

## Book Review

### *Biblical Perspectives on Leadership and Organizations*

By J. Lee Whittington  
Palgrave Macmillan (2015)

Reviewed by  
Stephanie Sheehan  
Southern Adventist University

With growing interest by faith-based institutions in the area of biblical integration within academia, Whittington's endeavor provides a valuable resource for those in the fields of leadership, management, theology, et al. Outside of academia, it will serve well as a resource for Christian leaders wanting to gain a more thorough understanding of scripturally based (i.e. spiritual) leadership and/or deepen their personal growth in this area, as well as those striving to influence organizational cultural through biblical principles. The principles are derived from scripture, however, are certainly actionable in secular or faith-based organizations.

Addressing leadership issues and practice in organizations, Whittington skillfully and thoroughly juxtaposes scripture, spirituality, leadership, and the differing contexts in which these emerge. The composition of this juxtaposition arises from Whittington's descriptive writing approach, and intentional use of imagery, lenses sketches, snapshots, and metaphors—all contributing to the interpretive lens.

To begin, Whittington lays a foundation of differentiation between religiosity and spirituality and then establishes the source of spirituality as the Holy Spirit. The identity and purpose of the Holy Spirit are identified and evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit as it is found in the Old and New Testament. Consistent in this work evidenced throughout scripture and which continues to this very moment is the element of empowerment by the Holy Spirit and its unique and vital role in leaders and leadership. As an example of one who yielded to, received such empowerment, and served to evidence, we are introduced to Paul in the New Testament.

Building on earlier work (Whittington, Pitts, Kageler & Goodwin, 2005), Whittington identifies Paul as the quintessential example of spiritual leadership, builds context for such through use of a well-crafted

biographical sketch, which establishes the influence of Holy Spirit empowerment of Paul's leadership as evidenced through its means, mission and measure. Continuing through the lens of Paul's empowered spiritual leadership, Whittington enlarges the field to include exploration of leadership theories, approaches, styles, and antecedental contributors to leadership effectiveness. This intersection with social science prompts topical foci such as power, influence, and seeing Paul through trait approach and through social approach.

Utilizing the approach of Morgan, Gregory and Roach (1997), Whittington expands the concept through metaphorical depiction of numerous contemporary leadership roles, some of which might fly under the radar of typical organizational leadership roles such as architect, guide or initiator. The metaphors become more robust as Whittington devotes a chapter to the roles of shepherd and servant, prompting deeper inquiry and confirmation of their biblical roots, implicit links to spiritual leadership and embodiment of authentic engagement. Shifting from individual to organizational perspective, Whittington continues the use of metaphors in discussions surrounding the New Testament church and the inherent implications for contemporary organizations and leaders. These connections are established through multiple metaphorical examples arising in scripture and portrayed within a leadership context. Post establishment of these organizational aspects and applications, Whittington describes the recurring theme of "one another's" (p. 186) found within scripture, for example "love one another" (John 13:34). This concept and specific word usage in other "one another" are often directional and involve relational attitudes and interactions. These, according to Whittington, form the basis for spiritually-based and/or spiritually influenced organizational citizenship

behavior, which in turn reinforces spiritually filtered human interactions and contributes to positive work environments.

Some of the key thoughts include: Holy Spirit empowerment is the key to spiritual leadership and influences every aspect of leadership, “leadership is a role not a rank” (p. 205), metaphors are useful in understanding the complexities of leadership as it intertwines biblical principles and narrative, and many others. The book is well-researched, well organized, and given the density of the material, the illustrative tables are beneficial to readers. For scholar or practitioner, *Biblical Perspectives on Leadership and Organizations* is a worthy resource.

## REFERENCES

- Morgan, G., Gregory, F., & Roach, C. (1997). *Images of organization*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Whittington, J. L., Pitts, T. M., Kageler, W. V., & Goodwin, V. L. (2005). Legacy leadership: The leadership wisdom of the Apostle Paul. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 16(5), 749-770.



**Stephanie Sheehan** is a 3rd year doctoral candidate in the School of Business and Leadership at Regent University, earning a PhD in Organizational Leadership. Desiring integration of faith and learning in all areas of life, she is committed to motivating and facilitating professional development and spiritual growth for students, professionals, teams, and organizations.