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## EDITORIAL STANDARDS FOR THE *JOURNAL OF RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP*

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Few long-term priorities are more important than the quality of religious leadership in this generation and into the next. There are, in fact, those who would say that the principal purpose of seminary training and the central mandate of denominational judicatories is to prepare and nurture congregational leaders. This fact creates an important irony, however. Although leadership education is among the most important goals of theological education and of congregational development, we have devoted surprisingly little systematic thought to the nature of leadership. This journal proposes to gather the ideas of those scattered thinkers who have been fostering faithful church leadership, and then to harness their knowledge for the benefit of congregations.

The goal of the *Journal of Religious Leadership* is to be both scholarly and prescriptive. Scholars in most “disciplines” build books from articles published in refereed journals. The journals enforce scholarly standards that separate solid research from speculation. These standards are not imposed, but develop over time as scholars debate ideas in print. The problem is that there are, at present, no clear standards for good scholarship on religious leadership.

Nor is there an outlet for such scholarship at the article level. If one were to write an excellent article (by some as yet undefined standard) about religious leadership, administration, and finance, there would be no place at the moment to publish it. A practitioner journal such as *Leadership* magazine would only welcome the article if it were stripped of its scholarly apparatus and if its ideas came in bite-size portions with immediate application. A scholarly nonprofits journal such as *Nonprofit Management and*

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*Leadership or Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* would only accept the article if it suppressed any specific discussion of faith. And, a sociology of religion journal, such as *Sociology of Religion*, *The Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* or *The Review of Religious Research* would insist that an author draw no prescriptive conclusions that would be of use to practitioners. The closest cousins to the *Journal of Religious Leadership* are the various denominational journals such as the Methodist *Quarterly Review*, the Presbyterian *Theology Today*, or the Episcopal *Anglican Theological Review*. Each of these journals asks scholarly theologians to include conclusions for a churchly audience. But even these denominational journals tend to tone down the scholarly sophistication so as not to lose lay audiences. The work of religious leadership is too important to settle for anything but rigorous scholarship. The *Journal of Religious Leadership* will, therefore, fill an important niche by encouraging scholarly authors to draw prescriptive conclusions and by expecting those prescriptive conclusions to derive directly from scholarly research.

Articles submitted to the journal will go through an evaluative referee process. There are two reasons for this process: integrity and improvement. The integrity of the journal, of course, depends on the ability of the Editorial Board (as well as selected outside referees) to judge the quality of the articles submitted for publication. But there is another reason for having a referee process. We hope that the feedback from the referees will help authors improve the quality of their work.<sup>1</sup> This requires referees not only to render judgments but also to suggest strategies and resources that authors can use to make their work better. In other words, the journal hopes not only to develop a body of literature but also to develop a body of authors as well.

The referee process begs the question of standards. What constitutes an outstanding article on the topic of religious leadership, administration, and finance? The answer to the question will, of course, evolve as the debate within this

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<sup>1</sup> Craig Dykstra, "Evaluation as Collaborative Inquiry," *Initiatives in Religion* 2:4 (Fall 1993): 1-2.

journal grows over time. But until such time, it is important to have a preliminary answer.

The Editorial Board of the *Journal of Religious Leadership* has thus agreed on four standards by which to judge articles submitted for publication. First of all, articles should be **scholarly**. The purpose of the journal is to promote deeper thinking on leadership. The only way to do that is to adopt scholarly norms for rigorous work. Every article should, of course, have a clearly defined central question - what in some fields is called the *problematique* - and a main thesis for addressing that question. Likewise, every paragraph in the paper should focus on that key question, locating the logic of the paragraph in relation to the main thesis. Simply listing ideas and findings will not be sufficient.

The main thesis of the paper should, by the same token, address some important open-space or lacunae in the field. This means that each paper will have to interact with one or more of the scholarly literatures. Inter- and multi-disciplinary pieces should be particularly clear about the literatures they address. And there are a host of literatures that touch on questions of religious leadership: ecclesiology, congregational studies, organization theory, feminist theology, religious education, organizational development, pastoral care, history, nonprofits studies, ethics, organizational culture and/or financial management (to name just a few). Each of these literatures has something to say about religious leadership, administration, and finance. And each one has large unanswered questions about these topics. Indeed, some of the most interesting articles will show how combining the perspectives of a number of literatures allows us to address questions that we could not previously frame. At the same time, the diversity of the audiences that will be reading this journal require authors to ground themselves in a literature and to explain how that discipline or scholarly field enlightens us about religious leadership.

Authors should, at the very least, describe the methodologies that they used when doing descriptive or empirical work. For example, in the second issue of the

journal, Sharon Callahan writes about using a DELPHI methodology to investigate the ecclesiological sensibilities of particular congregations. She did not have to invent this method; it is well-established in the field. All she had to do was show that it was the right method to apply to her particular investigation. But in order to establish the article's credibility, she did have to show how and why she chose that particular method. The same need to establish method applies to theological and theoretical pieces. Each should show the assumptions and methodological boundaries of their work.

The second standard for articles published in the journal is that they should be *theological*. Vague references to religion will not suffice. Nor will it be enough to write about religious organizations as if they were detached from faith. For example, David Nygren led a team in 1994 that evaluated leadership competencies in religious orders.<sup>2</sup> He used a methodology (which utilizes the behavioral event interview) that was well-established in psychology and often used in the business world. But he found that the categories had to change once he began to look at leadership in a specifically religious context. He had to add categories such as "awareness of God's presence" which were absent from secular studies. By taking seriously the spiritual nature of religious leadership Nygren and his team discovered crucial elements to religious leadership that would otherwise have been ignored.

Noticing theology is not enough, however. We would hope that in the pages of the *Journal of Religious Leadership* an author would feel the freedom not only to notice, as one of the authors in an early article does, that leaders need to be "spiritually mature persons." It would also be appropriate for that author to discuss what it means to be spiritually mature. We would thus invite articles that explore theological frameworks for outstanding leadership and for cultivating leaders. In fact, we would even welcome articles that use

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<sup>2</sup> David Nygren et. al., "Outstanding Leadership in Nonprofit Organizations: Leadership Competencies in Roman Catholic Religious Orders," *Nonprofit Management & Leadership* 4:4 (Summer 1994): 375-391.

theology to problematize accepted notions of what leadership means. In other words, the journal is looking for articles that provide critical reflection from within a faith tradition. For example, from a Christian perspective, an article might explore any of Don Browning's four movements in practical theology: descriptive theology, historical or reflective theology, systematic or constructive theology, and strategic theology.<sup>3</sup> Each one has implications for the nature and practice of Christian leadership.

The third standard invites articles to be expansive in the way they construe religious leadership. We invite articles that expand that notion to include nonprofit or social service agencies - the leadership of which often extends far beyond ordained persons. Any work that religious organizations do requires religious leadership. Articles may even explore leadership that extends beyond religious organizations. For example, when people of faith exercise callings in the secular world, they often do religiously-motivated and religiously-constructed leadership. We would welcome studies that describe how that leadership is different because it is religious.

We also intend to be expansive in the way religion is construed. Although many of us are Christian-centered, we welcome work centered in other religious and theological traditions. And we encourage articles that explore the relationships within and among religious traditions.

The final standard expects articles not only to be scholarly, theological, and expansive. They should also be prescriptive. Scholars often let practitioners draw their own conclusions about the implications of an article. We encourage authors instead to include a section in the paper itself where they suggest ways in which someone might take next steps because of the insights and ideas contained in the paper. For example, an article that discusses a Christian view of conflict in religious organizations might conclude with a series of perspectives a leader can keep in mind when next she encounters conflict. The point here is that the best articles

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<sup>3</sup> Don Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).

do not force practitioners to draw the conclusions on their own.

There is a potential tension, however, between the expansive construal of religion and the prescriptive element of articles. What one religious tradition prescribes, another may proscribe. So we would ask each article to name its norms. That is, we ask each author to state clearly the theological convictions that undergird the perspectives he or she espouses. The journal's hope to move communities of faith toward meaningful life creates a bias toward strategic action. And the journal's understanding that all action is embedded in context requires that authors name the norms out of which their strategic action emerges.

So now we invite submissions from all who study religious leadership. We are looking for papers that are scholarly, that are theological, that take an expansive view of religious leadership, and that draw prescriptive conclusions.