

Evangelical Review of Theology

GENERAL EDITOR: THOMAS SCHIRRMACHER

Volume 35 · Number 4 · October 2011

Articles and book reviews reflecting global evangelical
theology for the purpose of discerning the obedience of faith

Published by



for
WORLD EVANGELICAL
ALLIANCE
Theological Commission

Leaders from Disciples: The Church's Contribution to Leadership Development

Russell L. Huizing

KEYWORDS: *Augustine, Anabaptists, Bonhoeffer, imitation, incarnation, servanthood, teaching, contextualisation, Christology*

Leaders From Disciples: The Church's Contribution to Leadership Development

The holy grail of leadership research is successfully identifying and developing leaders. Meta-theories specifying great individuals, specific traits, environmental contingencies, behavioural adjustments, management systems, and relational influences have all been proposed as answers to this search.¹ Much of ecclesial leadership has followed these patterns by attempting to adapt non-ecclesial leadership models to an ecclesial context.²

An excellent example of this is the adaptation of the servant leadership theory proposed by Greenleaf.³ The theory's self-described pursuit of 'legitimate power and greatness' suggests that its underlying servant paradigm could be at odds with a Christian servant paradigm (cf. Lk. 22:25-27). Unfortunately, many ecclesial leadership models that draw upon non-ecclesial research rely upon the model's pragmatism and fail to question its underlying philosophical paradigms.⁴

This does not suggest that we should abandon the truths that are

Mastery to Joy', *Epiphany International* 14, no. 1 (2008): 40-41.

3 Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey Into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1977).

4 Although see Theresa Kaetkaew Punnachet, 'Catholic Servant-Leadership in Education: Going Beyond the Secular Paradigm', *International Studies in Catholic Education* 1, no. 2 (2009): accessed September 2, 2010, doi: 10.1080/194225309031137921.

1 Gary Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations* 6th ed (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2006).

2 Mary Ellen Drushal and Jerry R. Flora, 'Exemplary Christian Leadership: Beyond

Russell L. Huizing (MA, Liberty Theological Seminary) is an ordained Senior Pastor of the Pleasantview Alliance Church in Saegertown, PA. He is currently enrolled in the Ecclesial Leadership PhD program at Regent University. In addition to over 10 years of ecclesial leadership experience, he also has leadership experience as a family business owner and in a Global Fortune 50 corporation. He has been a featured speaker at seminars and has had research published.

established through non-ecclesial leadership research. However, it does suggest that ecclesial leadership has not only a distinct contribution to make to organizational leadership studies but also an obligation to develop a unique ecclesial leadership theory drawn from its sacred texts. With nearly 47% of the New Testament containing narrative about the ministry of Jesus and nearly 23% of the New Testament written by Paul, one of its most influential early leaders, ample resources to identify a uniquely Christian ecclesial leadership theory exist.⁵

Jesus took a band of relatively untrained individuals and within a short period had qualified them to lead his mission to change the world—which they promptly began to do. Theologians typically refer to his method of doing this as discipleship. This approach was relational, intentional, informal, within the context of community, and outward focused.⁶

Though the discipling method of Jesus certainly involved times of teaching, Jesus' discipleship model should not be thought of as strictly a teacher-student model.⁷ The final command given to his disciples was to go and make more disciples (Mt. 28:18-20) which encompassed the dissemination of information through teaching but also—and perhaps more importantly—the observation of those teach-

ings in 'attitudes, values, skills, and behaviours which are appropriate for all those who are followers of God'.⁸ This was the model of follower expansion instituted and commanded by Jesus. This does not mean that only leaders are called to multiply disciples—all followers are under the final command of Jesus. However, it is through the faithful fulfilment of this model of discipleship that new leaders develop and are recognized by the community.

One early Christian community example of this leadership development is Paul (cf. Acts 9:27, 11:25-26, 13:1-3). His pastoral epistles are of special importance as they represent a recognized leader of the church instructing other leaders of the church how to develop the next generation of leaders. As might be expected, Paul passes on to these leaders the model of leadership that he himself was imitating, that of Jesus,—one in which the faith is passed on to new followers through teachings that are observed (2 Tim. 2:2, Tit. 2:1-7).⁹

I Surveying Disciplemaking

Discipleship, then, appears to be the primary initiative not only in increasing the number of followers of Jesus but also in the development of Christ-following leaders. Though researchers should not construe the Bible as a manual with a neat discipleship outline, if

5 Felix Just, *New Testament Statistics* (2005, September 2), Retrieved November 12, 2010, from Catholic Resources: <catholic-resources.org/Bible/NT-Statistics-Greek.htm>.

6 Sylvia Wilkey Collinson, 'Making Disciples and the Christian Faith', *Evangelical Review of Theology* 29, no. 3 (2005):240-250.

7 Collinson, *Making Disciples*, 247.

8 Collinson, *Making Disciples*, 250.

9 Joseph A. Fitzmyer, 'The Structured Ministry of the Church in the Pastoral Epistles', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 66, no. 4 (2004): 582-596.

the primary initiative of the disciple of Jesus is to make other disciples of Jesus, then the characteristics of discipleship ought to be implicit in the narrative and didactic material of the New Testament.¹⁰ A brief survey of the New Testament material on discipleship will show this.

1 Matthew

The disciples of Jesus, as portrayed by Matthew, consistently seemed to think of discipleship in primarily institutional or charismatic terms.¹¹ However, rather than disciples being great individuals who charismatically lead others, Jesus unswervingly presented a picture of disciples who were non-offensive, humble, forgiving, generous, servants who recognized their own weaknesses and the weaknesses of others and were willing to put others ahead of themselves in order to accomplish the mission.¹² Of course, Jesus himself modelled the greatest example of this on the cross. It is exactly in the cross that we see that discipleship as Jesus instituted it, not simply some mystical experience. Rather, it is an all or nothing statement of faithfulness and obedience.

It is in this light that the Sermon on the Mount is understood as something more than a spiritualized allegory. Instead, it is Jesus' statement that dis-

cipleship has a visible influence on the daily practices of the individual, which in turn affects spiritual formation.¹³

Throughout church history, various underlying presuppositions of the Sermon on the Mount have led to four distinct perspectives on the sermon's relationship to discipleship: (a) commands to be followed in order to do God's will, (b) what doing God's will results in, (c) a best-case perspective that no follower can be expected to fully enjoy, or (d) examples of ethical behaviour to open the eyes of disciples to right living.¹⁴ All four views can be held in tension with each other rather than trying to identify the one best view.

Irrespective of which presuppositional perspective is held, one would be mistaken to believe that following Jesus' call to discipleship would lead to social or religious recognition. On the contrary, following Jesus in faith and instituting the life changes inherent in following him is likely to lead to social marginalization and place one at odds with the religious establishment.¹⁵

2 Mark

Discipleship as presented in the

¹⁰ John F. O'Grady, *Disciples and Leaders: The Origins of Christian Ministry in the New Testament* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991).

¹¹ Rollins G. Grams, 'Not "Leader" but "Little Ones" in the Father's Kingdom: The Character of Discipleship in Matthew's Gospel', *Transformation*, 21, no. 2 (2004): 114.

¹² Grams, 'Not "Leader"', 121-123.

¹³ Joshua Thomas Searle, 'Is the Sermon on the Mount Too Unrealistic to Serve as a Resource for Christian Discipleship and Spiritual Formation?', *Journal of European Baptist Studies*, 9, no. 2 (2009): 42.

¹⁴ Daniel Patte, *Discipleship According to the Sermon on the Mount: Four Legitimate Readings, Four Plausible Views of Discipleship, and Their Relative Values* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996).

¹⁵ Warren Carter, 'Matthew 4:18-22 and Matthean Discipleship: An Audience-Oriented Perspective', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 59, no. 1 (1997): 58-75.

Gospel of Mark is strongly Christ-centric. From the opening sentence to the ending verse (whether v. 8 or v. 20), Jesus is the central focus of this book. Clarity of focus is an important precursor to the disciple truly recognizing Jesus for who he is (Mk. 8:22-30).¹⁶

Mark further emphasizes this focus by contrasting the frailty and faithlessness of the twelve with the eagerness of outsiders like Bartimaeus.¹⁷ Even when Jesus himself is most sorely tempted in Gethsemane, he remains faithful by submitting himself to the will of the Father.

Such times of hopelessness are quite distinguished from the disciple's response to the storms on the lake where faithlessness was on display.¹⁸ The times of difficulty in the life of Christ highlighted the implicit struggle associated with following Jesus and the intentional effort required to remain faithful to him.¹⁹

Despite Mark's emphasis on focusing on Jesus, such a focus ought not to lead to a spectator role. Mark is clear that welcoming Jesus in and showing

him hospitality is a right response to what the disciple learns by focusing on him.²⁰ Through these illustrations from the life of Jesus, the disciple of Jesus is challenged to do likewise in the name of Jesus in culturally and socio-economically diverse contexts.²¹

However, even this hospitable response to Jesus, and through him to the world, is no collegial façade. The calling, mission, and servant-mindedness of the disciples lead them into the role of priest, interceding as a reflection of Jesus between the world and God.²²

Ultimately, the Gospel of Mark contributes to the understanding of discipleship by focusing on the presence of Jesus, extending his practices to the disciple, furthering his transformation in the life of the disciple, and deepening the disciple's knowledge of him.²³

3 Other New Testament Insights

Though Matthew and Mark represent the primary sources for most scholarship on discipleship, the entire New Testament is filled with insights of which only a sampling is possible. A consistent theme in the discipleship sources of the New Testament is what Nelson called the paradox of disciple-

16 Marvin Meyer, 'Taking Up the Cross and Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark', *Calvin Theological Journal*, 37, no. 2 (2002): 232.

17 Leroy Andrew Huizinga, 'Solus Christus: The Markan Contrast Between Jesus and His Disciples', *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 35, no. 6 (2008): 408-409; Leif E. Vaage, 'An Other Home: Discipleship in Mark as Domestic Asceticism', *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, 71, no. 4 (2009): 751-752.

18 Huizinga, 'Solus Christus', 409.

19 Vaage, 'An Other Home', 744-745.

20 Annang Asumang, "'And the Angels Waited on Him' (Mark 1:13): Hospitality and Discipleship in Mark's Gospel', *Conspectus (South African Theological Seminary)*, 8 (2009): 5.

21 Asumang, 'And the Angels', 20-22.

22 Demetrios Trakatellis, "'Akolouthēi Moi/Follow Me' (Mk. 2.14): Discipleship and Priesthood', *Greek Orthodox Theological Review*, 30, no. 3 (1985): 271-285.

23 Suzanne Wats Henderson, *Christology and Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

24 Peter K. Nelson, *Leadership and Discipleship: A Study of Luke 22:24-30* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1994).

ship.²⁴ The disciple who wants to be great must become a servant who expects trials through which Jesus will bring about exultation.²⁵ Although the disciples are called to be God's slaves, they remain leaders. The faithful disciple is to reign with Christ always in the context of servanthood.

In line with this theme of paradoxical discipleship, examples in Scripture of leaders rising from within the community of followers tend to emphasize individuals outside the ranks of leadership taking on new and necessary roles of leadership.²⁶ Furthermore, the promotion of these 'outside' leaders is not based upon some charismatic display of spiritual gifts. Rather, the distinguishing mark of the ecclesial leader—and ultimately of all spiritually maturing believers—is that of jars of clay who are filled with the fellowship of sharing in suffering with Christ.²⁷ The boast of the disciple—and the ecclesial leader—is a boast of weakness through which God can be glorified.²⁸

Discipleship then becomes an imitation of the cross of Christ rather than an imitation of qualities and characteristics of great individuals.²⁹ To be sure, through the trials God will bring about restoration, reconciliation, redemption, resurrection, and ultimately vin-

dication. This is what makes the trials of the disciple bearable and even transformational—the life of Christ on full display in the resurrection.³⁰ Thus, the life of the disciple becomes a retelling of the ultimate story of Christ who gave up the glories of heaven embracing humility, humanity, obedience, and ultimately death so that through his resurrection and reign God the Father might have his glory on full display.³¹

II The Characteristics of Disciples

The general contours of discipleship begin to take shape with this survey of discipleship source material. However, as Dale noted, there are quite diverse examples of leadership and discipleship characteristics among the twelve apostles alone: (a) Peter, the leader with initiative who needs direction, (b) Andrew, the leading follower, (c) James and John, the ambitious leaders who are faithful disciples, (d) Philip, the cautious leader and pragmatic disciple, (e) Thomas, the questioning leader and devoted disciple, (f) and Judas, the leader with potential who failed.³²

As can be seen, defining specific characteristics that will be relevant to every disciple of Christ or even just to a subset of ecclesial leaders will necessarily be broad in its description. Still, certain characteristics do seem to

25 Nelson, *Leadership and Discipleship*.

26 C. K. Robertson, 'The Limits of Leadership: Challenges to Apostolic Homeostasis in Luke-Acts', *Anglican Theological Review*, 87, no. 2 (2005): 273-290.

27 James Thompson, 'Authentic Discipleship: An Introduction to 2 Corinthians,' *Restoration Quarterly*, 19, no. 1 (1976): 4-6.

28 Thompson, 'Authentic Discipleship', 6.

29 Timothy Matthew Slemmons, 'Philippians 3:17-4:1', *Interpretation*, 64, no. 1 (2010): 80.

30 John Lewis, 'Renewed Journey: A Study of Philippians 3:10-11', *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 33, no. 4 (2009): 360-362.

31 Lewis, 'Renewed Journey', 362.

32 Robert D. Dale, 'Leadership—Follower-ship: The Church's Challenge', *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, 29, no. 2 (1987): 25-27.'

surface consistently when drawing together the New Testament teachings on following Jesus.

The local church is the field in which discipleship is planted and harvested. Only within the local church can paradigmatic elements of discipleship occur: (a) living in Christ, (b) loving one another, (c) labouring for the Kingdom, and (d) ecclesial practices such as evangelism, worship, teaching, and fellowship.³³

The life of discipleship, however, is not simply a programmatic self-help curriculum. Instead, it should be seen primarily as a covenantal commitment.³⁴ This is because the life of a disciple of Jesus is not based on learning, knowledge or personal characteristics, per se, but is a whole-life surrendering of the self for Christ's service.³⁵ Chennattu showed that the covenantal nature of discipleship could be clearly seen in the covenant meal and dialogue recorded in John 13-17 as well as the reestablishment of the covenant in John 20-21. This covenantal commitment is necessary because the disciple will be asked not only to learn from teaching but also to learn by doing.

Coleman noted the important distinction between teaching and train-

ing.³⁶ Teaching is primarily a cognitive exercise whereby disciples come to an understanding of why they should act in a particular manner. Training, on the other hand, is praxis oriented, assisting the disciple to act upon the knowledge gained through teaching. This praxis of the disciple leads to greater cognitive learning from experience and thus deeper cognitive understanding leading to further praxis.³⁷ The combination of both the cognitive and praxis is critical to the concept of discipleship, as is clear from Jesus' original commissioning statement—'teaching them to obey everything' (Mt. 28:20, NRSV).

This praxis-teaching of the disciple is drawn directly out of the description of post-ascension discipleship provided by John's Gospel, where the disciples' continuing relationship with Jesus is described with verbs of acceptance, involvement, and engagement within the context of the work of the Holy Spirit.³⁸ Throughout church history, the structure of this praxis-teaching has taken on different traditions: (a) contemplative, (b) holiness, (c) charismatic, (d) social justice, (e) evangelical, and (f) incarnational.³⁹

Despite the differences in the approaches represented by these dif-

33 Chris Shirley, 'It Takes a Church To Make a Disciple: An Integrative Model of Discipleship For the Local Church', *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, 50, no. 2 (2008): 213-220.

34 Rekha M. Chennattu, *Johannine Discipleship as a Covenant Relationship* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2006); Wojciech Kowalski, 'The Call to Discipleship: A Challenge to Personal Commitment', *African Ecclesial Review*, 42, no. 3-4 (2000): 130.

35 Kowalski, 'The Call to Discipleship', 130.

36 Lucien E. Coleman, Jr., 'Training Leaders In the Local Church', *Baptist History and Heritage*, 26, no. 3 (1991): 25.

37 Coleman, 'Training Leaders', 32.

38 Patrick Sean Moffett, 'The Spirit of Discipleship', *Human Development*, 29, no. 1 (2008): 35.

39 Thomas Frederick, 'Discipleship and Spirituality From a Christian Perspective', *Pastoral Psychology*, 56, no. 6 (2008): 557-558, accessed September 2, 2010 doi: 10.1007/s11089-008-0148-8

ferent traditions, discipleship remains characteristically contextual. This characteristic makes discipleship applicable to even the most difficult of circumstances. For instance, Ting and Watson found that even in persecution, spiritual formation can occur.⁴⁰ This formation occurred for those who reflected on being part of the larger body of Christ, came to an acceptance of their own frailty, saw God as their Provider, and expanded their concept of suffering to deal with the current persecution circumstances.⁴¹

However, one would be badly mistaken to interpret these characteristics of discipleship as willpower-driven deeds that result in self-actualization. Instead, these characteristics flow out of a lifestyle responding in worship to what God has done for the disciple through Jesus.⁴² The difference between willpower-driven and worship-responsive approaches to discipleship is not a small one. A willpower-driven approach may result in disciples that see their discipling as a mark of accomplishment. A worship-responsive approach leads rather to a disciple fully dependent on God's doing the work of continuing to nurture and grow the individual.⁴³

More importantly, 1 Corinthians 14:23-25 seems to suggest that it is in

the context of worship that the non-believer is most likely to recognize the revelation and presence of God. As such, discipleship naturally leads to mission and evangelism.⁴⁴ A discipleship rooted in a response of worship in the context of the local body that is covenantally committed to praxis-teaching will lead to a spiritual formation that is explicitly evangelistic in that the disciple's entire life becomes an expression of the gospel.

This moves far beyond a truncated gospel message that is implicitly self-centred and self-improving to a gospel that sees God fulfilling all his promises through Jesus who forgives us and frees us from our sins so that we and all creation with us can be reconciled to God.⁴⁵ Ultimately, what this leads to is an imitation of Christ from birth to death to resurrection to ascension.⁴⁶ The disciple of Jesus imitates him in a miraculous new birth, in death to sin, in proclamation of victory over evil, and in ruling under his authority.

Any definition of discipleship must then be at the same time about becoming a disciple as well as being a disci-

40 Rachel Sing-Kiat Ting & Terri Watson, 'Is Suffering Good? An Explorative Study On the Religious Persecution Among Chinese Pastors', *Journal of Psychology & Theology*, 35, no. 3 (2007): 202-210.

41 Ting & Watson, 'Is Suffering Good?', 206.

42 E. Byron Anderson, 'Worship: Schooling in the Tradition of Jesus', *Theology Today*, 66, no. 1 (2009): 21-32.

43 Anderson, 'Worship', 31.

44 Manfred Waldermar Kohl, 'Mission—The Heart of the Church For the New Millennium', *International Congregational Journal*, 2 (2001): 87-107.

45 Samuel R. Schutz, 'The Truncated Gospel in Modern Evangelicalism: A Critique and Beginning Reconstruction', *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 33, no. 4 (2009): 292-305; Timothy Keller, *The Gospel In All Its Forms* (2008, May 23), retrieved November 20, 2010, from Leadership Journal.net: <www.christianitytoday.com/le/2008/spring/9.74.html>

46 Brian F. Linnane, 'Dying With Christ: Rahner's Ethics of Discipleship', *Journal of Religion*, 81, no. 2 (2001): 247-248.

ple.⁴⁷ It includes both the phenomena in a non-believer's life leading up to entrance into the faith and the cultivation and growth of the disciple.⁴⁸ It includes the cognitive information that is passed along to all the disciples and the praxis of the disciple to the extent that both thoughts and actions lead to further spiritual transformation.⁴⁹ 'It is a general call for everyone and also an intense process for a select few.'⁵⁰ Ultimately, it is the process whereby an individual, in an ecclesial context, becomes more like Christ.⁵¹

III Historical Exemplars

The benefit of living in contemporary Christianity is that there is literally thousands of years' worth of examples of discipleship placed on historical display. Much like the myriad of references to discipleship in Scripture, this work necessarily must limit the examples given. However, an example from several different eras of Christianity may assist in showing the flexible contextualization of discipleship.

1 Augustine—The Ministry of Discipleship

Possidius provided what might be

called a sequel to Augustine's widely popular (even in the fifth century) *Confessions*.⁵² Whereas *Confessions* was Augustine's account of his life prior to faith and what he had become in Christ, Possidius' *Vita* is an account of Augustine's life as a believer and an ecclesial leader written shortly after Augustine's death. Most of Possidius' material comes from his own personal eyewitness account of Augustine, as well as what would appear to be reliable secondary sources.⁵³

Most of the book comprises chronological accounts of Augustine's time in ministry. Sandwiched between these are significant insights into his character. Especially in the sections dealing with Augustine's character, Possidius showed the impact that Augustine's example had on others. For example, Augustine was required to serve as a civil judge, a responsibility that he loathed.⁵⁴ However, Augustine performed this responsibility with the utmost integrity in the hopes of influencing the citizenry through it.

Possidius also presented Augustine as a bishop who spoke up on behalf of those with little voice and one who consistently contributed to the cultivation of the larger body of Christ.⁵⁵ Throughout these recollections of Augustine, Possidius paints him as practising simplicity, holiness, hospitality, discipline, and forgiveness.

47 James G. Samra, 'A Biblical View of Discipleship', *Bibliotheca sacra*, 160, no. 638 (2003): 220.

48 Samra, 'A Biblical View of Discipleship', 220.

49 Samra, 'A Biblical View of Discipleship', 220.

50 Samra, 'A Biblical View of Discipleship', 220.

51 Samra, 'A Biblical View of Discipleship', 219-234.

52 Edward L. Smither, "To Emulate and Imitate:" Possidius' Life of Augustine as a Fifth Century Discipleship Tool', *Southwestern Journal of Theology*, 50, no. 2 (2008): 159.

53 Smither, 'To Emulate and Imitate', 159.

54 Smither, 'To Emulate and Imitate', 162.

55 Smither, 'To Emulate and Imitate', 162.

Though the *Vita* is applicable to all believers, it appears that Possidius is writing specifically with ecclesial leaders in mind.⁵⁶ Given how Possidius described Augustine as valuing imitation as a primary facet of discipleship, it is not difficult to see Possidius' intention in writing the *Vita* as extending the discipleship of Augustine to others.⁵⁷

Though Augustine is thought of primarily as one of the great minds of Christianity, the picture that we get from Possidius is one of a bishop deeply concerned with shepherding his flock in a way reflective of the Great Shepherd. In this way, *Vita* becomes a helpful and early expression of Christian discipleship.

2 Anabaptists—Radically Reformed Discipleship

The name Anabaptists is somewhat more familiar than the individuals who initiated this Christian movement. Weaver provided an overview of the approaches to discipleship of some of the Anabaptists' early leaders (specifically, Michael Sattler, Conrad Grebel, Hans Denck, and Balthasar Hubmaier).⁵⁸ Weaver hypothesized that, based on the sources from these early Anabaptist leaders, one can deduce that they saw discipleship as going beyond simply imitation and into the realm of solidarity.⁵⁹ Thus, the disciple does not only know and act in the way

that Jesus would act, but the disciple is actually present in the work of Jesus and Jesus is present in their work.⁶⁰

Developing out of the Christology of the church being the body of Christ, each disciple becomes more than simply a resemblance to Christ and becomes an actual incarnation of the Head of the church.⁶¹ This basis for discipleship was quite different from other Reformation perspectives that saw the individual as well as the church gathering as simply the visible representation of the church.⁶² The Anabaptist tradition also differentiated itself from a 'minimal' perspective adopted by the Catholic Church.

Distinct from these two approaches, the Anabaptist explanation of discipleship was one of radical, all-encompassing commitment to complete unity and representation with Christ in all facets of life. However, the agreement on solidarity with Christ did not mean that early Anabaptists were completely in accord. Some emphasized the incarnation of Christ's earthly ministry while others emphasized the incarnation of the character of Christ.⁶³

Irrespective of these differences, the Anabaptist tradition sought to emphasize an imitation of Christ that was of such a nature that to look at the believer was to look at an incarnation of the work and ministry of Christ himself.

3 Bonhoeffer—Loving the Unloved

Dietrich Bonhoeffer provided a modern

56 Smither, 'To Emulate and Imitate', 166.

57 Smither, 'To Emulate and Imitate', 167.

58 J. Denny Weaver, 'Discipleship Redefined: Four Sixteenth Century Anabaptists', *Mennonite Quarterly Review*, 54, no. 4 (1980): 256.

59 Weaver, 'Discipleship Redefined', 256.

60 Weaver, 'Discipleship Redefined', 256.

61 Weaver, 'Discipleship Redefined', 256.

62 Weaver, 'Discipleship Redefined', 278.

63 Weaver, 'Discipleship Redefined', 279.

example of discipleship. Jensen noted the transforming effect of Bonhoeffer's life as he came to understand more deeply what imitating Christ in the midst of great evil looked like.⁶⁴

In Bonhoeffer's early writings, he seemed to hold a more traditional Lutheran approach to Judaism, which saw millennia of difficulties for Jewish culture as a penalty for the Jewish involvement in the crucifixion of Jesus.⁶⁵ However, with the Aryan Clauses, Bonhoeffer was brought face to face with the inconsistency of his beliefs. His brother-in-law's father died shortly after the Aryan Clauses were established. The Clauses forbade any Jewish person from performing religious duties. Bonhoeffer's brother-in-law came to him asking if he would perform the funeral service for his Jewish father. After some consultation, Bonhoeffer refused to do the service.

However, over time, he came to regret this and later asked his brother-in-law to forgive him for his decision. As the plight of the Jewish people in the German occupied territories became more evident to Bonhoeffer, he came to realize the necessity of aligning himself with the vulnerable.⁶⁶

This alignment with those opposed to Jesus may have come out of Bonhoeffer's unique (for his day) theology of justification and sanctification.⁶⁷ Bon-

hoeffer understood justification to be not merely a declaration of justification in which the believer receives a portion of righteousness but instead is immersed into Jesus who is righteousness.⁶⁸ Sanctification was the holistic transformation of a disciple's life such that the believer now lived in righteousness.⁶⁹ Thus, Bonhoeffer would say,

Just as justification watered down to a judicial concept unconnected to human reality cheapens the grace involved in the call, so sanctification, if only addressed as a concept of following but unconnected to concrete actions will cheapen the grace given in following. In other words, discipleship, like the call, is costly.⁷⁰

Therefore Bonhoeffer's own spiritual formation may have led him to see his alignment with the vulnerable as an act of discipleship that was a natural aspect of both justification and sanctification. His desire to live out his justification led Bonhoeffer to aid even those opposed to Christ in order that justice would prevail so that the righteousness of Christ revealed itself through Bonhoeffer's actions.

4 Contextualized Discipleship

Each of these examples places great emphasis on contextualization for dis-

64 David H. Jensen, 'Religionless Christianity and Vulnerable Discipleship: The Interfaith Promise of Bonhoeffer's Theology', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, 38, no. 2/3 (2001): 151-167.

65 Jensen, 'Religionless Christianity'.

66 Jensen, 'Religionless Christianity'.

67 Mary VandenBerg, 'Bonhoeffer's Discipleship: Theology For the Purpose of Christian

Formation', *Calvin Theological Journal*, 44, no. 2 (2009): 339.

68 VandenBerg, 'Bonhoeffer's Discipleship', 340.

69 VandenBerg, 'Bonhoeffer's Discipleship', 342.

70 VandenBerg, 'Bonhoeffer's Discipleship', 344.

cipleship. Throughout Christian history, it has been widely recognized that Scripture is one of the primary means of God revealing himself to humanity and as such is an important and necessary guide to understanding the world we live in. From this perspective, Scripture is an obligatory resource for the disciple to understand topics as diverse as urbanization, consumerism, citizenry, generosity, patriotism, and evangelism.⁷¹

However, contextualization of discipleship, as can be seen by the historical examples provided, cannot simply be about hermeneutics.⁷² Nor can only the 'peripheral' aspects of Christianity be contextualized. As the historical examples begin to show, there are no 'peripheral' aspects. Instead, every truth of Christianity must be reassessed from the immediate context, which will necessarily add another facet of revelation of who God is and how he reveals himself.⁷³

This deeply contextualized discipleship will lead to a uniquely contextualized theological development, which will express itself in contextualized confessions.⁷⁴ The reason why Augustine and Bonhoeffer seem so different in the ways they reacted to the enemies of Christ is not because of theological differences. It could be argued that

Augustine is Bonhoeffer's theological grandfather! Instead, the differences arise out of the unique contexts in which each of them was developing his imitation and incarnation of Christ within. Song summarized this contextualization well;

Discipleship in context rises out of a dynamic interplay between text (passed down by tradition) and context. By paying attention to both the Bible and the context in which people live, we are then able to bring the task of disciple-making in a *culturally relevant* and *biblically faithful* manner.⁷⁵

Thus, one can find discipleship occurring within contexts as diverse as suffering, violence, persecution, conflict, and marriage.⁷⁶ Rather than thinking that this suggests a scattered and unsystematic understanding of discipleship, it actually highlights the ever-present necessity of contextualizing discipleship into every phenomena, organization, and corner of life.

71 Walter Brueggemann, *The Word That Redescribes the World: The Bible and Discipleship*, P. D. Miller (Ed.) (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006).

72 Benno Van den Toren, 'Growing Disciples in the Rainforest: A Contextualized Confession For Pygmy Christians', *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 33, no. 4 (2009): 307.

73 Van den Toren, 'Growing Disciples', 307.

74 Van den Toren, 'Growing Disciples', 309.

75 Minho Song, 'Contextualization and Discipleship: Closing the Gap Between Theory and Practice', *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 30, no. 3 (2006): 253 (italics original).

76 Isaiah Dau, 'Following Jesus in a World of Suffering and Violence', *Evangelical Review of Theology*, 31, no.4 (2007): 358-368; Ting & Watson, 'Is Suffering Good?', 202-210; Luisa M. Saffiotti, 'Discipleship As Peace-Building: Living and Ministering in Right Relationships, Becoming Instruments of Transformation,' *Human Development*, 27, no. 2 (2006): 5-9; Jane E. Strohl, 'Marriage as Discipleship: Luther's Praise of Married Life', *Dialog: A Journal of Theology*, 47, no. 2 (2008): 136-142, accessed September 10, 2010 doi: 10.1111/j.1540-6385.2008.00379.x.

IV Discipleship and Ecclesial Leadership

What all this suggests is that the relationship of discipleship to ecclesial leadership is not simply one of variables. Though ecclesial leadership characteristics can be classified, one cannot possibly be content to be an ecclesial leader outside of the rubric of discipleship. In order to be the leader that God has called the ecclesial leader to be, there must be an imitation of Christ. Such an imitation within the context of leadership is the very heart of discipleship.

The ecclesial leader cannot think of discipleship simply as a means among other means that can be chosen from to lead others. Discipleship, to the extent that it is an imitation of Christ, is the means of leading others. Within different contexts and traditions, this may look different, but its goal remains the same—becoming like Christ in such a way that we incarnate his body in a physical, visible, and tangible manner.

It is in this light that the command from Paul to Timothy to pass on to others what has been observed so that they can pass it on to others (2 Tim. 2:2) becomes one of the key statements of discipleship. As Christ's Great Commandment and Great Commission are passed on to new generations of believers—not simply in word but in practice—disciples who love God fully and their neighbours equally as themselves are being made and thus

Christ is being fully reflected. It is in this pursuit that disciples are continually becoming and being.

It is from within the ranks of those faithful to the call of God on their life that the next generations of believers are drawn, and thus discipleship—though not making ecclesial leaders out of every disciple—becomes the fundamental method of leadership development. As disciples are guided and admonished by those who lead them to become more and more like Jesus (1 Cor. 11:1), great leaders will be cultivated in the image of Christ and their actions will incarnate his presence. In this way, not only will great ecclesial leaders imitate Christ, but also through their actions, Christ himself will be acting through them, providing the greatest leadership of all.

One particularly important area of further research surfaces from this study. As noted above, research exists that describe the characteristics of many ecclesial leaders through church history. However, each one tends to look at the leader to the exclusion of all others. At some level, this is dictated by the different contexts that ecclesial leaders live within. However, understanding more clearly how historical ecclesial leaders understood their imitation of Christ as expressed in their leadership will assist in having a better grasp on how contemporary ecclesial leaders can contextualize their own leadership experiences.