



DORDT COLLEGE

Digital Collections @ Dordt

Faculty Work Comprehensive List

5-6-2020

Leading Redemptively: The Heart of Christian Leadership

Ryan G. Zonnefeld

Dordt University, ryan.zonnefeld@dordt.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/faculty_work



Part of the [Christianity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Zonnefeld, R. G. (2020). Leading Redemptively: The Heart of Christian Leadership. Retrieved from https://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/faculty_work/1174

This Blog Post is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Collections @ Dordt. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Work Comprehensive List by an authorized administrator of Digital Collections @ Dordt. For more information, please contact ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu.

Leading Redemptively: The Heart of Christian Leadership

Abstract

"The redemptive leader views authority as a God-given responsibility that is inseparable from image-bearing and required to be carried out with humility and love."

Posting about humble leadership from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

<https://inallthings.org/leading-redemptively-the-heart-of-christian-leadership/>

Keywords

In All Things, leadership, redemption, humility, cultural mandate

Disciplines

Christianity

Comments

In All Things is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt University](#).

in things

May 6, 2020

Leading Redemptively: The Heart of Christian Leadership

Ryan Zonnefeld

“Leadership is influence. That’s it. Nothing more; nothing less.”¹

John Maxwell’s views on leadership are perhaps more well-known than some, yet his prolific authoring has not inhibited countless others to share their views of leadership as well. While varying views and definitions exist, there is overwhelming agreement on one premise: everyone has influence and, in turn, is a leader in some form or fashion. Indeed, the cultural mandate itself (Genesis 1:28) lays a foundation for the entire human race as leaders called to steward the world God has given us.

To be a Christian leader is more than just being a Christian and having a title. It is more than *leading Christianly* and becomes even more impactful, and faithful, when it is reimagined as *leading redemptively*. Redemptive leadership fully embodies the distinctiveness of what God intended in the cultural mandate. Focusing on this mandate shifts the focus of leadership away from influence and followership toward a deeper heart commitment of office consciousness, belief, humility, and love as the four pillars of *leading redemptively*.

Leading redemptively is most easily seen in the actions of a leader, but the deeper purpose and direction that guide these actions is rooted in heart-commitments that lie at the core of the leader. Or, to put it another way, the liturgies of the hands (acts of

leading) are grounded in a philosophical imagination that comes from the head, directed by the heart.² We need to focus on the heart before we focus on the head (leadership thinking and knowledge) or the hands (leadership skills and talent). Christian leadership runs much deeper than words and practices, reinforcing the need for a deeper understanding of Christian leadership as *redemptive* leadership where the heart and the head drive the hands (i.e. actions) of leaders.

Knowledge and skill may look similar in both the Christian and non-Christian leader, but these purposeful heart commitments are what differentiate a Christian leader. Heart commitments, on the other hand, require careful and deep cultivating to fully grasp the call of leadership, for our heart influences what we worship and how we act.³

Redemptive leadership embodies the head, heart, and hands. The heart serves as the foundation for the four pillars of *leading redemptively*: office consciousness, belief, humility, and love.

Office Consciousness

The heart of leadership lies deeper than knowing oneself. Knowing oneself begins with knowing God. It is about understanding His call to leadership (office-consciousness) and the beliefs, humility, and love that flow from the heart. *Office consciousness* solidifies the commitment of the redemptive leader to both an understanding of and commitment to the office of leadership. The office-conscious leader understands that leadership requires faithfulness to the office.

Jesus exemplified office-consciousness in three key ways that are important examples of *leading redemptively*. First, Jesus did not choose His disciples based on their knowledge or skills, but because of their faithfulness. Second, He sought to be faithful to the Father's will and, in turn, inspired others to faithfulness as well. Jesus was very conscious of His office. Service was not just what He did, service embodied His very nature. Third, Jesus' relationship with the Father reflects the faithfulness of office-consciousness. Jesus knew what He was called to do and was faithful to that call. He developed relationships with others and fought temptations and ridicule, yet remained faithful to his calling. The same should be known of us as leaders, that we are first and foremost faithful to the calling God has given each of us. Leaders lead because they are passionate about being obedient.

Belief

Actions of leaders flow from beliefs and inner loves, so it is critical that the focus be placed on the heart before actions. To *lead redemptively*, one must hold to *redemptive*

beliefs. “All human beings at root are *believers* who are committed to and oriented by a fundamental constellation of beliefs that, even if not reflected upon, govern and control our being and our doing.”⁴

Graham provides insight into how beliefs influence actions by describing the relationship between controlling and professed beliefs.⁵ While persons hold both types of beliefs, one’s controlling beliefs are not necessarily consistent with one’s professed beliefs. A leader’s professed beliefs form the bases for our theories and discussions regarding leadership, but they do not always control the way leaders actually lead. It is easy for a leader to get caught up in the actions of leadership that are influential without taking the time to process whether the actions are in line with one’s deeper beliefs.

Humility

Office consciousness and belief, the first two aspects of *leading redemptively*, are expressed through the next two aspects: humility and love. Humility can be a challenging aspect of leadership. A leader who displays too much humility is perceived as weak and the perception of a leader who displays too little humility is often arrogance. For the redemptive leader, however, humility is not a tool for practical gains. For the redemptive leader, “humility is more about how I treat others than how I think about myself.” ((Dickson, J. (2011). *Humilitas: A lost key to life, love, and leadership*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan. p. 25)) True humility recognizes not just the dignity, but the image-bearing authority that God has given to all of us. In action, humility is demonstrated in selfless, Kingdom-directed ways.

One of the challenges of humility is that there are many examples of misdirected humility. Some leaders pursue humility through effusive talk, hoping that talking about it will engender it in their heart. This façade of humility creates an aversion from others to accept leadership positions. Other leaders focus more on getting things done than being concerned about how they get done. A colleague of mine once commented that a great leader is one who “gets things done with an iron fist in a velvet glove.” If “getting things done” supersedes the importance of office-consciousness, faithfulness, belief, humility, or love, then we have misunderstood and greatly warped our view and expectations of leaders.

Love

Having a strong sense of office consciousness, deep beliefs, and authentic humility are not enough. The *redemptive leader* must also personify love. “Being a disciple of Jesus is...a matter of being the kind of person who *loves* rightly—who loves God and neighbor

and is oriented to the world by the primacy of that love.”⁶ Our image bearing gives the authority to lead, belief gives a foundation to lead, and humility is one expression of *leading redemptively*, but love is a second critical expression of the purpose and motivation of *leading redemptively*.

In the first century, St. Augustine emphasized that we are motivated in everything we do by what we love. The *redemptive* leader has a Kingdom focus to his or her work, seeing leadership as a vertical relationship with God and a horizontal relationship with their co-servants. *Redemptive leadership* recognizes a much greater purpose for the work itself, it *loves* the work because of the purpose of the work.

Summary

In summary, *leading redemptively* requires deep heart-commitments to office-consciousness, belief, humility, and love. It requires a worldview that sees the Creation as fallen, and recognizes not only the need for its redemption, but the command and authority granted to engage as redemptive agents. The redemptive leader views authority as a God-given responsibility that is inseparable from image-bearing and required to be carried out with humility and love.

FOOTNOTES

1. Maxwell, J. C. (1993). *Developing the leader within you*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers. p. 1
2. Smith, J. K. A., (2009). *Desiring the kingdom: Worship, worldview, and cultural formation*. Grand Rapids: Baker.
3. Smith, J. K. A., (2009). *Desiring the kingdom: Worship, worldview, and cultural formation*. Grand Rapids: Baker.
4. Smith, J. K. A., (2009). *Desiring the kingdom: Worship, worldview, and cultural formation*. Grand Rapids: Baker. P. 24
5. Graham, D. L. (2009). *Teaching redemptively: Brining grace and truth into your classroom*. Colorado Springs: Purposeful Design Publications.
6. Smith, J. K. A., (2009). *Desiring the kingdom: Worship, worldview, and cultural formation*. Grand Rapids: Baker. pp. 32-33