

The Spirit and Leadership: Exploring Person-Centred Leadership through the Lens of Pentecostal Spirituality

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Abstract

The assumption that leadership theories can be imported into ecclesial environments needs to be critically examined. Pentecostal spirituality provides an opportunity to engage in such a critical analysis of the compatibility of leadership theory(s) as a valid expression for communities. The interpretive strategies employed by Pentecostal spirituality serve an alternate to the positivist methodologies that dominate leadership theory. This paper will explore the person-centred theory classification of leadership theory espoused by John Dugan through the lens of Amos Yong's pneumatological imagination as the primary expression of Pentecostal spirituality. The critical examination will produce concrete applications for the incorporation of Pentecostal spirituality into the leadership practices of spirit-filled communities of faith.

Keywords

Epistemology - leadership theory - Pentecostal spirituality - positivism

Introduction

By the time leadership theory became an autonomous field of study in the twentieth century, the Newtonian concept that researchers were capable of an unmediated and objective relationship with knowledge was the established norm.¹ This widening of the gap between the knower and known created a narrowing of acceptable pursuits of knowledge, effectively marginalising interpretive epistemological expressions by suppressing embodied and affective pathways to creating knowledge that were historically accepted as valid prior to the Enlightenment Era.² Pentecostal Spirituality operates from an expanded epistemological horizon that incorporates the particulars of lived reality as credible avenues to the construction of knowledge.³ It is this spirituality, which fuels global Pentecostalism, that

¹ Ronald Love, *The Enlightenment* (Westport, Greenwood Publishing Group, 2008), 35-36.

² Iain McGilchrist, *The Master and Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World* (New Haven 2009), 330-331.

³ Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full Gospel* (New York, Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2017), 12-13.

serves to protest against the epistemology of the Enlightenment Era responsible for the shaping of Modernity.⁴

Within the North American context, scholarly pursuits in the field of leadership studies have predominantly utilised positivist methodologies informed by commitments to a foundationalist epistemology.⁵ Positivism's allegiance to objectivity and universal claims of truth, discovered confirmed by confirmation scientific method, limits the acceptability of proposals for validating truth claims. Within such an epistemological structure, leadership is understood primarily as a leader who influences a follower through the use of principles deemed universally identified and validated.⁶ Such propositional logic, designed to influence the behaviour of others primarily through mastery of universally valid principles, is incapable of capturing the embodied and affective ethos embedded within Pentecostal Spirituality.

When influence through the utilisation of propositional logic serves as the primary description of leadership, the embodied and affective activities that comprise lived reality are marginalised. The belief that a leader's ability to influence a follower through the mastery of principles deemed universally applicable, which serves as a key marker for the foundationalist epistemology from which positivist methodologies are built, significantly limits the acceptable methods of influence deemed valid in the pursuit of knowledge. The insistence of Pentecostal spirituality upon mutually informed pathways to knowledge—that includes reason, affection, and praxis—has the potential to broaden the epistemological methodologies utilised to construct leadership theory.⁷ The embodied and affective epistemology structures that inform Pentecostal spirituality provide an alternative to the positivist methodologies that undergird scholarship in leadership by expanding pathways for constructing knowledge to include the particularities of lived reality.

The objective of this paper is to explore person-centred leadership theories through the lens of Pentecostal Spirituality by examining a limited selection of scholarship produced within each respective field of study. The two divisions of this paper will utilise the work of notable scholars to highlight the epistemological structures of person-centred theories of leadership and propose expanding its horizons through the integration of the epistemological values found within Pentecostal spirituality. Leadership scholar Peter Northouse and Pentecostal theologian Steven Land will be the interlocutor's for the first division aimed at achieving a working description of both leadership theory and Pentecostal spirituality. The second division will juxtapose organisational leadership expert John Dugan against Pentecostal scholar Amos Yong as a guide for engaging in a critical analysis designed to yield insights into

⁴ Kenneth J. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic: Spirit, Scripture and Community* (Cleveland: CPT Press, 2009), 22.

⁵ Dugan, John P. *Leadership Theory: Cultivating Critical Perspectives*. (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2017), 288-289.

⁶ Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice 5th Edition* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2010), 2-4.

⁷ Kenneth J. Archer, "A Pentecostal Way of Doing Theology: Method and Manner," *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9 no. 3 (July 2007): 309.

the capacity of Pentecostal spirituality to broaden the epistemological horizons of person-centred leadership theories. This analysis will provide the opportunity for the concluding remarks concerning the concrete applications that emerge when person-centred leadership theory is filtered through the interpretive epistemological structures of Pentecostal spirituality.

1. Descriptions of Pentecostal Spirituality and Leadership Theory

It is futile to attempt to construct a monolithic definition of Pentecostalism.⁸ While Pentecostalism may defy efforts to be categorised by a singular universally accepted definition, it is possible to capture an accurate description. Pentecostal philosopher Yoon Shin advocates that the most appropriate description of Pentecostalism is a personal, experiential encounter with the Spirit of God.⁹ This pneumatic emphasis of Pentecostal spirituality displays a receptiveness towards interpretive epistemologies in which a pre-scientific truth exists in the performance of everyday life. The experiential sensibilities that reside within Pentecostal spirituality resists the positivist methodologies, preferring interpretive methodologies that endorse the embodied and affective activities of one's lived reality as epistemological valid.

The privileging of experience broadens the epistemological structures beyond doctrinal concerns to encompass Pentecostalism as an embodied spirituality. Pentecostals reject the prevailing paradigm that knowledge is primarily accumulated from within the disciplines of scientific inquiry, which attempts to locate universal truths through the use of a propositional logic influenced by foundationalist epistemology and positivist methodologies. Pentecostal spirituality embraces the possibility of securing truth claims that transcend the materiality of rationalism. Utilising lived reality as a valid expression of research ensures that proclivities towards an embodied and affective spirituality are not relegated to the margins of research activities by positivist methodologies incapable of capturing the intuitive sensibilities of Pentecostal spirituality.¹⁰

This argument is assembled eloquently by Pentecostal scholar Steven Land, who proffers that Pentecostalism should not be limited to the rationalist or scholastic theological systems that define Evangelicalism.¹¹ Land elevates intuitive and embodied lived realities as valid epistemological avenues in his seminal work entitled *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom*. The interpretive methodological employed by Land expands the epistemological horizons by exploring intuition and praxis beyond the subordinate role of

⁸ Yoon Shin, *Pentecostalism, Postmodernism, and Reformed Epistemology: James KA Smith and the Contours of a Postmodern Christian Epistemology* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), 14.

⁹ Shin, *Pentecostalism, Postmodernism, and Reformed Epistemology*, 2.

¹⁰ Yoon Shin, *Pentecostalism, Postmodernism, and Reformed Epistemology: James KA Smith and the Contours of a Postmodern Christian Epistemology* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), 2.

¹¹ Steven Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Cleveland: CPT Press, 2010), 18.

validating knowledge already created through propositional logic.¹² This integrated approach whereby orthodoxy, orthopathy, and orthopraxis are mutually informing epistemological paths shrinks the gap between the knower and known by permitting the practices and dispositions of Pentecostal spirituality to inform the construction of truth claims.¹³ Cultivating a more fully-orbed epistemology found within Pentecostal spirituality has the potential to expand the leadership theory beyond propositional logic by validating experiences and praxis as equally valid means of constructing knowledge.

Similar to Pentecostalism, leadership theory defies a monolithic definition. The observations by leadership scholar Roger Stodgill that there are as many definitions of leadership as there are people trying to define it, has withstood the test of time.¹⁴ Despite a universal definition of leadership evading leadership scholars, a common description of leadership can be ascertained from research. Edwin Locke echoes the consensus of scholarship when he describes leadership as “as the process of inducing others to process a common goal.¹⁵ Lock’s opposition to the generationalisation of leadership by advocating that leadership is domain sensitive stops shy of achieving the mutually epistemological pathways discoverable in Pentecostal spirituality by insinuating that environmental causes are dependent upon specific traits. This epistemological limitation is a common thread within the body of literature produced within leadership scholarship.

Peter Northouse, in his seminal work titled *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, adopts the commonly held definition of leadership as a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal. Northouse claims that by prioritising leadership as a process it creates a transactional event between the leader and followers in which both are affected. This makes leadership accessible to everyone, regardless of whether the leader is bestowed formal designation. His proposed definition provides an opportunity for Northouse to explore the integration of theory and practice. In alignment with the commitment to analyse how leadership theory can inform praxis, Northouse employs case studies at the conclusion of each chapter.¹⁶ While the utilisation of case studies serves to bolster Northouse’s efforts to integrate theory and practice, it fails to provide the robust epistemological structures required for constructing knowledge through experiential and practical modes.

This impoverished epistemology can be observed in a critical examination of Case Study 2.2. After narrating the remarkable turnaround of a family-owned business, Northouse asked the following questions: 1) *How would you describe Carol’s leadership traits?* 2) *How big a part*

¹² Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 27-36.

¹³ Daniel Castelo, *Pentecostalism as a Christian Mystical Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2017), 3.

¹⁴ Ralph M. Stodgill, *Handbook of Leadership: A survey of theory and research* (New York: Free Press, 1974), 7.

¹⁵ Edward Lock, “The Foundations of Leadership Theory in *The Future of Leadership Development. Series in Applied Psychology* ed by Susan Elaine Murphy, and Ronald E. Riggio (Mahwah, N.J.: Psychology Press), 2003, 29-30.

¹⁶ Northouse, *Leadership*, 12.

did Carol's leadership traits play in the expansion of the company? 3) Would Carol be a leader in other business contexts? The assumption within the questions posed that a specific trait(s) was responsible for the turnaround of the company diminishes the role of affection and praxis in Carol's revitalisation efforts. This marginalises the experiential lived realities potentially discoverable in the story of Carol's turnaround of the family business. The working assumption that a trait(s) was primarily responsible for Carol's ability to revitalise her family business ignores the possibility that Carol was motivated by a desire to honour her husband's memory; or her inspiration was to provide her sons with a viable business as part of their inheritance. Further, it is also feasible significantly increasing the marketing budget contributed to the success of Carol's company.¹⁷ These are only a fraction of possibilities that lie outside a specific trait(s) which could be responsible for the growth and expansion of Carol's company.

2. An Analysis of Person-Centred Leadership through the Prism of Pentecostal Spirituality

Providing broad descriptive parameters for understanding both Pentecostal spirituality and leadership theory lays the foundation for critical examination of the respected epistemology structures that inform each discipline of study. This critical engagement will limit its analysis to organisational leadership expert John Dugan and Pentecostal theologian Amos Yong, who will serve as the interlocutors for observations concerning the potential of Pentecostal spirituality to shape person-centred leadership theory. Dugan proposes in his book titled *Leadership Theory: Cultivating Critical Perspectives* that person-centred theories of leadership are "decidedly leader centric, emphasising individuals rather than collectives and leader roles over leadership processes."¹⁸ Amos Yong's book *The Dialogical Spirit: Reason and Theological Method in the Third Millennium* suggests that a pneumatological imagination embraces the tension between historical particularity and universal applicability.¹⁹ This juxtaposing of person-centred leadership theory advocated by Dugan against the pneumatological imagination of Amos Yong will serve to highlight potential ways that Pentecostal spirituality can shape person centred leadership theory.

Dugan's overview of person-centred leadership commences with the oldest expression of person-centred leadership classified as the "Great Man" theory.²⁰ This theory is credited to

¹⁷ The case study narrates all three of these items but makes no direct attempt to connect them to the success of the company.

¹⁸ Dugan, *Leadership Theory*, 96.

¹⁹ Amos Yong, *The Dialogical Spirit: Christian reason and theological method in the third Millennium* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishing, 2015), 2

²⁰ Great Man Theory predates the 19th amendment of the US constitution which gave women the right to vote. This means that much of his theory was constructed under the assumption that masculine qualities were the dominant expression of leadership. This is still a significant problem today which Pentecostal spirituality can provide a corrective to gender disparity in leadership theory research, but it beyond the scope of this paper.

Thomas Carlyle, who, in his book titled *Heroes, Hero Worship and Heroic in History*, would conclude from his research that a natural inequality exists among men, and that hereditary abilities always supersede learned ones.²¹ The “Great Man” theory of leadership predetermines leadership traits that are based upon universal traits identified and validated through positivistic research methodologies. This marginalises embodied and affective experiences and ritualistic practices to serve as a means of constructing meaningful knowledge pertaining to leadership. The “Great Man” theory of person-centred leadership diminishes historical particularity and lived reality ignored in favour of universally validating a trait(s) that displays signs of positioning a person to influence another person(s).

It was nearly one hundred years before the trait-based theory of leadership was challenged by the research of Roger Stodgill, who proposed that leadership traits could be learned.²² Dugan notes three subclassifications of leadership theory that developed from Stodgill’s conclusion that leadership traits are not hereditary. The first, commonly known as the Leadership Challenge Theory, has been made popular from the research conducted by James Kouzes and Barry Posner, for their book entitled *The Leadership Challenge: How Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations*. The authors of *The Leadership Challenge* propose five key components to leadership, researched across multiple cultures to validate as universal truths.²³ To prove the universality of the five principles, stories from various leaders are presented throughout the text.²⁴ The authors provide some insights into their epistemological views by asserting that, “While the context of leadership has changed dramatically over the years, the content has not changed much at all. The fundamental behaviours and actions of leaders remained essentially the same, and they are as relevant today as when we began our study of exemplary leadership.”²⁵ The authors are asserting in this statement that experience (context) should be subjugated to propositional logic (content). Doing so keeps in place the gap between the knower and the known, thus ensuring the marginalisation of both affection and praxis pathways for constructing knowledge.

A second subclassification of person-centred leadership that emerged from the premise that leadership traits can be taught that Dugan discusses is emotional intelligence. Built upon three key facets and nineteen capacities, emotional intelligence hypothesises that, when individuals enact certain capabilities, those capabilities will have a positive impact on followers.²⁶ Emotional intelligence does allow for adjustment to environmental factors but fails to elevate affection to a mutually informing epistemological path capable of validating truth claims. The affective domain is subservient to cognition by suppressing emotional

²¹ Dugan, *Leadership Theory*, 97.

²² Michael Z., Hackman and Craig E. Johnson. *Leadership: A communication perspective* (Long Grove: Waveland Press, 2013), 73-74.

²³ James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner. *The leadership challenge: The Most Trust Source on Becoming a Leader* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2006), xi-xii.

²⁴ Kouzes and Posner. *The leadership challenge*, 295.

²⁵ Kouzes and Posner, *The Leadership Challenge*, 13.

²⁶ Dugan, *Leadership*, 104.

expression as validation of propositional logic.

More recently, Strength-Based Leadership Theory has attempted to revive the trait-based theory of leadership. Strength-based leadership's assertion that "to develop a strength in any activity requires a certain level of natural talent," echoes the conclusions drawn by trait-leadership theory nearly one hundred years prior.²⁷ Strength-based leadership theory slightly alters trait-based theory by proposing that a strength can be matched to a task, and in doing so, can produce good leadership.²⁸ The objective is to find where one's talents lie, and then to match one's work environment to the talents among five categories and thirty-four specific strengths. The prioritising of a trait(s) to the expense of embodied and affective activity limits the epistemological options from which strengths-based leadership theory can operate.

This brief analysis of person-centred leadership exhibits the epistemological and methodological limitations from which person-centred theories of leadership are constructed. Both experience and praxis are marginalised to propositional logic. The marginalisation is enacted by restricting embodied and affective activities to validation of truth claims, effectively stripping any ability to participate in the construction of knowledge. Pentecostal spirituality is undergirded by interpretive epistemology that elevates embodied and affective lived realities to a valid expression for securing knowledge. This expanded epistemology can potentially expand both the epistemological and the methodological parameters utilised by person-centred leadership theories.

By asserting that knowledge is pneumatologically charged, Yong is able to widen the epistemological parameters that are deemed valid to construct knowledge. This expanded epistemology allows formulating propositions in a more holistic manner by allowing both experience and praxis to participate in the construction, not just the validating of truth.²⁹ Such an epistemological structure is built upon allowing experience and praxis to participate alongside propositional logic in the dialogue towards building truth claims. This stands in stark contrast to person-centred leadership theories, in which experience and praxis only serve to validate established knowledge via propositional logic. Yong's epistemology provides a corrective to the foundationalist epistemology by centering the pursuit of knowledge around an pneumatological imagination that expands knowledge to include affective and embodied activities.³⁰ By pursuing truth within a mutually informing way, Yong's epistemology moves our ability for discernment from linear to circular.³¹ This non-foundationalist epistemology expands the horizons by elevating affection and praxis as

²⁷ Dugan, *Leadership*, 107.

²⁸ Strength based leadership theory grants the power exercise leadership solely to a trait/strength by assuming that strengths are genetic. The context only serves to validate leadership, often by conveying positional authority upon the leader. Exploring this dynamic would require critically examining Strength based leadership through the lens of sanctification which is beyond the scope of this paper.

²⁹ Yong, *Dialogical Spirit*, 33.

³⁰ Frestadius, Simo. "In Search of a "Pentecostal" Epistemology: Comparing the Contributions of Amos Yong and James KA Smith." *Pneuma* 38, no. 1-2 (2016), 97.

³¹ Yong, *Dialogical Spirit*, 58.

capable of participation in the creation of knowledge. The expanded epistemology that is rooted in a pneumatological imagination and is promoted by Amos Yong allows for the voice of the Spirit to discern outside traditional theological spaces.³² The multidisciplinary approach found in Yong's pneumatological imagination displays potential to serve as a framework from which to filter person centred leadership through Pentecostal Spirituality.

Conclusion

Pentecostal scholarship is re-examining compatibility of her spirituality with modern epistemological methodologies. A growing number of Pentecostal scholars are contesting whether the ethos of her spirituality is compatible with the foundationalist epistemology that dominated epistemological pursuits throughout the nineteenth century.³³ The pneumatological imagination advocated by Amos Yong promotes the elevation of experience and praxis as mutually informing epistemological pathways can expand the positivistic methodology framework that regulates the scholarship producing leadership theory. It has the ability to serve as an expression of Pentecostal spirituality capable of a rescripting leadership theory through the cultivation of a robust epistemology capable of embracing truth as fallibilistic without succumbing to relativism. This cultivation of a pneumatological imagination will challenge faith leaders to resist the import of corporate oriented theories of leadership into ecclesial environments without allocating for the enchanted, embodied, and affective disposition of Pentecostal Spirituality. The result should be an expansion of the epistemological horizons that allow for a mutually informing construction of truth claims from the position of reason, affection, and praxis. Leadership theory could be significantly enhanced by utilising such interpretive methodologies, designed to engage the embodied and affective realities, to participate in the construction of truth claims.³⁴

Leadership Theory seems to be one frontier which has yet to be explored by Pentecostal spirituality. This resistance likely originates from leadership theory being one of the last fields of research to sever ties with the foundationalist and positivistic methodologies of the Enlightenment Era.³⁵ Abolishing the epistemological indebtedness to these Enlightenment Era epistemological structures will be a significant obstacle for Christian leadership in the twenty-first century. Pentecostal spirituality offers an alternative epistemological structure, capable of aiding leadership in expanding its epistemology beyond the limited foundationalist epistemological structures, by embracing both experience and practice in ways that move beyond merely describing a phenomenon towards permitting lived realities to shape and construct the theories of leadership being produced.

³² Shin, *Pentecostalism, Postmodernism and Reformed Epistemology*, 200.

³³ Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 200-201.

³⁴ Yong, *Dialogical Spirit*, 83.

³⁵ Ken Parry, Michael D. Mumford, Ian Bower, and Logan L. Watts. "Qualitative and historiometric methods in leadership research: A review of the first 25 years of *The Leadership Quarterly*." *The Leadership Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (2014), 135.

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