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Is Servant Leadership Inherently Christian?

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Servant leadership has gained currency among Christians of various persuasions. Multiple books have been written on biblical principles of servant leadership.¹ Numerous workshops have been conducted on how to practice servant leadership in various ecclesial and secular settings. To many the concept of servant leadership seems taken straight from the New Testament. After all, Jesus famously told his disciples: “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all.”² In addition, servant leadership is perceived as not limited to church environments. The Toro Company, Herman Miller, Synovus Financial Corporation, ServiceMaster Company, Men’s Warehouse, Southwest Airlines and TDIndustries are cited among businesses that embrace servant leadership.³ An important reason these reputed companies chose to implement servant leadership is that it delivers profits while creating an enjoyable workplace.

The purpose of this paper is to show that, while an Augustinian theology of leadership would indeed have a robust service dimension to it, the assumptions behind it are very different from those undergirding the modern therapeutic model, customer service model, or even the unconditional concern for co-workers model. For Augustine, this difference in basic assumption would carry decisive significance. Consequently, Augustine would have a hard time characterizing servant leadership as originated and developed in modern leadership literature as Christian.

Leader as Therapist

The idea of servant leadership seems so biblical to many that they would be surprised to learn that the Bible was not the original source of or primary inspiration behind the emergence of this leadership paradigm. Servant leadership originated in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and Robert Greenleaf was its founding father. After completing his career at AT&T, Greenleaf consulted several major corporations on management issues. At the outset of his essay “The Servant as Leader,” where the concept of servant leadership was first sketched,

¹ Perhaps the most well-known work in this vein is Ken Blanchard, *Lead Like Jesus: Lessons from the Greatest Leadership Role Model of All Time* (Edinburgh, UK: Thomas Nelson, 2008). See also Ken Blanchard and Phil Hodges, *The Servant Leader* (Edinburgh, UK: Thomas Nelson, 2003); Efrain Agosto, *Servant Leadership: Jesus and Paul* (Saint Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2005); Keith Moore, *Servant Leadership in the Twenty-First Century* (New York, NY: Morgan James Publishing, 2005).

² Mark. 10: 42-44, New Revised Standard Version.

³ Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice* (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 2013), 223.

Greenleaf said that the idea for his paradigm was the book entitled *Journey to the East* by Herman Hesse. This is a story about a group of people on a journey, and the central figure is Leo, who does menial chores and sustains the group with his songs and spirit. All goes well until Leo disappears, the group unravels and the journey is abandoned. After some years the author finds out that Leo is the leader of the Order that sponsored the journey. Thus Leo is both a servant and a leader. The idea of servant leadership came to Greenleaf as an intuitive insight as he was contemplating Leo. Greenleaf describes a servant leader as the one who first senses a natural desire to serve. Then this individual makes a conscious choice to lead. This is in sharp contrast with people who are leaders first, including those whose decision to serve may come only after their leadership is established. These are two extreme types, with shades in between. The difference manifests itself most clearly in that the servant leader makes sure that coworkers' highest priority needs are being met. The best test of whether a given leader is a servant leader is if her or his coworkers, while being served, grow as persons, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous and likely themselves to become servants. In addition, one needs to ask whether the least privileged in society benefit from this leadership, or, at least, are not further deprived. Admittedly, this test is not easy to administer or quantify, and unintended consequences will occur in the practice of servant leadership. At the same time, those who are natural servant leaders are more likely to persevere and get it right eventually.⁴

What are the distinct characteristics of servant leadership? Greenleaf does not single them out neatly in the bullet point format. The following have made it to section headings: listening, understanding, imagination (paired with language), withdrawal, acceptance, empathy, intuitive knowledge beyond conscious rationality, foresight, awareness, perception, persuasion, action (phrased as "one action at a time"), conceptualizing, healing and serving.⁵ The delineation of these characteristics is somewhat murky, and their definitions are less than clear. One gets the impression that Greenleaf's purpose was sharing insights rather than achieving definitional precision. These characteristics can be split into several groups. There are those that do not seem to be distinctive marks of servant leadership. It is hard to see why imagination, intuition, foresight, awareness, ability to persuade, perception, conceptualizing and ability to take action would not be important for any kind of leader, not just for a servant leader. Consequently, it is unclear why they should be named among the distinct characteristics of servant leadership. Then there is serving, which seems somewhat tautological, and probably that is why in subsequent works on servant

⁴ Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power & Greatness* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2002), 21-61.

⁵ Ibid.

leadership it is replaced with humility and related qualities. We are left with listening, understanding, withdrawal, acceptance, empathy and healing. A cursory look at this list is sufficient to see that these qualities are customarily associated with therapists rather than leaders in various public domains. That such a significant portion of a servant leader's qualities are therapeutic in nature is quite revealing about the main thrust of servant leadership as originally conceived. In the past decade and a half various lists of distinct qualities of a servant leader have appeared, with some placing a greater emphasis on therapeutic qualities than others. The list given by Larry Spears is the one that is probably cited most often: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people and building community.⁶ It is noteworthy that the first three are so explicitly therapeutic in nature, and the rest do not seem to be peculiar to a servant leader as distinct from a leader that is not a servant. Humility, which is often cited by other authors, as the hallmark of servant leadership, is not mentioned by Spears, either.

In 1966, a few years before the publication of Greenleaf's "The Servant as Leader," Philip Rieff put in print his book entitled *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*. In this work, Rieff predicted a day and age when religious faith would have primarily therapeutic function and the entire culture will be permeated with a therapeutic mindset. The culture was undergoing profound changes as he was writing. The spiritualizers, who set the pace of Western cultural life around the beginning of the 19th century, were giving way to their logical and historical successors, the psychologizers. Some of the instruments of inherited system of permissions and restraints would not survive. The question was no longer, as Dostoyevsky put it, "Can civilized people believe?" The question of the coming day was "Can unbelieving people be civilized?" Evil and morality were disappearing. Saints were no longer a cultural ideal, their place was taken by Everyman seeking to shed institutional and cultural shackles in order to achieve true self-realization through the satisfaction of desire. The Greek notion that the key to happiness is to have as few needs as possible was being sent to permanent oblivion. In place of family, Church, Party or nation as institutions that held the society together there will be theaters and hospitals. Whereas a religious person is born to be saved, a psychological person is born to be pleased. "I believe" transitioned into "I feel," and the psychotherapist has become the new spiritual guide. The wisdom of the coming order would not reside in the right doctrine taught by the right people but in doctrines that give permission to everybody to live a truly experiential life. Freed from all gods, the psychological

⁶ Larry C. Spears, "Introduction: Tracing the Past, Present and Future of Servant Leadership," in Larry C. Spears and Michelle Lawrence, editors, *Focus on Leadership: Servant-Leadership for the 21st Century* (New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons, 2002), 1-16.

person would use any faith, or a combination of faiths, that lends itself to a therapeutic use. These changes are truly groundbreaking. It was a misnomer to imagine the West as conservative, and the East as revolutionary. Emerging therapeutic Westerners were the true revolutionaries, with Easterners swiftly learning to imitate the West. To paraphrase Marx and Engels, all morality loses its legitimacy with a therapeutic outlook.⁷

Rieff's book turned out to be prophetic. In subsequent decades, the notion of the self as the locus of meaning has only strengthened, and Western society has become significantly more therapeutic.⁸ This is evidenced by, among other things, the sheer proliferation of therapists. The American Psychological Association estimates that there are 93,000 practicing psychologists in the United States. Licensed psychologists numbered approximately 85,000 in 2004. Graduations average 4,000-5,000 per year and approximately 2,700 of those are in health service provider fields.⁹ Among other things, the triumph of the therapeutic worldview led to a change in the general public's concept of deity. No longer was God to be found in creeds or limited to a specific institution, such as the church. Instead, to find God one would have to turn inward and engage in soul-searching. Of course, the inward turn in theology happened at least as early as the 18th century, when Kant wrote his second critique.¹⁰ However, for Kant and his numerous followers of various stripes there was a definite universality regarding how exactly God is to be identified. This universality was conditioned by the idea of a common human nature. With the therapeutic turn this universality became significantly more tenuous, if not altogether gone. If the idea of a common human nature remained, it did not play a significant heuristic role in the formation of rules of how one ought to live. Everybody would now have to locate God inside themselves in their own way. Faith traditions, or their combinations at best provided tools that contributed to this search. The practical changes in theological outlook these shifts entailed were momentous, whether in the doctrine of God, theological anthropology, Christology, ecclesiology or eschatology. Of course, more often than not these changes were made without thematic reflection, but they were not less important for it.

⁷ Philip Rieff, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), 1-27.

⁸ See, for instance, Katie Wright, *The Rise of the Therapeutic Society: Psychological Knowledge and the Contradictions of Cultural Change* (Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2011); Ole Jacob Madsen, *The Therapeutic Turn: How Psychology Altered Western Culture* (London, UK: Routledge, 2014).

⁹ American Psychological Association, "Support Center," American Psychological Association, <http://www.apa.org/support/about/psych/numbers-us.aspx#answer> (accessed September 25, 2014).

¹⁰ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, tr. H. J. Paton (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1956).

One can certainly deliberate the merits of therapeutic spirituality in leadership. Such merits can indeed be identified and are not to be dismissed easily. For instance, some people may be helped by a therapeutic leader in dealing with their psychological issues, particularly as the latter are related to work. Perhaps a therapeutically savvy boss could be better equipped to help subordinates identify and use their strengths. It seems generally helpful that a leader is a good psychologist. The ability to understand what motivates workers, clients, board members and other stakeholders will definitely help the leader in some crucial situations. Indeed, the best leaders are well attuned to people around them, as this seems crucial in leading people effectively. Neither does seeking to understand people, or even oneself, contradict Christian spirituality *per se*. However, it is hard to maintain that the therapeutic worldview as it emerged in the last few decades is the same as, or even a variation of, Christian spirituality as understood and practiced by St. Augustine, a Christian bishop and theologian of the late fourth and early fifth centuries who was arguably the most influential figure in post-biblical Christianity. There are three crucial differences between St. Augustine and the modern therapeutic mindset as it emerged in the late 20th century.

First, St. Augustine saw community as a necessary setting for therapy to occur. When we hear of a therapy session, we tend to picture a patient sitting on a couch while talking to a therapist. There is no one else in the room besides the patient and therapist, and the latter is bound by norms stringently guarding the confidentiality of the entire therapeutic process. Nothing could be farther from how St. Augustine understood the cure of souls. He saw this process as occurring primarily in the context of communal preaching and life. As his beloved teacher Ambrose, Augustine saw communal preaching as a foundational matrix for the cure of souls. He was certainly not above visiting with individuals as the need arose. However, individual counsel was not foundational for spiritual therapy as St. Augustine understood it. Paul Kolbet points out that, in contrast to Stoic philosophy and much of modern therapy, Augustine held that an attempt to cure the soul by becoming “grounded in oneself” leads not to cure but to a perverse kind of exaltation.¹¹ He saw immersion in hearing communal preaching and participation in communal life as germane to the process of curing souls.

Second, St. Augustine saw teleology, or study of the ultimate purpose toward which human existence is ordered, as a necessary part of the cure of souls. He borrowed Stoics psychagogy as his method. Psychagogy was born in Greek philosophical schools to describe and direct the process of philosophers guiding

¹¹ Paul R. Kolbet, *Augustine and the Cure of the Souls: Revising a Classical Ideal* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 118-138.

their pupils in their intellectual, moral and spiritual growth. It was different from philosophy proper in that psychagogy entailed the use of rhetoric for achieving those ends. At the same time, it necessarily included awareness of human *telos*, or ultimate purpose, in general, not just a *raison d'être* of a particular community, unless this community is the church, which is the appropriate setting for people to discover their ultimate purpose. The means of moving toward one's purpose should in some important way correspond to this purpose, and both means and ends are public matters. To put it in Aristotelian terms, humans have both efficient and final causes, and both are equally public. This contrasts remarkably with much of modern culture, where emphasis is given to identifying efficient ways for people to achieve their private ends. St. Augustine would insist that discovering one's ultimate purpose is a public process that is essential for the cure of souls. Moreover, one's ultimate purpose is not entirely subjective, whether in personal or communal terms. It has an objective reality to it. Kolbet stresses continuously that St. Augustine's purpose was not merely to replace pagan philosophical rhetoric with a Christian one. To him, psychagogy employs rhetoric in pointing to the teleological objective reality that exists independently of reason and rhetoric. The notion that individuals should discover their own subjective goals without regard for an objectively existing ultimate purpose common to all the people would be quite foreign to St. Augustine.

Third, unlike the modern therapeutic mindset, St. Augustine did not consider an autonomous psyche as the place where one's true self discoverable. While self-examination has an important place in Augustinian spirituality, in order to find the true self one needs to turn upward, not inward. Nobody has a sound understanding of who one authentically is apart from this participatory union with Christ and His body, the Church. Consequently, spiritual healing can take place by entering into union with Christ and His Spirit in an ecclesial setting, not through endless self-exploration focused on the discovery of the true self in isolation from any external factors. As Kolbet notes, for St. Augustine "Catholic Christology supplied the logic legitimating genuine therapeutic practice."¹² St. Augustine rejected the Manichean assumption, according to which humans can be soundly guided just by pure and simple reason. There can be no pretense of purely rational guidance apart from the full Scripture because an attempt at such guidance would leave people insufficiently critical of their own experience and language. Appropriate guidance is defined christologically as divine wisdom adopting herself to human beings whose perceptive power is too weak to recognize her. Consequently, there is no way to discover the true self apart from the explicit awareness of and practical participation in this wisdom. The authentic cure of souls cannot be split into first discovering the true self by therapeutic

¹² Ibid, 126.

means and then affirming the results by saying that this is how God has created a given person. A few Bible verses thrown into this process of self-discovery would not make the process more Christian. To St. Augustine, the cure of souls is a laborious process that necessarily involves thematic awareness of and participation in the divine life. It cannot be circumvented by relying exclusively on human resources.

Servant leadership has evolved since Greenleaf's days. Based on his survey of recent literature, Peter Northouse gives a model of servant leadership that reflects current scholarship. This model consists of antecedent conditions, servant leader behaviors and outcomes. Antecedent conditions include context, culture, leader attributes and follower receptivity. Some situations are more amenable to servant leadership than others. For example, health care and nonprofit settings would generally be more receptive to servant leadership than, say, Wall Street firms. Some leaders feel a greater desire to serve than others, and people are receptive of servant leadership to differing degrees. Servant leader behaviors include conceptualizing, emotional healing, putting followers first, helping followers grow and succeed, behaving ethically, empowering and creating value for community, in that order. As it is unclear why conceptualizing should be a distinct behavior of a servant leader as opposed to a leader who is not a servant leader, emotional healing retains the honor of the hallmark of servant leadership. Out of the remaining behaviors, only putting followers first is perhaps the only distinct mark of a servant leader. Servant leadership outcomes are follower's growth and improved performance, enhanced organizational performance, and positive societal impact. Northouse goes through lists of distinct characteristics of servant leadership given by various contemporary authors. The most prominent is the above mentioned list by Spears, who retains listening, empathy and healing as the top three. At the same time, if we look at qualities given by other authors, we will detect a shift in emphasis. We will still find some Freudian therapeutic qualities, such as emotional healing and authenticity. Nevertheless, less Freudian qualities have clearly gained in prominence. There are empowering and community building. What's more, some of the qualities, such as humility, selflessness, covenantal relationship and *agapè* love have a distinctly Augustinian ring to them.¹³ While humility is absent from the lists of qualities of a servant leader given by Greenleaf and Spears, it becomes increasingly prominent in later authors writing on servant leadership.¹⁴

¹³ Northouse, 219-251.

¹⁴ Robert S. Dennis and Mihai Bocarnea, "Development of the Servant Leadership Assessment Instrument," *Leadership & Organizational Development Journal*, 26 (2005): 600-615; Paul T. P. Wong and Dean Davey, "Best Practices in Servant Leadership" (paper presented at the Servant Leadership Research Roundtable, Regent University, Virginia Beach, VA, July 2007); Dirk van Dierendonck and Inge Nujten, "The Servant Leadership Survey: Development and Validation of a

In addition, there seems a clear movement from servant leader the therapist to servant leader the mentor whose primary role is to develop other leaders and then stand back and take mostly a supportive role. An article by Robert Russell and Gregory Stone is indicative of this development. They give quite an extensive list of attributes of a servant leader. The functional attributes are vision, honesty, integrity, trust, service, modeling, pioneering, appreciation of others and empowerment. The accompanying attributes include communication, credibility, competence, stewardship, visibility, influence, persuasion, listening, encouragement, teaching and delegation.¹⁵ Listening, empathy, understanding and healing are not explicitly mentioned. Of course, one can say that they are implicitly present. Still, the shift in emphasis is evident. The attributes listed by the authors conjure the image of a mentoring meeting rather than a counseling session.

Would St. Augustine welcome these developments? To answer that question, we will need to move our focus from St. Augustine the therapist to St. Augustine the mentor. As we will see, the cure of souls and mentoring carried significant similarities in the thought and practice of St. Augustine.

Leader as Servant-Mentor

In his list of the most significant mentoring forms employed by St. Augustine, Edward Smither lists the monastery, letters, books, church councils and personal visits. The monastic community provided the primary context for mentoring leaders, and that is why it was so important for St. Augustine to get it right. The first community he established in Cassisiacum was geared toward philosophical studies. The second community he founded in Tagaste put more emphasis on spiritual formation. Still, in the words of Smither, it resembled a place of leisure more than a monastery. The garden monastery in Hippo had a stricter schedule and spiritual routines. When St. Augustine was ordained, he refocused the Hippo monastery on the needs of the church. As in the case of the cure of souls, St. Augustine believed a vibrant community to be necessary for the formation of leaders. Smither underscores that for St. Augustine monasticism was cenobitical, meaning mentoring happened mostly in the context of a group. The group should live together in unity, be a model for the church and a means of spiritual growth for its participants. In addition, it should be facilitated by true friendship, which

Multidimensional Measure, “*Journal of Business and Psychology*, 26 (2011): 249-267. See also Dirk van Dierendonck, “Servant Leadership: A Review and Synthesis,” in *Journal of Management*, 37 (2011): 1228-1269.

¹⁵ Robert F. Russell and A. Gregory Stone, “A Review of Servant Leadership Attributes: Developing a Practical Model,” in *Leadership & Organizational Development Journal*, 23 (2002): 145 – 157.

is characterized primarily by *agape*, or loving friends for their own sake with the shared desire to grow closer to God together.¹⁶ Since the days of Greenleaf, there has been an increasing recognition of the importance of a group for sound organizational functioning, particularly for leadership training. Perhaps the most vivid sign of this recognition is the increasing emphasis placed on the importance of teamwork. The practice of organizing workforce in teams gained currency in the early 1990s. By the year 2000 half of all US organizations used teams, and now almost all of them do. A recent survey of high-level managers found that 91 percent of them believe teams to be the key to success.¹⁷ To mirror this trend, business schools increasingly encourage students to work in teams. So, at least in this respect the modern organizational culture appears to have moved closer to St. Augustin's theology of leadership.

However, in other important respects the modern culture and St. Augustine remain far apart. Having relegated the question of one's ultimate purpose, or *telos*, to the realm of the private, Western society is as focused on efficient causality as ever. While efficiency remains the paramount public value, the final ends that efficiency should serve to achieve are to be determined by everyone individually. To be sure, there is a multiplicity of communities, including religious ones, each seeking to achieve its main purpose(s). However, given the unprecedented ease with which people nowadays leave and join various communities, it is the individual who is ultimately left with the burden of determining her or his own private ultimate purpose. In the past few decades this split between efficient and final causalities, which would be quite foreign to Augustine, has only hardened. The disregard for communal teleology, is a pillar of modern secular society predicated on the freedom of individuals to pursue happiness as they understand it. Determining the supreme good is perceived as almost entirely a private matter. It is considered unbecoming to promote an ultimate purpose that all of the public should embrace while the business of advising how to achieve privately or communally determined ends is flourishing, as evidenced by the sheer proliferation of consulting services and how-to literature. These services and literature tend to downplay the final causality heavily, if they bother with it at all. The two kinds of causality operate on different levels, and the connection between them seems torn asunder. But separated from teleology, efficient causality loses its legitimacy. Efficiency has a paradoxical nature in that it has to be ordered toward some end, otherwise it loses

¹⁶ Edward L. Smither, *Augustine as Mentor: A Model for Preparing Spiritual Leaders* (Nashville, TN: B&H Academic, 2008), 125-212.

¹⁷ Susan Cain, *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World that can't Stop Talking* (New York, NY: Broadway Books, 2012). Cain argues that the emphasis of teamwork has come at the expense of people working individually and tends to stifle rather than foster the creativity of team members.

its meaning and thus becomes ultimately inefficient. In other words, it cannot exist just for its own sake. Furthermore, there is a link between means and ends, however weak that link may seem in the modern consumerist society. That being said, the contemporary organizational culture seems to have recognized the need for teleology, albeit in a narrow sense. Nowadays, organizations are expected to have vision statements, which are supposed to give the picture of what a given organization strives to become. However, in many, and probably most, cases these statements reinforce the subsuming of teleology into instrumentality rather than to overcome it. The pictures that emerge from vision statements are mostly of what a given organization would become if it achieves the supreme level of efficiency. Very few, if any, vision statements would deal with the question of why the supreme efficiency needs to be achieved in the first place. But without teleology in place it is unclear what ends the supreme efficiency would serve. The guiding, if often silent, cultural assumption is that the final ends are determined by everyone individually, and vision statements by and large do very little to challenge this deeply unaugustinian premise, which has greatly influenced, among other things, modern mentoring. While St. Augustine's mentoring has been ordered toward discernment of the relation of one's ultimate purpose to the life in a given community, mentoring in the modern secular workplace is mostly geared toward maximizing efficiency.

This brings us to the question of whether an Augustinian practice of mentoring and leadership can happen in settings where explicit references to God are absent. The precise answer to this question would depend on where one draws boundaries that delimit Augustinianism. In his well-known treatise *Civitas Dei*, St. Augustine described two cities, the city of God that is primarily motivated by the love of God, and the city of the world, where the main motivation is self-love. These cities never exist in their pure forms. People motivated by self-love exist in the church, and people motivated by their love of God live among the selfishness of the city of the world. At the same time, St. Augustine saw in the greatness of the Roman Empire, his prime example of the city of the world, a reflection of virtues of some of its inhabitants. In book V, chapter 18, of *Civitas Dei* St. Augustine cites several Roman citizens who exhibited significant praiseworthy virtues while acting selflessly. Their main motivation was honor, which trumped their self-interest.¹⁸ Apparently, St. Augustine believed that some of people who are not motivated by love of God can act virtuously in ways that would shed glory on their cities, even though the city of the world as a whole is destined to fail eventually. Drawing analogy with the contemporary world, one may say that Augustine would recognize virtuous actions of unbelievers.

¹⁸ St. Augustine, "City of God," ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Marcus Dodds, in *The Complete Works of St. Augustine*, Amazon, Kindle edition.

However, these virtues cannot be motivated primarily by self-love, which Augustine seems to have seen as the defining characteristic of opposition to God. He would welcome virtuous acts of service if they overcome selfishness. Nevertheless, within the context of a modern consumerist society, servant leadership tends to be validated precisely because it produces benefits for those who practice it.

Servant Leadership in a Business Setting

According to Northouse, the outcomes of servant leadership are follower performance and growth, organizational performance and societal impact. In a modern business setting, the outcomes so conceived squarely put service in a consumerist context and thus give the very term “servant” a strong consumerist flavor. The primary purpose of servant leadership is to maximize followers’ performance. Achieving this objective would, in turn, maximize organizational performance. Out of the three intended outcomes, societal impact could be a distinct mark of servant leadership. However, speaking of this outcome, Northouse hastens to add that it is not commonly measured in studies of servant leadership.¹⁹ So, personal and organizational performances are the only outcomes that trigger researchers’ interest. Given the pressures of consumerist society, this is perfectly understandable. However, in this case servant leadership here is at best a means for achieving consumerist ends. Since there is hardly anything specifically Christian about those ends, it is unclear what is particularly Christian about servant leadership so conceptualized, either.

An article by Edward Hess of Darden Business School, University of Virginia, is quite typical for contemporary approaches to this leadership paradigm. The title of his article, “Servant Leadership: A Path to High Performance,” is pretty straightforward in identifying the intended outcome. Hess gives us still another list of characteristics shared by servant leaders: these leaders are people-centric, value service to others and sense a duty of stewardship. Many of them have long tenures in their organizations, and they have not forgotten what it is like to be a line employee. Contrary to common perceptions, says Hess, people-centric environments and high performance standards are not mutually exclusive. In the long term, employees in such organizations tend to outperform the competition because of the high emotional engagement with and loyalty to their organizations. In fact, the better the boss treats employees, the better they

¹⁹ Northouse, 219-251.

perform. Hess adds that his research clearly demonstrates that employee satisfaction drives customer satisfaction and loyalty.²⁰

Is servant leadership really that effective in delivering profits? It appears to be at least in some contexts, as attested by the widely cited example of Southwest Airlines. Northouse seems to be correct in pointing out that some contexts are more amenable to servant leadership than to others. And what if servant leadership does not deliver? What if business leaders conclude that the kind of servant leadership they practice inhibits the numbers? Undoubtedly, they would feel the pressure to adjust their leadership praxis in a way that maximizes profits, even if that means abandoning practices customarily associated with servant leadership. And if the profit making is considered the primary end of a given enterprise, as it most often is, then servant leadership practices will undergo significant changes and may well be jettisoned altogether. Or perhaps those adjustments will be framed as identifying and implementing better and more efficient ways to serve customers and thus as building on the current servant leadership mindset. However, it is even more unclear what it is that makes servant leadership, so understood, a particularly Christian way of doing business. One does not need to be a Christian, or even have even a cursory knowledge of Christian scripture and tradition to feel the pinch of losing consumers and then go about identifying ways to serve customers better in order to entice them back.

Certainly, much in the idea of servant leadership does resonate with both the Scripture and tradition. We already noted that Jesus told his disciples that whoever wants to lead should be like a servant. These words are amply backed by other sayings and actions of Jesus. For example, he washed their feet to underscore the importance of this admonition. He also said that he came to the world not to lord over people but to serve. And, of course, major Christian traditions agree in that by allowing to have himself crucified, Jesus rendered a vitally important, indeed salvific, service to the humankind, even though traditions differ on the precise nature of salvation. The motive of service has been powerful among Christians throughout the history of Christianity. The idea of service is prominent in St. Augustine's writings, where words "servant" and "service" are mentioned 1,493 times. But what was the meaning St. Augustine attached to these terms? It was certainly not the same as the one intended by many leadership scholars when they speak of servant leadership in that St. Augustine did not consider the served, whether God or people, as customers.

²⁰ Edward D. Hess, "Servant Leadership: A Path to High Performance," *Washington Post*, April 28, 2013.

However, even though the meaning of “service” will be notably different from the one attached to this term by Christian leaders throughout the history of Christianity, would not that difference be legitimate given that the context of modern business is different from that of a church? The answer to this question depends on what kind of service will be rendered by Christian leaders in the workplace. If this service will be the same as customer service, then it is challenging to see how that would lead to an authentic Christian witness. At best Christian leaders would demonstrate that they are more successful because they are capable of giving better service to customers, but the service in question will be the same kind that non-Christian workers are supposed to render. The difference between the two meanings of the term in question is so significant that it is hard to see how one would transition into the other without disregarding entirely the teleological dimension of the idea of service.

In order to grasp this tension fully, it is important for Christian leaders to decouple commercial success from genuine Christian spirituality. The idea that worldly success is indicative of divine blessedness is not entirely new. In Christian tradition, it goes all the way back to ancient Israel, which has been promised material blessedness if the people worship Yahweh and maintain just relations among themselves. In fact, the possession of land was the crux of the covenant between Yahweh and the people of Israel. In addition, the idea of material prosperity as a sign of blessedness is certainly not limited to Judaism. In fact, it is present among all the major religions, mostly on the popular level. As Bryan Turner, a sociologist of religion, pointed out, for most people material blessedness is indeed the most important thing associated with religious worship. Ascetic practices are normally limited to monks and other religious virtuosos, while the common folk expect material rewards from the deity in recognition of their faithfulness in following religious prescriptions.²¹

In the New Testament the view of the connection between wealth and blessedness is a bit different. To be sure, Jesus is not talking about wealth as something that is in itself sinful. However, he clearly indicated that wealth is morally and spiritually dangerous. His saying to the effect that it is as challenging for a rich man to enter into the kingdom as it is for a camel to get through the needle gate is indicative. In subsequent Christian tradition the attitude towards wealth is mixed. This ambiguous attitude has persisted through most of Christian history, with the tradition of renouncing one’s possessions for the sake of higher spiritual calling becoming a bedrock of the monastic movement. St. Augustine’s

²¹ Bryan S. Turner, *Religion and Modern Society: Citizenship, Secularization and the State* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

community in Hippo was no exception: everyone joining had to renounce his personal property.

Given this ambiguity of Christian Scriptures and tradition regarding material wealth, the degree to which the sense that wealth is morally and spiritually hazardous is lost on many modern Christians is truly remarkable, albeit not surprising. Perhaps the most well-known study of how Christian spirituality is related to material success in the modern world is the book *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* by Max Weber, where he explored the process of this idea coming to dominance in Reformed Protestantism. Of course, Weber concluded that Reformed Christians in the US sought the assurance of their divine election and eventually found it in material wealth.²² However, even though the idea of material wealth as a sign of divine blessing is not new, in the past few decades it has been taken to entirely new levels. Only a few decades ago preachers who promised material prosperity as a reward for piety were perceived as swindlers. Today the so-called prosperity gospel attracts a wide following. If one flips TV channels in search of a Christian broadcast, she or he is likely to see a prosperity preacher, such as Joel Austin, Joyce Meyer, or Creflo Dollar. Certainly, most mainline and evangelical Christians regard these and other prosperity gospel preachers as giving a distorted view of Christian spirituality and explicitly reject it. At the same time, a conviction that the size of church's offerings and attendance is a sure sign of blessedness is not limited to the prosperity gospel. It has seeped into churches and other religious institutions of various denominations and persuasions, including those whose rhetoric is dismissive of the health-and-wealth Christianity. It has become commonplace to think first of dynamics of attendance and offering when evaluating whether a given church is on the right track. In addition, the idea that in order to engage in more ministry churches or mission agencies need to spend more money has become firmly entrenched in North American Christianity. This attitude to money as a primary, and sometimes the determinative sign of divine blessedness would strike St. Augustine as fundamentally different from the attitude displayed by Jesus and his early followers. A distinct characteristic of this attitude is resistance to quantification. If the numbers improve as a result of a given choice, it will not necessarily be a valid indication of whether a genuinely Christian choice has been made. In fact, the numbers may well worsen as a result of a genuinely Christian choice as ways of profit making that run contrary to cruciform Christian praxis will not be pursued. Nor is there a uniform simplistic way of determining whether a genuinely Christian course has been taken. That determination can be made only by sometimes painstaking examination of the context of the decision, the

²² Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, tr. by Talcott Parsons (London, UK: Routledge, 1996).

intension behind it and, last but not the least important, Christian scriptures and tradition. Consequences may, and in many cases will, be a legitimately important factor in this determination. However, for a Christian leader that cannot be the only deciding factor. Almost inevitably, that would put this leader at odds with much of modern results-oriented secularist, consumerist and therapeutic culture with its propensity for technical solutions. It would be naïve for a genuinely Christian leader to hope to avoid this tension altogether.

It is little wonder that the idea of business success as a sign of divine blessing is widespread among Christian business people in North America. After all, businesses are created with making profit as their explicit primary purpose. Businesses are certainly expected to function within certain parameters, such as obedience to the law, while pursuing this goal. Provided these parameters are met, delivering profits becomes an overarching objective. In the US businesses are called “for profit” organizations for a reason. Understandably, Christian leaders face a tremendous pressure to contribute delivering profits as much as they can, and that reflects in the ways they are expected to treat other stakeholders, particularly their subordinates. At the same time, Christian leaders must take into account that the people they lead are first and foremost God’s wayward children who their Father so loved that He sent his only begotten Son, so they would not perish but have eternal life. It is not hard to see that at least on some occasions these two views of other people, the theological and the functional, will be in tension. For example, if a worker performs poorly, what should their Christian leaders do? Should a Christian leader in this situation try to shield the subordinates from the unpleasant consequences of their performance? Or should a Christian leader stimulate them by punishing and, if need be, terminating? Or should a Christian leader engage the subordinates with the purpose of helping them to discover their true vocation? There are seldom easy answers to these questions, but by and large servant leadership theorists and practitioners would be inclined to at least try to help the subordinate before dismissing her or him. That this inclination is in some important way akin to Christian spirituality makes servant leadership all the more appealing to Christian leaders and popular leadership gurus who seek to appeal to a Christian audience. Servant leadership implores the leader to fix the subordinate by therapeutics means, even though the forms such a therapy may take vary. Whether Freudian, cognitive or behavioral in nature, this therapy is supposed to heal subordinates, build them up, assist them in discovering their gifts and thus enable them to deliver profits. Christian leaders may be more effective in this because they are hopefully resourced with Christian spirituality, which should enable them to deliver therapy of better quality.

All of this may look like a perfect way to integrate Christian spirituality into a modern capitalist society. Everyone stands to benefit: the workers get fixed by Christian means and deliver better performance, their Christian leaders look good in the eyes of their bosses and customers, the bottom line improves and everybody receives material, and perhaps spiritual, rewards. The often overlooked problem with this picture, at least as Christian spirituality as conceived and practiced by St. Augustine is concerned, is the remarkable reversal of means and ends. In this picture of servant leadership, people become means for the final goal, which is producing material wealth. Of course, it can be countered that this is just the nature of modern business, and that the wealth so produced goes toward satisfying the needs of consumers. However, if Christian spirituality is one of many therapeutic strategies designed to equip people to deliver profits, then its viability primarily depends on whether it is capable to deliver better profits than the competition. But this is problematic precisely because Christianity was not formed with this end in mind. For this reason, it is often experienced as somewhat exotic and foreign when people attempt to fit it for this purpose. In fact, in many instances therapeutic oil of another type may be preferable, the one specifically designed for this end. When modern leadership gurus attempt to use Christianity for maximizing profits, it is difficult to shake the feeling that they make Christian spirituality something of an auxiliary that greases the machine basically foreign to it. In some situations this Christian oil will be more effective than in others, but in all cases it is something incidental, not germane, to the overall process. This stands in remarkable tension with the exclusive claim of Christian spirituality to be the most, indeed exclusively, important spirituality on the block. And the reason for it being such is that it claims to serve the greatest end possible, which is different from maximizing profits.

It may be countered that Christian practitioners of servant leadership do not have to jettison the doctrinal dimension of their faith the way Kant did. They need only suspend that in their secular workplace, or at least suspend it long enough for others to buy into their leadership practice. Then they could make the link of the leadership practice to their Christian beliefs explicit if and when an occasion arises. In other words, even though other leaders in a given workplace may exercise servant leadership with consumerist profit-making goals in mind, does that necessarily mean that an authentically Christian leader is able to lead as a servant leader in a genuinely Christian fashion? After all, the ideas of altruistic love, building other people up, humility and power sharing can be appropriated by Christian leaders, even though the theory they are associated with did not originate with Christianity, and appears to resonate with some of the well-known Gospel texts. That they can be stripped of their theological content is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, their theological portability can give an

opportunity to introduce Christian practice at what is nowadays called a secular workplace. An unbeliever can be exposed to practices of servant leadership that are Christian in anything but name. When these practices get a buy in, this unbeliever can cautiously and gradually be introduced to the Christian faith behind them. But the link between means and ends makes it more challenging to harness Christian spirituality for delivering profits than it may appear. While Christian leaders may serve in their workplaces in ways consistent with both meanings of service for a long time, at some point teleological differences will inevitably result in different courses leaders' actions may take. If the service given by Christian leaders is authentically cruciform in nature, it inevitably will not be contained within the framework of modern consumerist practice of service. The choice Christian leaders make in such conflicting situations will determine whether the genuine Christian leadership is taking place.

In his article entitled "Why Servant Leadership is a Bad Idea" Mitch McCrimmon, a business consultant, points to powerful systemic factors working against servant leadership in a modern business environment. If servant leadership is understood to imply that contemporary leaders need to be less autocratic and hierarchical, more caring and inclusive, then it is true but trivial. Who could possibly argue to the contrary? If servant leadership is understood to mean that managers should be servants to their subordinates, then this approach would inevitably collide with harsh realities of modern business. Managers work at the pleasure of owners and customers. Consequently, managers should serve these two groups, not subordinates, if managers want to keep their jobs. Of course, effective managers will do all they can to engage, motivate, consider and include employees, but this falls short of being their servants as evidenced, among other things, by managers holding a deciding say on whether given employees will retain their jobs. Consequently, when managers positioning themselves as servants exercise their right to fire an employee, as they almost inevitably will have to at some point, they will breed cynicism and distrust. Because employees fundamentally remain a means to an end, servant leaders will unavoidably end disappointed. Moreover, the structure of modern employment encourages employees to treat their bosses as customers, not the other way around. If they want to keep their jobs, managers need to serve the owners, and then customers. The harsh reality of modern business is that employees are a means to an end. Of course, effective managers will do all they can to motivate, engage, consider and include employees. However, managers are not employees' servants.²³ One

²³ Mitch McCrimmon, "Why Servant Leadership is a Bad Idea," <http://www.management-issues.com/opinion/6015/why-servant-leadership-is-a-bad-idea/> (accessed September 25, 2014). McCrimmon also says that servant leadership is paternalistic in that it puts the leader in a role of the benign parent. Thus servant leadership hinders leaders in their efforts to treat subordinates as

could envision a leader making a genuine effort to serve subordinates. Such a leader could succeed for a period of time, particularly if subordinates take the leader as a model of delivering the same kind of genuine service to customers. However, due to systemic reasons outlined by McCrimmon, this practice will be disrupted if it stops generating satisfactory revenue. And because revenue generally trumps employee satisfaction in modern business, in that case servant leaders will have to, perhaps against their will, put off their servant mantles, take the whip and adjust the business, so it generates more money. Almost inevitably, some employees will be hurt in the process. Leaders' relations with employees may be significantly altered as a result, even though the adjustments may be couched in the language of a company desiring to be a better servant to its customers. The real meaning of service in question will be put in stark relief.

McCrimmon's objections seem to be limited to the for profit sector. But what about non-profits? Can servant leadership be a viable way to lead in a setting where profit making is explicitly recognized as not the most important goal? If so, can servant leadership be exercised in such a way as to be an inherently Christian way to lead? And if so, what would be the conditions for such an exercise?

Servant Leadership in a Non-Profit

In the current Western cultural matrix the term "service" most often associated with serving customers. Perhaps one of the reasons is that business is often viewed as a paradigmatic model for institutions of various kinds. That the word "businesslike" is most often a compliment is indicative of this reality. Even those institutions whose nature has traditionally been perceived as very different from that of a business resemble an enterprise to increasingly greater degree. The blunt statement by Ken Blanchard, a leading modern popular leadership guru, to the effect that church indeed is a business puts this approach in stark relief.²⁴ Nevertheless, even those who, like Blanchard, believe that a church is a business may be hesitant to assert that in an authentic Christian community people should treat each other as customers. There are those who hold that pastors ought to serve their flock in a manner akin to how best businesspeople treat their clients. However, even a cursory familiarity with the Scripture and history of Christian church should make one hesitant to accept the consumerist model as the paradigm of how Christians should be treated by their spiritual leaders. After all, it is exceedingly challenging to maintain that Christ treated his apostles as customers

mature adults. He allows that servant leadership can be cultivated in other areas of society, such as religion and public policy, but not in business.

²⁴ Ken Blanchard, Lecture at Biola University, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8M_QJ6G66E8 (accessed September 25, 2014).

or Paul served the churches he planted as merchants would serve their clients. The difference between the two models of service seems so great that it is hard to see how introducing the consumerist paradigm into ministry would not fundamentally alter the nature of Christian life as a whole.

But what if a non-profit explicitly commits to having unconditional concern for people as the top priority? In their thought-provoking paper, Gregory Stone and his co-workers examine and compare transformational and servant leadership paradigms. After careful analysis, they conclude that the main difference between the two lays in leader's focus. A transformational leader's primary commitment is to the organization. Development and empowering of followers have an important role, but only insofar as they facilitate achieving organizational objectives. Of course, in order to be truly transformational, leaders must not limit themselves to transactional relationships with their followers. A transformational leader finds a way of motivating people that goes beyond exchange relations. To provide this kind of motivation, transformational leaders need to possess a certain charisma. Still, this charisma must serve achieving organizational objectives. The development of followers is not the primary purpose, although it is often a welcome side benefit. By contrast, the servant leader is focused primarily on the followers. She or he does not have an allegiance to an abstract organizational entity. The nature of servant leader's commitment to people is not that of an emotional attachment. Rather, it is an unconditional concern for the well-being of their workers. Service to followers takes precedence over service to customers. Servant leaders are not results-focused, they focus on service itself. Relationships and people are more important than tasks and product. The desire to serve people supersedes organizational objectives. Furthermore, servant leadership is the conviction that long term organizational goals are best achieved by first fostering the well-being and growth of followers.²⁵ Thus, transformational and servant leadership paradigm seem to coincide in the long term.

For the sake of argument, let us suppose there are nonprofits where this way of leading may be viable. However, is a leadership model defined by unconditional concern for the followers inherently Christian? Once again, the idea of unconditional concern for the other seems to resonate with Christian spirituality. After all, Christ himself seems to have been so concerned for other people that he gave his life for them. At the same time, Christians certainly do not have a monopoly on unconditional concern for the other. Perhaps the best

²⁵ A. Gregory Stone, Robert F. Russell and Kathleen Patterson, "Transformational Versus Servant Leadership: A Difference in Leader Focus." *Leadership and Organizational Development Journal*, 25, (2004): 349 – 361.

known thinker of the last century who has given the most prominent place to this concern is Emmanuel Levinas, a French philosopher of Jewish origins who is known for his phenomenology of intersubjective responsibility. The crux of transcendence is in the responsibility placed upon us by our encounter with the other. This responsibility is nonreciprocal, unconditional and unlimited. It is also underdetermined. The encounter with the other person places on us a demand, the precise content of which is not immediately, and never entirely, clear. We are aware that we are responsible for the other, and this sense of obligation can never be fulfilled no matter how much we act upon it. At no point of encounter is this responsibility terminated.²⁶ Of course, the idea of unconditional concern for followers is not worked out by Stone, et al, with even remotely the same philosophical rigor as Levinas elaborated on his fundamental concept of unconditional responsibility for the other. But the two seem to carry substantial similarities on the level of basic ideas: both give decisive importance to the unconditional concern for the other, and this seems to imply the obligation of service to the other.

However, if we want to reach into the origins of the idea of unconditional concern for the other as the sole criterion of the right life, we, once again, will need to go back all the way to Kant, particularly to his categorical imperative. It has substantial affinities with what has come to be known in Western Christianity as the Golden Rule, or Christ's admonition to love others as we love ourselves. However, this affinity should not be the sole determinant of whether the categorical imperative as espoused by Kant is inherently Christian.

As has been pointed out, St. Augustine was able to recognize virtues of Romans, even though these people were gentiles. What's more, he was not hesitant to set virtues of Romans as an example for Christians. The title of chapter 18, book V, of *Civitas Dei* is self-explanatory: "How Far Christians Ought to Be from Boasting, If They have done Anything for the Love of the Eternal Country, When the Romans Did Such Great Things for Human Glory and a Terrestrial City." Even though Romans were motivated by the love of liberty and the desire for human praise, their deeds were admirable. Of course, some of the deeds St. Augustine mentions, such as emperors killing their own children for disobeying orders and warriors throwing themselves from the precipice as a sacrifice to gods, would strike modern reader as morally dubious. However, Augustine does not speak of these acts as worthy of imitation but points to the great degree of commitment and selflessness in service of the city that motivated them. It is this commitment and selflessness that should teach Christians a lesson. As they are citizens of a much greater city, *Civitas Dei*, Christians must be just as

²⁶ Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University, 1969).

selfless. If the selflessness of Romans caused the Roman empire to become so great and magnificent, Christians will be stung with shame if they fail to hold fast to those same virtues for the sake of a city incomparably more glorious, the city of God.

At the same time, St. Augustine stops short of calling the virtues and motivations of Romans Christian, admirable as they may be. Even though these virtues may be worthy of imitation by Christians, they cannot serve as passports granting citizenship in the city of God. Only love of God can grant that citizenship.²⁷ If St. Augustine's reaction to modern practitioners of servant leadership were similar, he would recognize the merits of the leader's unconditional concern for human beings, perhaps lift it up as an example for Christians, but would stop short of calling it inherently Christian. To him the citizenship in *Civitas Dei* was inseparable from love of very specific God. No doubt, many modern leadership theorists and theologians would find this notion too exclusionary. However, the radical secularization of ethics that resulted in significant portion from the Kantian collapse of theology into morals may indicate that St. Augustine was onto something important.²⁸

But what of the situation where a God-loving Christian practices servant leadership, whether in ecclesial or other public settings? This is related to the question of whether the method of making a single commandment of the Gospel the sole defining feature of leadership is inherently Christian. In this age of short attention spans, leaders face tremendous pressure to simplify. Complexity and nuance have decidedly fallen out of favor. Leadership training manuals need to be distilled to entries with a few bullet points that are easy to retain in memory. Of course, Christian leaders are not immune to this pressure. Many of them find servant leadership attractive precisely because it presents a model that seems to bring Christian spirituality into leadership by focusing on a single concept that is easy to understand. It is exceedingly hard to disagree with the notion that service should be an important dimension of Christian spirituality of leadership. But there is the question of whether the method of truncating the nature of leadership to the point of making service the single determinative criterion is aligned with Christian spirituality.

St. Augustine's writings do not give the impression that he did not see service as such a criterion. This is not because he thought service unimportant in spirituality of leadership. We already noted the paramount importance he has given to service. Throughout his writings Augustine calls ministers servants of

²⁷ St. Augustine, "City of God," ed. Philip Schaff, tr. Marcus Dodds, *The Complete Works of St. Augustine*, Amazon, Kindle edition.

²⁸ See, for example, John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1995).

God. He takes this designation for granted as needing no explanation. Service to God certainly entails obligation to the sheep, i.e. the laity. However, this obligation is construed by Augustine primarily in terms of spiritual nourishment rather than service. This nourishment takes place mainly through instruction and liturgy. Ministers need to make sure they do not nourish themselves at the expense of their flock. Even though they are permitted to live off the flock, they should not do so in such a manner as to give the impression that they preach the Gospel out of their own need and privation. In an ecclesial setting, everyone should seek not their own benefit but the will of Christ.²⁹ Consequently, seeking and doing the will of God takes precedence over seeking the best interests of the other. In chapter 19 of Book V of *Civitas Dei* St. Augustine addresses the issue of Christians in positions of power in non-ecclesial public settings. He points out that those Christians who accept positions of power outside the ecclesial realm should eschew the desire for domination and worldly glory. However, this does not lead St. Augustine to single out serving subordinates as the most important mark of the Christian leader in a non-church environment. Remember, this Christian is the same layperson who is nourished in the church via teaching and the Eucharist. In a worldly power setting, this nourishment results primarily in a Christian demonstrating the true glory of God. To do so, the Christian leader in a position of power should despise the judgment of flatterers but not their salvation. The Christian leader should set little value on their praise but not their love and strive earnestly to have all the praise directed to God.³⁰ Even though the motive of service is prominent in St. Augustine's writings, he is far from asserting that service to people should be the sole defining feature of Christian leadership. He definitely saw himself as a servant of both fellow bishops and those entrusted to his care, but this understanding of his role did not preclude him from using power when he felt it necessary. Unlike modern theorists of servant leadership, Augustine did not see any contradiction between the understanding of his role as a servant, on the one hand, and belonging to the upper echelons of a quite hierarchical system, i.e. the Catholic Church, on the other. Moreover, Augustine would not characterize his concern for the monks he mentored, laypeople in his diocese, or any other group as unconditional. Even though their very existence presented a powerful and inexhaustible responsibility on him, this responsibility has been conditioned by, and I secondary to, his responsibility to God. The silent demand of the other had an explicit theological grounding. Augustine was a servant to people only insofar as he was a servant to God. That meant serving

²⁹ St. Augustine, *On Pastors*, http://fathergilles.net/parishministry/On_Pastors_by_St_Augustine.pdf (accessed September 25, 2014).

³⁰ St. Augustine, "City of God," ed. Philip Schaff, tr. Marcus Dodds, in *The Complete Works of St. Augustine*, Amazon, Kindle edition.

people only in so far as those acts of service would nourish them spiritually. St. Augustine did not dwell on acts of service to people in his writings precisely because, necessary as those acts were, they were neither an end in themselves, nor the defining characteristic of his leadership.

Conclusion

We set out to examine servant leadership to determine whether it is inherently Christian. In order to do so, we probed the foundations of servant leadership in light of the writings of St. Augustine. We began by exploring the therapeutic origins of servant leadership and the related issue of whether the modern Western therapeutic worldview is inherently Christian. We concluded that this worldview conflicts with St. Augustine's practice of cure of the souls in three fundamental respects. First, St. Augustine believed that a communal setting is essential for the genuine cure of the souls. Second, St. Augustine saw teleology, or the study of our ultimate purpose, as a necessary part of the cure of souls. Third, St. Augustine did not consider an autonomous psyche as the locus of one's true self. We went on to explore the shift from therapy to mentoring in the writings of some contemporary servant leadership theorists. This we did in the light of St. Augustine's practice of mentoring. We concluded that, while there has been the recognition of the importance of community for adequate mentoring, the modern servant leadership paradigm and St. Augustine's approach remain far apart. The primary difference lays in the very public nature of teleology in St. Augustine.

We proceeded to examine how servant leadership is understood in a modern business setting and found decisive differences with the Augustinian worldview. The theme of service is certainly prominent within both the New Testament and Christian tradition, particularly in works of St. Augustine. However, these affinities should not mislead one into thinking that by themselves they are sufficient to establish that servant leadership is inherently Christian and, therefore, should be embraced by Christians across the occupational spectrum as a therapeutic strategy whose power is legitimated by its capability to deliver profits. While the latter is certainly an appropriate end for a business within some parameters, the kind of service that occurs in the context of a sale must not be confused with the service that happens in a genuine Christian community. The two are paradigmatically different. This is not to suggest that service is not an integral part of a cruciform Christian praxis. Precisely because it is, service needs to be firmly rooted within that praxis in order to be authentically Christian. If service is set within the modern consumerist context, it runs a great risk of becoming substantially different from the kind of leadership exercised within cruciform Christian communities. Taken out of the context of a genuine Christian communal praxis, servant leadership becomes merely a tool for achieving better

business outcomes. In that case the very meaning of “service” shifts fundamentally, and it is hard to see what is particularly Christian about this term so redefined.

These days Christians find themselves torn between Sunday and Monday. Many of them feel understandably uneasy about this gap and see servant leadership as a tool in overcoming it and perhaps bringing Christian spirituality into workplace. However, that can be done authentically only if one’s practice of service in leadership is substantially integrated into a cruciform Christian spirituality where there is a robust community dimension. Taken out of this context, servant leadership easily slips into the overall consumerist and therapeutic pattern of life and becomes a means for achieving extraneous ends. An important test of whether that slippage has occurred comes when the goal of profit making comes into conflict with values that undergird servant leadership. If profit making wins, then it is indicative of servant leadership becoming subsumed into the overall consumerist pattern. Christian leaders must not allow themselves to be turned into therapists whose goal is to help people heal emotionally by facilitating self-discovery in order to enable them to deliver greater profits.

We then probed whether servant leadership could be an inherently Christian way to lead in a non-profit setting, whose primary purpose is serving people, not making profits. The answer in part hinges on whether unconditional concern for the other person is inherently Christian. We saw that this idea originated with the Enlightenment, and in Augustine concern for the other person is conditioned by the concern to do God’s will, even though he would agree that concern for the other should take precedence over concern for the self. Moreover, although St. Augustine clearly saw himself as a servant of God and servant to others insofar as he was a servant to God, he did not make service the decisive criteria of his leadership style and decisions. Service was just one, albeit important, dimension of his leadership approach. He was not hesitant to exercise authority when he felt led to do so. He perceived his main task as spiritual nourishment, not service. And he saw the will of God as taking precedence over the best interests of the other. To St. Augustine, service was one of many crucial dimensions of his leadership style. The idea of making service into the solely defining dimension of leadership is a result of modern pressures to simplify the concept of leadership rather than of the desire to capture Christian understanding of leadership in all its richness.

Servant leadership has been born off pouring Freudian wine into Kantian wineskins peppered with a fiction narrative and was then subsumed into the consumerist paradigm of modern business. A community cannot be authentically

Christian if its members do not serve each other. Neither can it be genuinely Christian if this service does not exceed customer-oriented service. In order to be authentic, Christian service needs to be integrated into Christian communal praxis, both in and outside of the workplace.