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## BOOK REVIEW

### UNDERSTANDING CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

By: Ian Parkinson

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A masterful piece of work that combines a breadth of academic knowledge with a genuine spirituality, this book is seasoned with the lessons of practical experience. The book falls into two main sections: one is more theoretical and the other more practical. Each section has five chapters.

Chapter One makes the case for leadership by discussing what happens when it is missing. It also sets out what the author describes as “the goods of leadership.” These he defines as sense-making, animation, alignment, problem-solving, and hope. There is also a brief—but important—excursus on leadership and ministry, terms the author believes need to be distinguished.

Chapter Two acknowledges the complexity of leadership, a complexity driven by differences in context and perspective, along with a temptation toward oversimplification. The author then proceeds to survey a range of theories, breaking them into three broad classifications: leader-centered theories, relationship-centered theories, and an approach that sees leadership as a social process.

Chapters Three and four move to a biblical discussion of the theme, first exploring how leadership is presented in the Old Testament and then how it is presented in the New. The chapters are not always watertight as some of the themes discussed under the rubric of the Old Testament (such as shepherd, or servant) are not exclusive to the OT, as they are also in the NT, including the ministry of Jesus.

The NT chapter includes a series of studies on leadership words. These are grouped under three functions: exercising oversight,

representing Christ, and animating the body. By the end of Chapter Four, the author is ready to present the following definition of Christian Leadership: *A relational process of social influence through which people are inspired, enabled and mobilized to act in positive, new ways, towards the achievement of God's purposes.*

In part two, the author turns to focus on more practical matters. Five tasks are grouped under the heading “the work of leadership.” The first of these discusses leadership and organizational culture. The author points us to the Schein’s three levels of culture. Leaders have the possibility of shaping their organization’s culture through modeling, explaining, exposing dysfunction, inviting participation, and reinforcing.

The next aspect of the leader’s work is the task of “animating the body.” The idea of leaders as catalysts is developed, with both theological and practical considerations presented. Three priorities are suggested: leaders need to establish a “development culture,” cultivate a vision for “whole-life discipleship,” and devise a strategy for leader development.

Chapter Eight deals with the task of “fostering collaboration” and includes detailed discussion of the concept of teams. It also addresses conflict, noting the differences between affective, procedural, and substantive conflict. Another task is that of discerning direction in light of the organization’s identity, purpose, and vision.

The final chapter is a short discussion of “the spirituality of Christian leadership”: What is it that makes leadership Christian? While much of the application in the book relates primarily to leaders in a church context, the book recognizes that Christian leadership is not limited to such. The author suggests that “perhaps what most distinguishes Christian leadership from any other form of leadership is the understanding that it is received from God as a gift.”

One of the great strengths of the book is its thoroughness. The author demonstrates a considerable grasp of a range of relevant leadership. He has thought deeply about the range of questions arising from leadership. The book is not a simple regurgitation of secular theory seasoned with an isolated text from Scripture here and there to justify the title! There is frequent engagement with

Scripture, ranging from theological reflection to the use of biblical narratives to illustrate a point.

Additionally, the author makes careful use of his own experience in a way that demonstrates that leadership has been far from a merely theoretical subject for him. He includes case studies ranging from a vicar revitalizing an inner-city church in Liverpool to a consultant psychiatrist developing the work of a Mental Health Trust.

A minor limitation is that much of the application is made in an Anglican context. This is understandable, given the author's primary sphere of work. I wonder if the book's appeal might be extended in a future edition that draws on some more non-Anglican examples. My free-church friends need not be put off—they might even enjoy the discussion of elders and bishops!

In conclusion, this excellent book merits a prime place on any curriculum devoted to the subject of Christian leadership.

Alan Wilson

Belfast Bible College, Irish Baptist College & Irish Bible Institute,  
Ireland