relationship between Rome and Israel, or simply a bias toward western culture, the writers of Scripture and the early church were more focused to the north and west with limited attention to the southern church or the outreaches to that "ends of the earth" (Kartzow & Moxnes, 2010; Martin, 1989; Shauf, 2009). Kartzow and Moxnes (2010) even suggested that Ethiopia may have been Rome's enemy. Perhaps the early church, especially the 4th century church, as well as subsequent Christians therefore downplayed the significance of the Ethiopian eunuch's conversion based on geopolitical conflict. Beyond geographical or cultural ideologically based bias, there was some indication that during the early church era people of dark skin may have been viewed as less

desirable (Kartzow & Moxnes, 2010). However, others have claimed that the black Ethiopian people were actually widely appreciated (Shauf, 2009), so the impact of color in the early church is ambiguous. Clearly Luke wrote both the Cornelius and Ethiopian narratives as evidence of the church's spread to new populations, and while the Cornelius story and Peter's work and visions received more attention, the stories served as precursors to the early churches' acceptance that not only to the Jews, but to the gentiles "...God gave the same gift..." (Acts 11:17).

Contemporary Ideologies

Contemporary scholars and readers of the periscope bring ideologies that Kartzow and Moxnes (2010) suggested diminish the Ethiopian, black, and eunuch characteristics of the narrative. That is, contemporary western readings virtually ignore the ethnicity and the eunuch-triggered isolation of the Ethiopian, overlooking the isolated subcultures of race, geography, and the sexual handicap (Kartzow & Moxnes, 2010; Martin, 1989; Shauf, 2009). Just as readers have ideological presuppositions, so do scholars (Robbins, 1996), and such ideological driven subjectivity may have downplayed the racial nature of the Ethiopian story in academic works (Martin, 1989).

Kartzow and Moxnes (2010) posit that the narrative may well have been included by Luke to offer racial identification to often ignored subcultures, and Martin (1989) would agree that the inclusion of the Ethiopian is culturally affirming to Black Christians and connects them to their faith in its earliest traditions (p.125). The full richness of the Ethiopian eunuch narrative would be more fully appreciated by modern readers of the Civil Rights era and members of the repressed subcultures who would more easily envision the Ethiopian as Black and make the connections with equality, universalism of the Gospel message, and the liberation available to all through Christ (Martin, 1989). For many, the significance of the story of the conversion of the

Black African eunuch in terms of inclusiveness at the heavenly banquet, in bridging the racial, social, and sexual divides was overlooked (Kartzow & Moxnes, 2010; Martin, 1989).

So arguably the first non-Jew that joined the early Christian church, a conversion directed by intervention of the Holy Spirit (Shauf, 2009), was black, barren, and remote, facts often minimized if not ignored by contemporary scholars and preachers tainted by an ideology of white western focus (Kartzow & Moxnes, 2010). In considering the socially diminished characteristics of the Ethiopian eunuch, readers could find that the narrative represents all of mankind (Kartzow & Moxnes, 2010), that the complex characteristics of position, power, race, sexual limitations, remoteness, and religious ostracism depict the new welcoming of all to the wedding feast in the Kingdom.

Divinely Empowered Leadership

Scripture is “one of the most important avenues for exploring leadership” (Bekker, 2006, p. 4), and analyzing the ideological texture offers Christian leadership practitioners and scholars the ability to perceive leadership lessons and practices from new, fresh perspectives (Robbins, 1996). In Luke’s Acts 8:26-40, an examination of how both early church and contemporary ideologies taint the interpretation can reveal rich lessons for the follower-focused, enlightened, Spiritually empowered leader. Insights into in how early evangelism crossed racial, distance, cultural, and even handicap boundaries, and perhaps as importantly, how ideologies minimized understanding of those boundaries can inform leaders in their self-awareness, growth and leadership practices. The relevant lessons of awareness and inclusiveness are reflected in many contemporary leadership theories.

Ethical Leadership

Yukl (2010) suggested that while definitions of ethical leadership vary, motives and behaviors of fairness, values, morality, and the desire to protect rights are essential elements. In the Ethiopian eunuch narrative, the main character was excluded from Jewish society, handicapped, distanced both geographically and racially, yet Philip, directed by the Lord, initiated an outreach that removed those barriers and welcomed him into the early church community. The proactive effort, ignoring whatever artificial societal and cultural barriers may have existed, reflected the characteristics of a leader practicing contemporary ethical leadership theory (Yukl, 2010).

Servant Leadership

As Greenleaf (2010) described of the servant leader, “the great leader is seen as servant first” (p. 87). The servant leader is concerned less with power and authority and more with nurturing, defending, and empowering followers (Greenleaf, 2010; Yukl, 2010). Yukl (2010) identifies the opposition to social injustice and treating the weak and marginal members of society with respect, as principles of servant leadership (p.419). While the Ethiopian eunuch as a member of Candace’s court would not be considered weak, he would have been marginalized in the Jewish community and considered an outsider (Shauf, 2009). Philip under the guidance of the Spirit traveled specifically to meet the Ethiopian, ran to him, offered to share the good news, and concluded the servanthood by baptizing him into the Christian community. Philip’s initiative and follower focus, particularly in reaching out to a foreigner, a eunuch, demonstrated the sacrificial, leaders initiated behaviors reflective of servant leadership. As Mark wrote, “But it shall not be so among you, but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all.” (Mark 10:43-44)

Transformational Leadership

Transformation leadership is characterized by four pillars of inspirational motivation, individual consideration, intellectual stimulation, and idealized influence (Bass & Riggio, 2010) and in the Ethiopian eunuch narrative, Philip visibly demonstrated transformational leadership behaviors. Intellectual stimulation is when the leader “increases follower awareness of problems and influences followers to view problems from a new perspective” (Yukl, 2010, p. 276). Philip offered such awareness and fresh perspective when in response to the eunuch recognizing a need for guidance, “Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning with this Scripture he told him the good news about Jesus” (Acts 8:35). The eunuch began to understand and view the Scripture and his salvation from a “new perspective” leading him to be baptized. Philip practiced the transformational behavior of intellectual stimulation as he led the Ethiopian into understanding.

Idealized influence is the practice of modeling admirable behavior (Bass & Riggio, 2010). Philip, in proactively sharing the good news while traveling over considerable distances, demonstrated servanthood and evangelism that the Ethiopian eunuch could both appreciate and mimic when he returned to his native land to spread the Gospel. Yukl (2010) describes individualized consideration, the treating of followers as individuals as “providing support, encouragement, and coaching to followers” which aptly describes Philip as he revealed the good news of Jesus Christ to the eunuch in just the right manner, coaching him through the learning. Finally, the fourth principle of transformational leadership is inspirational motivation which is the practice of communicating an exciting vision, often employing symbology (Bass & Riggio, 2010; Yukl, 2010). The exciting, inspirational nature of Philip’s message was apparent from eunuch’s reaction when he rejoiced and participated in the symbolic baptism practice. Philip clearly left the Ethiopian with an exciting, appealing vision.

In this short periscope, Philip demonstrated many of the fundamentals of transformational leadership theory. The intent of transformational leadership is to encourage followers to transcend their own self-interests, to encourage a commitment to a higher purpose, and lessons from Philip's leadership depicted in the Ethiopian eunuch narrative can inform the contemporary leader seeking to elevate their leadership practices in such a way.

Spiritual Leadership

Spiritual leadership replaces the misguided contemporary leadership practices that focus on power, management, and administration, with leadership that is more concerned with personal fulfillment and a greater purpose (Murray & Evers, 2011, p. 9). From the directive from the angel of the Lord in verse 26 to "rise and go toward the south", to the Spirit directing Philip to join the Ethiopian at his chariot in verse 29, to how the Spirit carried Philip away after the eunuch was baptized in verse 39, Acts 8 demonstrates the divine empowerment of spiritual leadership theory. In Philip, we see the Spiritual empowerment demonstrated toward one rejected by the religious community, a follower removed from the community by handicap, race and geography, with uplifting results and the resultant spread of the Gospel to the south ends of the earth.

Spiritual empowerment offers both leaders and followers a more integrated life of wholeness that incorporates Spirituality with day-to-day efforts (Murray & Evers, 2011). Fry (2003) posits that spiritual leadership addresses the needs of leaders and followers and results in them become more productive and committed to the effort (p. 694). Like the prophetic word of the Lord to Zerubbabel in Zechariah 4:6, "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts." the Christian leader relying on divine, spiritual empowerment as opposed to their

own strength is demonstrating Spiritual leadership in alignment with the teaching of Scripture. Philip depicted clearly Spiritual leadership.

Conclusion

Ideological interpretation of Acts 8:26-40 reveals a deep texture of exegesis, a colorful demonstration of a number of contemporary leadership theories from new and enlightening perspectives. Jabini (2010) cautioned though that in studying the ideological texture, it is important to remember the fullness of Christ and not allow one dimension such as race, handicap, geographical placement, or position to taint the view. With Jabini's caution in mind, exploring the underappreciated aspects of the Ethiopian eunuch's conversion story can proffer insights of value for the Christian leader. Philip, divinely empowered to reach a marginalized Ethiopian eunuch, offers not only Christian leadership examples, but reminds us of the bias and blindness that ideological presuppositions can yield in our lives. Integration of Scriptural lesson in leadership is vital to effective Christian leadership. Hoppe (2005) suggested that practicing an unnatural separation of work and spirituality, leaders can miss their true opportunity to make a difference not just a living (p.86).

If Christian leaders are called to reach the ends of the earth as written in Acts 1:8, those "ends" are often found in their own workplace or neighborhood. Frequently the distant people are separated not by geography, but by ideologies; by perspectives, biases and sometimes blindness such as all people possess. Opportunities for eternal outcomes "in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:8) are truly available only through the empowering Holy Spirit. The Christian leaders' call to reach across the cultural divides of ethnicity, geography, physical condition, and religious restrictions through the power of the Spirit are the real exegetical lessons of Acts 8:26-40.

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