

Leadership or Servanthood? Walking in the Steps of Jesus

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Hwa Yung has served a lifetime in ecumenical leadership. A native of Malasia, he was the bishop of the Methodist Church in that country for almost a decade, along with serving as Principal of the Malasia Theological Seminary, as Chairman of the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, and on the international board of the Lausanne Movement. He has authored or co-authored a number of books offering an Asian view on Christianity and its application in the marketplace. His latest work, *Leadership or Servanthood? Walking in the Steps of Jesus*, speaks in that same voice, providing an external, objective view of the Western Church's adoption of business leadership theory and offering a corrective, biblical approach.

In the opening two chapters, Yung examines the source texts of leadership theory in the Occidental World, citing such business notables as Jim Collins, Robert Greenleaf, and Peter Drucker. He notes the tremendous growth of leadership programs both in university business schools and the American church as well as the multiplication of leadership books and training materials available on the market. From his Asian perspective, he sees the American church adopting the leadership models crafted by business authors and then seeking to export those models to the "majority world" (Asia, Africa, and South America). While he acknowledges the need for leadership in the church and throughout society, he refocuses the lens of his analysis to the teaching of Scripture and ultimately finds that the call of Christians is to service, not to leadership. His suggestion to the Western church and other religious organizations is that they should "move away from all the hype about leadership and back to the call of servanthood" (Yung, 2021, p. 25).

The remaining seven chapters of the book are a how-to manual for understanding the call to servanthood and how it should manifest in the life of those who are responsible for leading an organization. Following the model he utilized in chapters one and two, contrasting the concepts of leadership in the business academy and other sources

with those of scripture, Yung sets out in chapter three to present a biblical model of a leader's authority. In this chapter, he employs Joseph Nye, Jr.'s (2004) views on hard and soft power to reflect a Western cultural understanding of authority. He then associates hard and soft power with two common sources of authority in business leadership scholarship: institutional authority, based on one's organizational position, and personal moral authority, based on one's personality and ability to inspire others. Comparing Nye with scripture, Yung finds that Jesus' authority was based on neither of those sources. He argues that Christ's authority stemmed from His commitment to do "only what he sees the father doing" (John 5:19) and by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit beginning at the time of His baptism in the Jordan (Matthew 3:16). He further argues that same authority will be available to all Christian leaders (post Acts 2) if they equally commit to following the Father's leadership and receive the indwelling of the Spirit. Yung does not argue that spiritual authority will replace institutional authority or personal moral authority but rather that spiritual authority will work in concert with the other two sources, governing them to help leaders avoid abuses of authority and to lead with an attitude of service.

In chapter four, Yung describes the "path to authority," contrasting Chairman Mao's use of military force to Christ's submission to the will of the Father. He acknowledges that submission as a source of authority stands in stark contrast to the world's understanding of how to gain authority but painstakingly walks through scriptures supporting his approach. He interprets Satan's temptations of Christ in the wilderness (Luke 4) as an effort by the Enemy to separate the authority of Christ from its rightful source in His submission to the Father. He cites Paul's *kenosis* hymn in Philippians 2:5-11 and Christ's teaching His disciples that they must be servants (Mark 9:35) and slaves (Mark 10:44). Yung's point is to draw a necessary connection between Jesus's confession

that He does only what he sees the Father doing (John 5:19) and His announcement that all authority on heaven and earth had been given to Him (Matthew 28:18). He claims that one cannot exercise authority in any spiritual sense without first, and continuously, offering oneself in submission to God. He helpfully adds on the issue of to whom a leader must submit and concludes that submission is owed to the teachings of the Bible, to the internal testimony we receive from God through various means, and to those He has placed in authority over us.

In chapters five and six, Yung expounds on the relationship of father and child that he proposes all Christians must have with God in order to properly exert leadership. He cites Christ's training the disciples in the model prayer (Matthew 6:9-13), His call for us to be born again (John 3:3), Paul's teaching on the spirit of adoption (Romans 8:14-17), and other scriptures to demonstrate the depth of intimacy that God wants to achieve with His children. Relating to God as father in this sense, Yung argues, provides the support and inner strength necessary to continuously seek out the lowest place at the table rather than the place of honor (Luke 14:20). It is only after knowing the glory of our position as God's children that we can bear the humility of self-sacrifice that He requires, particularly in the face of the cultural voices affirming those who seek, and sometimes achieve, the rewards of leadership, such as prestige and power. Yung posits that it is our insecurities and emotional wounds that drive us to self-affirmation or self-aggrandizement and that those insecurities and wounds must instead be addressed by maintaining a restorative relationship with God as Father.

In chapters seven and eight, Yung redoubles his focus on the internal qualification for leadership, contrasting Jeffrey Pfeffer's (2015) article, "Good Leaders Don't Have to be Good" with a biblical approach to human character. Yung decries the loss of integrity and virtue so visible in modern business, citing recent ethical failures such as the VW diesel engine scandal and the collapse of Enron. He proposes that the key characteristics of Christian leaders must be humility, compassion, faithfulness, and self-sacrifice. He identifies the temptation to be self-seeking as the key challenge to becoming qualified for leadership and offers the practice of "self-giving" as the tactical antidote. As always, he highlights a contrast of leadership qualification in modern culture (talent and ability) with the biblical qualifications (humility, compassion, faithfulness, self-sacrifice, and dying to self-seeking). Constructively, Yung offers guidance on

the process for achieving this spiritual preparation for leadership through God's transformational activity. Using the biblical examples of Jacob, Moses, Peter, and Paul, he demonstrates how God breaks down the prideful character of those He wants to use as leaders and transforms them into humble people, fit for purpose.

In the final chapter (9), Yung calls for leadership in Christian organizations while at the same time redefining leadership as a series of burdens one bears rather than a series of prerogatives one enjoys. He invokes Martin Luther's description of vocation, that some are called to serve in different offices, including those that must exercise leadership, but holds that the character of the Christian leader is no different than if he were not so called. Finally, Yung returns briefly to his argument that spiritual authority is necessary for Christian leaders. He reinforces the idea that only through submission to the Father and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit can one properly serve God in a leadership capacity.

This book is a valid critique of the state of leadership studies in the Western church and Western culture generally. Whether the connection Yung draws between leadership theory and ethical failures in business is as thick as he claims is open to discussion, but his argument is certainly rational. His exegesis of scripture to support his arguments might also bear scrutiny from biblical scholars, but nothing struck this reviewer as being beyond the pale of common interpretations. Most importantly, there is a pastoral quality about this book. Yung does not criticize the Western approach to leadership and then leave his readers without a path to recovery. He devotes over half the book to laying out a restorative approach whereby those who are called into leadership can develop the internal qualities necessary to qualify for it.

Yung's argument at times goes beyond the scope of leadership to the core of the Christian life more generally, representing a possible diffusion of his focus. In chapter four he contrasts the submission required for spiritual leadership with the common goal of self-actualization promoted by Abraham Maslow and other modern psychologists. Given that Maslow and others would apply their theories to all people, whether serving in leadership roles or not, it becomes unclear whether Yung is allowing for the same breadth of application. Yung would claim one cannot lead without serving. Would he also claim one can serve without leading? His call in chapters five through eight for tending to the internal life of faith and the relationship to the Father would prepare one for any kind of ministry, with or

without leadership responsibilities, although for leaders the temptation to abuse others for self-affirmation can be much more dangerous.

While Yung professes to speak only as an ecumenical leader and demurs on whether his argument applies to business or politics as well as it does to church leadership, his engagement with, and critique of, business leadership scholarship invites that application. He does not engage business leadership theory at a level that would allow business professors to test the historical performance or internal logic of those theories. Other analytical sources would be necessary to test those theories' limits. All the same, business leaders and professors of business leadership should have no trouble integrating Yung's work into their current approaches to leadership. The book ends with a helpful catalog of suggested further readings from a broad historical range of ancient to modern, including both secular and Christian sources.

At 147 pages, *Leadership or Servanthood* is a short read. It would be an excellent addition to the curriculum of a business leadership class in the Christian university for instructors who want to challenge their students, and be challenged themselves, to hold their theoretical models against the teachings of Scripture. The Asian critique of the Occidental church and business communities may threaten some American readers in a positive way to take their position of academic and cultural hegemony seriously in this and other areas. It is also a good book for seminary students and other aspiring church leaders. The failures of pastors, noted by Yung and many others, are all too often a result of the abuse of positions of authority in the church. A clearer understanding of the call to servanthood may help protect us all from the institutional and personal damage those failures can cause.

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