

INTERSECTING CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND LEADERSHIP THEORY: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF SELECTED BAPTIST SEMINARIES
POSITIONED TO SERVE THE AMERICAN MOUNTAIN WEST

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To My Sons
Joshua, Eli, Caleb, and Nathan
May you lead with the mindset of Jesus

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The dream of pursuing doctoral work began with the support of my parents, Howard and Pamela Palmer. My father, a farmer, excelled at demonstrating the influential power of a quiet life lived in response to Christ's unmerited redemption. My mother taught me to dream beyond past experiences and bigger than present circumstances so every divinely bestowed gift might be leveraged toward fulfilling the Great Commission. While the Christian faith of many in my family is worthy of note, my maternal grandfather, Bennett Jones, was foremost in planting aspirational seeds and used to ask me regularly during my childhood whether I would become a pastor, a doctor, or a lawyer. I am confident that he would grin knowing the first two had been realized.

My journey to New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and into the field of Christian leadership would not have been possible without the encouragement of three alumni. Charles Pinkerton Sr. (MRE, 1985), my spiritual mentor and childhood pastor, saw promise in a twelve-year-old in 1988 and never stopped cheering me on until his last day on earth on December 16, 2025. Andrew Ogea (MDiv, 2010; DMin, 2019), my dear friend in the faith, has walked in close community with me since we met in 2005. Reggie Ogea (MDiv, 1980; ThD, 1984), my dissertation supervisor, has invested precious time and wisdom to spur me on in fulfilling a long-held goal. My ministry has been shaped by these men along with the faculty, staff, and my fellow students who have helped me grow. Time and again, they have proven Charles Pinkerton right about the usefulness of that special institution in preparing servants for effective service in diverse contexts.

Credit for my curiosity about the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory is owed to Larry Locke, with whom I previously served at the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor. As Associate Dean of the McLane College of Business, he gave me my first opportunity to teach in higher education. Moreover, he challenged me to think deeply about the essence of Christian leadership and invited me to fix my gaze on biblical servanthood even to the point of *martyria* (μαρτυρία).

The completion of this dissertation could not have been possible without the generous support of the chief academic officers, participating faculty members, and participating academic supervisors at Canadian Baptist Theological Seminary and College, Gateway Seminary of the Southern Baptist Convention, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Their collegiality has been a great gift.

I thank God every day for my four sons—Joshua, Eli, Caleb, and Nathan—and my exceptional daughter-in-law, Lauren. Seeing them follow Jesus is worth any sacrifice. I appreciate their patience and support over these past five years and could not be prouder of each of them.

Amid a sea of gratitude that would be appropriate to convey, one person stands out as uniquely deserving. Christie has stood by me faithfully through twenty-six years of marriage including a military career with nine deployments, living in seventeen houses in eleven states, and countless smaller perils. Her love and devotion have been unwavering. Any success I have enjoyed in my adult life is a testament to her character and resolve, and I will be forever grateful.

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ABSTRACT

INTERSECTING CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AND LEADERSHIP THEORY: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF SELECTED BAPTIST SEMINARIES POSITIONED TO SERVE THE AMERICAN MOUNTAIN WEST

Jason B. Palmer, PhD

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2026

Faculty Supervisor, Reggie Ogea, Professor of Leadership and Pastoral Ministry

This dissertation describes the lived experiences of faculty members and the academic supervisors to whom they report regarding how theology informs their treatment of popular leadership theories. Participating faculty members interact with a combination of undergraduate, master's, and doctoral students on leadership studies in coursework, professional doctorate projects, and research doctorate dissertations at four selected Baptist seminaries that are geographically closest to the American Mountain West. Formational experiences and reflections on present perspectives regarding their approach to leadership theory emerged during a series of three interviews for faculty participants and one interview for supervisors. Findings from the data suggest expansion of the academic field of leadership invites an evolution of the academic qualifications expected of those teaching Christian leadership courses, invite the use of more robust theological assessment tools when evaluating leadership theory, and identify a recognition among participating scholars for consistency in the way general revelation impacts the integration of secular wisdom into seminary coursework across diverse academic disciplines.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Research Problem

Critical reflection at the intersection of Christian theology and popular leadership theories can expose theoretical assertions and underlying assumptions that a growing number of Christian academics find specious and untenable. How do Christian scholars respond at this decision point when they assess a leadership theory, model, or approach to have elements of theological incompatibility such as an observed lack of Christology and problematic anthropological components? Three courses of action seem most plausible.¹ First, they can accept the theory and utilize it in its popularized form despite any theological reservations. Second, they can modify the leadership theory such that it is brought into sufficient compliance with the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy and then employ it in revised form. If they choose to modify the theory, how are these theoretical adjustments made? As a third option, they can reject a leadership theory determined to be theologically unsound in favor of a model judged to be more theologically

¹ Jack Barentsen and Dustin D. Benac, “The Value and Impact of Servant Leadership Discourse in Church Leadership Studies,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Servant Leadership*, ed. Satinder Dhiman and Gary E. Roberts (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 499–503; J. Keith McKinley, *Evaluating Leadership: A Model for Missiological Assessment of Leadership Theory and Practice* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2024), 163; Jason B. Palmer, “Theologically Analyzing Secular Leadership Theory: Evidence of Pelagius’s Teachings in the Servant Leadership of Robert Greenleaf,” *Journal of Religious Leadership* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2024): 79; Jason B. Palmer, “Surveying Leadership Theory Integration Trends in Undergraduate Coursework at Selected Baptist Schools,” *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* 15, no. 1 (Summer 2025): 62–3.

sustainable. Understanding the process by which Christian scholars evaluate and respond to leadership theories presents an opportunity for members in the field of leadership to appreciate better how these theological conclusions shape the way faculty introduce leadership theories to students in postsecondary coursework.

Christian institutions of higher education provide important spaces for exploring the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory. In the United States, thirty-two of the fifty states have at least one school affiliated with the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU).² When the forty-five International Association of Baptist Colleges and Universities (IABCU) member schools are overlaid onto the domestic CCCU map, the combined coverage area grows to thirty-three states.³ Yet seventeen states have neither a CCCU nor an IABCU institution: Alaska, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Maine, Maryland, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wyoming. Even when the 114 typically smaller schools accredited by the Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE) are included, eleven states still do not

² “List of CCCU Institutions,” Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, accessed November 21, 2025, https://www.cccu.org/members_and_affiliates/?from=map. Schools with Governing Member, Associate Member, and Collaborative Partner status are included here. The states without a school affiliated with the CCCU are Alaska, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Dakota, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wyoming.

³ “Member Schools,” International Association of Baptist Colleges and Universities, accessed November 21, 2025, <https://www.baptistschools.org/member-schools>. Louisiana has no CCCU-affiliated institutions but has two IABCU-affiliated institutions.

have a single CCCU, IABCU, or AHBE institution: Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, and Wyoming.⁴

Two geographical areas lack geographic proximity to Christian institutions of higher education affiliated with the CCCU and IABCU. The first is the American Mountain West, a collection of eight states (Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico) depicted in figure 1. The second is a collection of smaller states, in terms of landmass, in the Northeast Region. Mapping this scarcity of residential access to CCCU and IABCU learning communities fosters appreciation for the disproportionate impact on the vast American Mountain West.

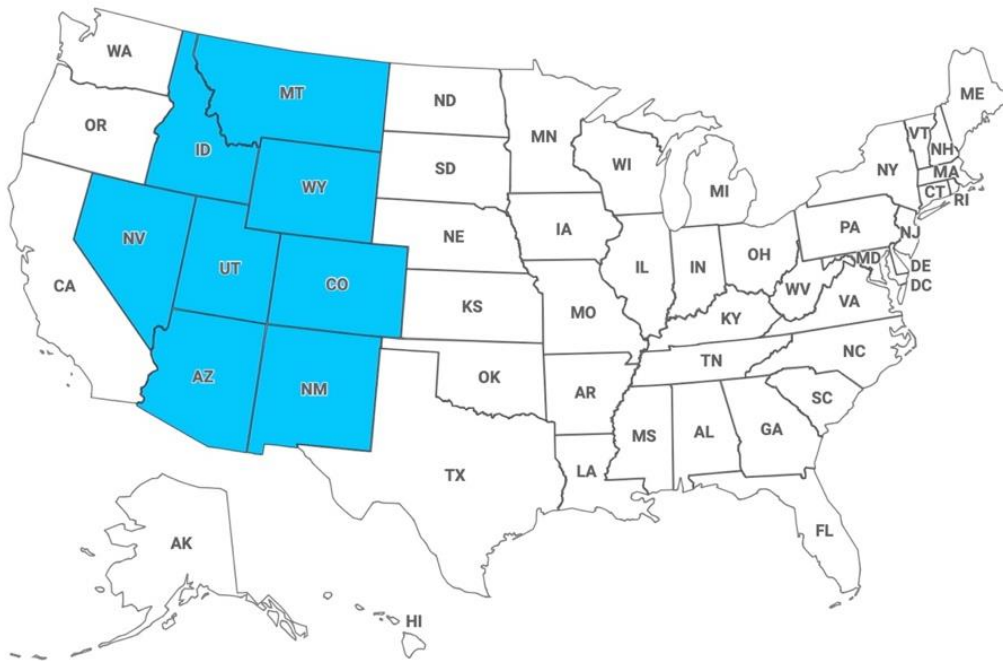


Figure 1. Map of the American Mountain West

⁴ “Institution Profiles,” Association for Biblical Higher Education, accessed November 21, 2025, <https://abhe-dir.weaveeducation.com>. Only “accredited institutions” are included in this search.

According to the United States Census Bureau’s 2020 Decennial Census, the fifty states and the District of Columbia encompass 3,532,316 square miles of land and an estimated 331,449,281 people.⁵ The scope of the Christian higher education residential access problem begins to come into clearer focus when considering the seventeen states with no CCCU or IABCU schools comprise 1,327,761.7 square miles or 37.6 percent of the country’s land mass and account for some 38,267,899 people or 11.5 percent of the population. Table 1 presents the states from north to south and demonstrates the considerable scale of the American Mountain West—a group of states that together constitute 856,345.5 square miles or 24.2 percent of the country’s area—which, while comparatively remote, is home to an estimated 24,919,150 people or 7.5 percent of the national population. The implications of expansive terrain and dispersed population highlight the need for effective avenues to develop capable Christian leaders in this region. The absence of IABCU member school main campuses in the American Mountain West complicates this endeavor for Baptist churches and parachurch ministries.

Table 1. American Mountain West Data from the 2020 Decennial Census

State	Population	Land area in square miles
Montana	1,084,225	145,550.2
Idaho	1,839,106	82,645.4
Wyoming	576,851	97,088.6
Nevada	3,104,614	109,860.4
Utah	3,271,616	82,595.7
Colorado	5,773,714	103,637.1
Arizona	7,151,502	113,655.4
New Mexico	2,117,522	121,312.7
TOTALS	24,919,150	856,345.5

⁵ “Profiles,” United States Census Bureau, accessed June 4, 2025, <https://data.census.gov/profile?g=010XX00US>; “United States,” United States Census Bureau, accessed June 4, 2025, https://data.census.gov/profile/United_States?g=010XX00US.

Contemporary religious demographics locate Protestants—and Evangelicals in specific—in the religious minority across most of the American Mountain West. Ryan Burge is a political scientist and data analyst with history as an American Baptist pastor for over twenty years. He presently serves as Professor of Practice at the John C. Danforth Center at Washington University in St. Louis. His work helps bring the religious landscape of the American Mountain West into focus.⁶ Figure 2 depicts a county-by-county representation of the most prominent religious groups claiming Christian identity according to the 2020 U.S. Religion Census.⁷

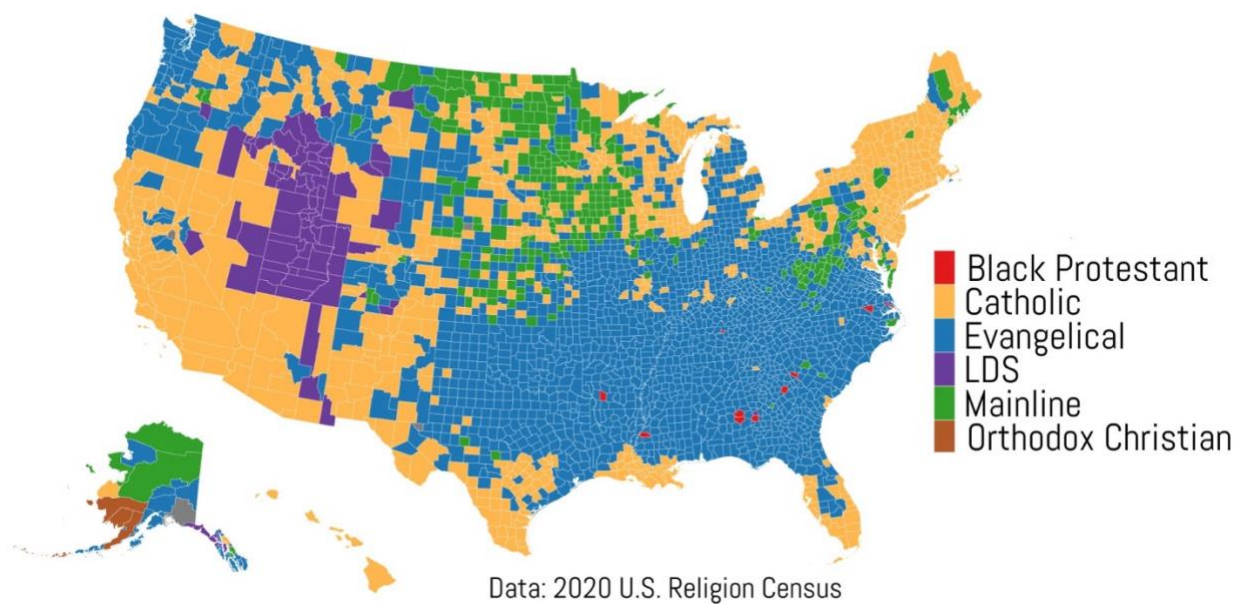


Figure 2. Largest Christian Tradition by County (2020)

⁶ “Ryan Burge,” John C. Danforth Center on Religion and Politics, Washington University in St. Louis, accessed November 21, 2025, <https://rap.wustl.edu/people/ryan-burge>.

⁷ Ryan Burge, “Largest Christian Tradition by County (2020),” LinkedIn, November 19, 2025, https://www.linkedin.com/posts/ryan-burge-66563718_out-of-3141-counties-in-the-united-states-activity-7396948365386825728-cfq1. Reprinted with permission.

Burge further interprets the 2020 U.S. Religion Census data in figure 3 to recognize the percentage of residents in each county identifying as Protestant.⁸

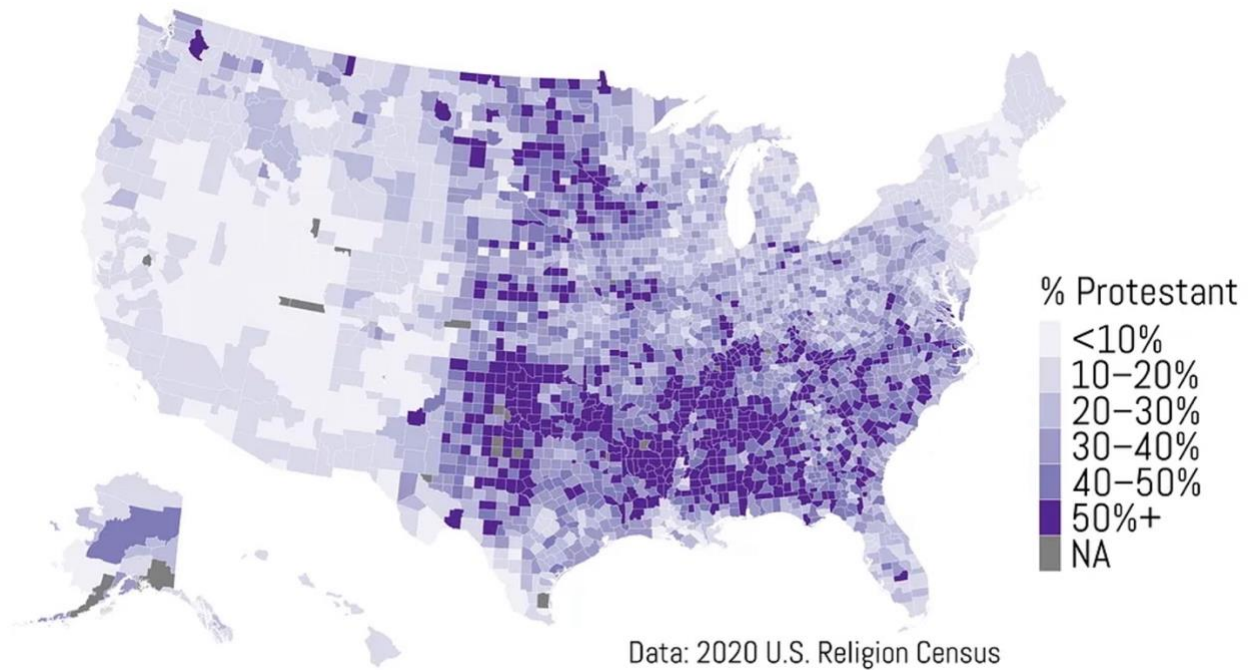


Figure 3. Protestants as a Share of County Population (2020)

In figure 4, Burge narrowed the aperture one more degree and showcased the counties in which the Evangelical presence comprises 5 percent or less of the religious demographic.⁹ The American Mountain West constitutes the largest region in in the United States in which

⁸ Ryan Burge, “Protestants as a Share of County Population (2020),” Substack, November 16, 2025, <https://substack.com/@ryanburge/note/c-177876318>. Reprinted with permission.

⁹ Ryan Burge, “Counties in the Bottom 10% of Evangelical Share (2020),” Substack, November 23, 2025, https://www.linkedin.com/posts/ryan-burge-66563718_these-are-the-counties-with-the-lowest-share-activity-7398356515071545344-85dc. Reprinted with permission.

Evangelicals make up 5 percent or less of the population, underscoring the reality that Evangelicals face a stark challenge in equipping spiritual leaders for productive service in that space.

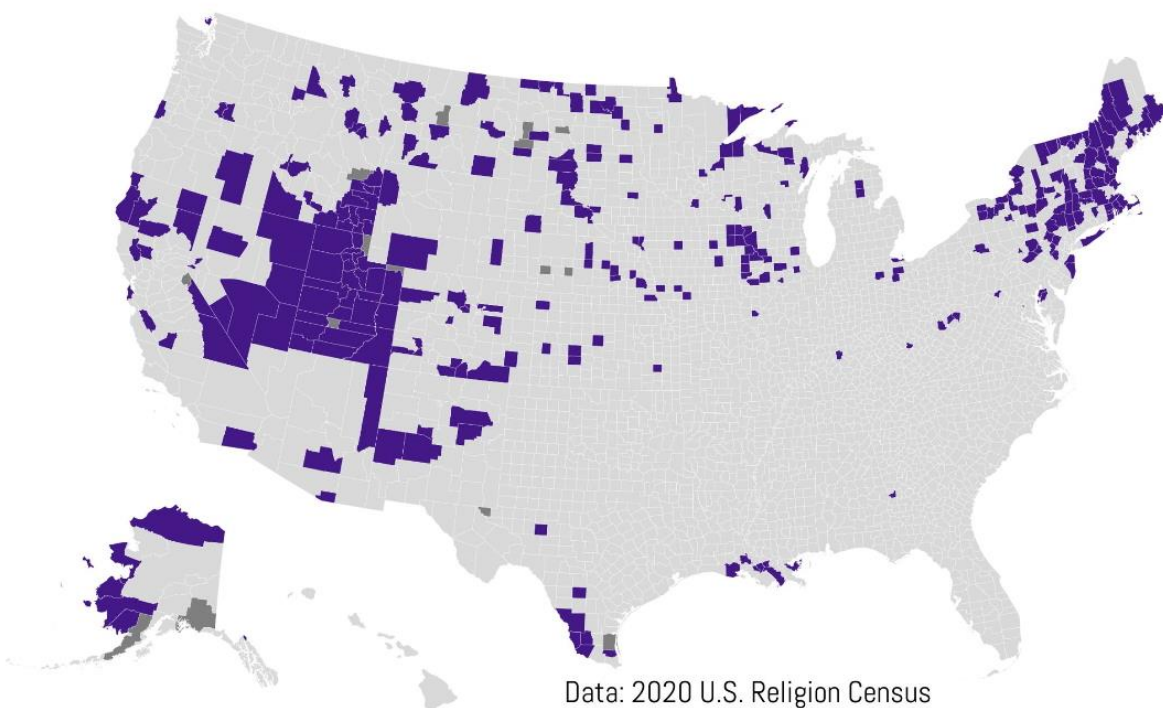


Figure 4. Counties with 10 Percent or Fewer Evangelicals

Despite this urgent spiritual need and the absence of any IABCU member school main campuses in the American Mountain West, the Baptist higher education community is taking strides to overcome this spatial gap. The growing ubiquity of high-speed internet access, normalization of synchronous and asynchronous educational delivery modalities, and increased openness of accreditation agencies to allow synchronous participation to satisfy in-person attendance requirements have attenuated many of the once daunting effects posed by such

geographical obstacles. Many Baptist colleges, universities, and seminaries have bolstered their online presence, which is promising for learners hailing from more austere locales. Some IABCU schools are operating regional or satellite campuses in the American Mountain West. While challenges remain, students in the United States now enjoy unprecedented access to Christian colleges, universities, and seminaries with accredited degree programs.

The revolution in educational access has contributed to an observable shift in the academic landscape. Institutional recruiting and retention strategies have morphed due, in part, to enhanced access to postsecondary education. Nevertheless, recent enrollment trends among students from Montana at Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) and Canadian National Baptist Convention (CNBC) seminaries serve as an illustration suggesting regional affinity may retain some enduring influence in educational decisions in the American Mountain West despite the pervasiveness of virtual access. Table 2 presents Spring 2025 enrollment figures for Montanans at SBC and CNBC seminaries in descending order of geographical proximity to Helena, Montana's capital city.¹⁰ The total number of students and full-time equivalent (FTE) data reported by each institution to The Association of Theological Schools in Fall 2024 provide context when contrasting student body sizes.¹¹ The figures demonstrate that 57 percent of doctoral students (4 of 7), 40 percent of those studying at the graduate—either master's or

¹⁰ Jason B. Palmer, "Baptist Seminaries Equipping Montanans for Effective Ministry," *Montana Southern Baptist Convention Enews*, September 23, 2025. <https://mtsbc.org/2025/09/baptist-seminaries-equipping-montanans>.

¹¹ "Member Schools," The Association of Theological Schools, accessed June 4, 2025, <https://www.ats.edu/member-schools>.

doctorate—level (8 of 20), and 32 percent of all Montanans enrolled in these seven Baptist seminaries (11 of 34) chose one of the four institutions within 1,600 miles of their capital city.

Table 2. Spring 2025 Enrollment of Degree-Seeking Students with a Permanent or Home Address in Montana Enrolled in SBC and CNBC Seminaries by Program Type

Institution	Fall 2024 number of students (FTE)	Driving distance from Helena, Montana	Undergraduate	Master's	Doctoral	Total
Canadian Baptist Theological Seminary and College	45 (27.00)	403 miles	0	0	N/A	0
Gateway Seminary of the Southern Baptist Convention	1,464 (741.50)	1,136 miles	N/A	3	0	3
Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary	2,909 (1,554.20)	1,252 miles	3	0	4	7
Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary	2,278 (1,004.60)	1,567 miles	0	1	0	1
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary	3,371 (1,813.00)	1,745 miles	9	7	0	16
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary	1,460 (894.20)	2,093 miles	2	2	1	5
Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary	2,263 (1,163.50)	2,251 miles	0	0	2	2
TOTALS			14	13	7	34

These percentages become even more intriguing when considering that Canadian Baptist Theological Seminary and College (CBT) and Gateway Seminary (GS) have the two smallest overall student populations among these seven schools. While larger institutions like The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBTS) attract a considerable number of students through their comparative breadth of resources and New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (NOBTS) attracts students from Montana via geographically targeted scholarships offered through their Caskey Center for Church Excellence, a respectable percentage of Montanans partner with seminaries—especially for increasingly advanced academic programs—closest to their homes. While levels of regional affinity may vary across the other seven states in the American Mountain West, geographic proximity to Montana offers a way to identify a manageable research audience for the present study.

With the present dissertation, I engage the pervasive challenges associated with accessing Baptist seminary education in the American Mountain West and seek to understand better how seminary faculty who teach leadership theory at some of the closest institutions intersect theoretical leadership content with Christian theology. My current ministry context in Whitefish, Montana, fuels interest in the study and serves as the geographic vantage point for inviting participation from the four closest SBC and CNBC seminaries.¹²

¹² After retiring as an Army Chaplain in 2019 and serving six years as Dean of Spiritual Life and University Chaplain and adjunct faculty member at University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, I relocated to Whitefish, Montana, in July 2025 to serve as Executive Pastor of Goodwater Church—a church planted on October 5, 2025, in partnership with the Montana Southern Baptist Convention and North American Mission Board’s Send Network.

The first seminary and the one nearest to Montana is an international option in Cochrane, Alberta, founded in 1987. While their enrollment is markedly smaller than that at any of the six SBC seminaries, CBT's vision appears to cohere handsomely with the stark reality of ministry in much of the American Mountain West: "to train God-called men and women for twenty-first century leadership in tough places."¹³ The second and closest domestic institution to Montana is GS, which was founded in 1944 as "Southern Baptists' seminary to the West."¹⁴ The main campus is in Ontario, California; however, GS has a growing array of regional campuses in Washington, California, Colorado, and Arizona as well as domestic teaching sites in California, Nevada, and Utah.¹⁵ GS's foray into these four states—Nevada, Utah, Colorado and Arizona—constitutes the only known residential learning opportunities presently offered in the American Mountain West by any of the four institutions included in this study.

The third is also the youngest SBC seminary: Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (MBTS) in Kansas City, Missouri. Founded in 1957, MBTS has grown to be one of the largest

¹³ "About," Canadian Baptist Seminary and College, accessed November 24, 2025, <https://cbtsc.ca/about>.

¹⁴ Katherine Chute, "Gateway Seminary Begins 75th Anniversary Celebration," *Gateway News*, March 19, 2019, <https://www.gs.edu/news-events/articles/gateway-seminary-begins-75th-anniversary-celebration>.

¹⁵ GS has campuses at Vancouver, WA; San Leandro, CA; Denver, CO; and Phoenix, AZ as well as teaching sites in Sacramento, CA; Salt Lake City, UT; Las Vegas, NV; Hong Kong; and Taiwan. See "Locations," Gateway Seminary, accessed November 24, 2025, <https://www.gs.edu/about/locations> and "Book of Reports of the 2025 Southern Baptist Convention," Southern Baptist Convention, June 10–11, 2025, <https://sbcannualmeeting.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/2025-Book-of-Reports-FINAL.pdf>, 117.

seminaries in the world and endeavors to realize their vision to be “For the Church.”¹⁶ The fourth is Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS) in Fort Worth, Texas. This second oldest SBC seminary has existed since 1908. SWBTS’s intent to achieve an expansive sphere of influence is observable in their vision “through theological education. . .to equip servants for the church to influence Texas, the region, the nation, and the world for the cause of Christ and the Kingdom of God.”¹⁷ General congruence in doctrinal convictions among these institutions and geographic proximity to the American Mountain West make these four Baptist seminaries—all of which are IABCU member schools—particularly attractive as a research group for exploring the conceptual intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory from a Baptist perspective.

This dissertation is a qualitative study that investigates faculty and administrator perceptions at CBT, GS, MBTS, and SWBTS on the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory by answering this research question: How do faculty members teaching leadership courses at selected IABCU member schools and their academic supervisors integrate leadership theory into academic coursework?

This research aggregates participating Baptist scholars’ individual viewpoints and practices regarding the use of leadership theory in selected seminary settings. By aggregating the data across the four selected institutions, the research report reflects my intent to avoid

¹⁶ “For the Church Vision,” Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, August 7, 2017, <https://www.mbts.edu/article/for-the-church-vision>.

¹⁷ “About,” Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, accessed November 24, 2025, <https://swbts.edu/about>.

interinstitutional comparisons that might have increased reticence to participate. Given that many of the faculty teaching leadership theory in various fields of study across the forty-five IABCU member schools are unlikely to have the same amount of formal theological education as that which is more common among seminary professors engaged for the present research, this dissertation documents an experiential baseline showing how participants working in settings of keen theological literacy such as the selected Baptist seminaries handle leadership theory in ways that comport with Christian orthodoxy. These findings contribute heuristically to the field of Christian leadership by capturing data on the lived experiences of academics intersecting Christian theology and leadership theory at the tactical level and demonstrating to the broader IABCU and CCCU communities the value of critically assessing leadership theory.

Thesis Statement

The data will demonstrate that most faculty teaching leadership theory at the selected Baptist seminaries and the administrators who supervise them tend to use a general theological framework when engaging popular leadership theories from a theological perspective. Rather than relying on any specific “typology, assessment grid, or system of evaluation,” these educators and supervisors analyze and respond to leadership theories through a general theological framework.¹⁸ Evidence of typological gaps identified among participants will present an opportunity to apply the theological aspect of McKinley’s Leadership Assessment Matrix to identify a leadership theory’s teleology, ontology, authority, and ethic.¹⁹

¹⁸ McKinley, *Evaluating Leadership*, 175.

¹⁹ Ibid., 156.

Limitations

Katarzyna Peoples described *limitations* as methodological vulnerabilities beyond the control of the researcher that could affect the results, and she pointed out several limitations that are common to phenomenological studies: small sample size impacting generalizability, time constraints on the research report, and participant bias.²⁰ Alex Limpaecher and LaiYee Ho, the co-founders of the qualitative research suite Delve, identified some design limitations in phenomenological studies including researcher-induced bias; difficulty in establishing validity and reliability; challenges in gathering and analyzing data; and suboptimal participant communication capabilities due to language proficiency, age, or cognitive function.²¹ My dissertation responds to the vulnerabilities associated with each of these limitations.²²

Delimitations

This research is delimited to the four SBC and CNBC seminaries that are geographically closest to the American Mountain West: CBT, GS, MBTS, and SWBTS. The lived experiences of faculty and academic supervisors at the remaining three SBC seminaries and forty-one other IABCU member schools regarding the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory

²⁰ Katarzyna Peoples, *How to Write a Phenomenological Dissertation: A Step-by-Step Guide* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2021), 36, 103.

²¹ LaiYee Ho and Alex Limpaecher, “What Is Phenomenological Research Design?,” *The Essential Guide to Coding Qualitative Data*, March 17, 2022, <https://delvetool.com/blogphenomenology>.

²² A recent example of a dissertation that used a phenomenological approach and addressed these limitations is Jennifer Blair Foster, “Leading in Between: A Phenomenological Study of Selected Second Chair Ministry Leaders in Alabama Baptist Churches” (PhD diss., New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, 2024).

are deemed beyond the scope of this investigation and a noted opportunity for extrapolation of this study that is worthy of further research. The research is delimited to faculty who teach leadership courses integrating leadership theory at the undergraduate, master's, or doctoral level and the academic supervisors who directly supervise those faculty members. The research is delimited further by the choice to employ McKinley's Leadership Assessment Matrix in structuring theological assessments of leadership theories.²³

Definitions of Terms

Christian theology refers to the study of the Christian God. The term constitutes “beliefs held by Christians, as derived from the Bible, informed by the discussions among the community of theologians in church history, and checked for logical coherence” and “includes the investigation of the human relationship with God, including divine revelation and human response.”²⁴

This dissertation utilizes Peter Northouse's definition of *leadership*: “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.”²⁵ When nuancing this concept of leadership to distinguish that which can be characterized as *Christian leadership*,

²³ McKinley, *Evaluating Leadership*, 23, 67, 156. Jason B. Palmer, review of *Evaluating Leadership: A Model for Missiological Assessment of Leadership Theory and Practice*, by J. Keith McKinley, *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 24, no. 2 (Fall 2025): 104–6.

²⁴ Adam Harwood, *Christian Theology: Biblical, Historical, and Systematic* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2022), xxi, 3.

²⁵ Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 10th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2026), 4.

Hwa Yung's definition of leadership is adopted: "the result of practicing genuine servanthood wherever we are and in whatever position we are called to by Christ and his body, the church."²⁶

The term *American Mountain West* describes that area identified by the United States Census Bureau as the Mountain Division (Division 8) of the West Region (Region 3) comprising eight states: Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico. The *Northeast Region* describes that area identified by the United States Census Bureau as Region 1 consisting of two divisions: the New England Division (Division 1) and the Middle Atlantic Division (Division 2). Six states comprise the New England Division: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont. The Middle Atlantic Division consists of three states: New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania.²⁷

The *Southern Baptist Convention* (SBC) describes "a fellowship of nearly 47,000 Baptist churches scattered across the United States and its territories" and also an annual two-day gathering of messengers representing autonomous local churches.²⁸ The SBC statement of faith is *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*. The *Canadian National Baptist Convention* (CNBC)

²⁶ Hwa Yung, *Leadership or Servanthood?: Walking in the Steps of Jesus* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2021), 130. Yung proffered a slightly streamlined variant of this definition on p. 14.

²⁷ "Census Regions and Divisions of the United States," United States Census Bureau, accessed November 24, 2025, https://www2.census.gov/geo/pdfs/maps-data/maps/reference/us_regdiv.pdf.

²⁸ "Fast Facts," Southern Baptist Convention, accessed November 24, 2025, <https://www.sbc.net/about/what-we-do/fast-facts>.

denotes a cooperative collection of over five hundred Baptist churches in Canada that identify *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000* as their shared statement of faith.²⁹

The *North American Mission Board* (NAMB) is an entity of the Southern Baptist Convention that “exists to serve pastors, churches and other Southern Baptist ministry partners as they engage the mission field in the United States, Canada and beyond.”³⁰ The *Montana Southern Baptist Convention* (MTSBC) is a collection of 125 local churches affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention and located in Montana.³¹

Leadership Assessment Matrix refers to McKinley’s novel “tool to examine and assess any leadership theory and make a reasonable, biblically faithful, culturally appropriate determination about the theory’s rightness and usefulness in the context of intercultural missions.”³² The Leadership Assessment includes three aspects: philosophical, theological, and cultural.³³

²⁹ “About,” Canadian National Baptist Convention, accessed November 24, 2025, <https://www.cnbc.ca/cnbc/about>. “CNBC Statement of Faith,” Canadian National Baptist Convention, accessed November 24, 2025, <https://www.cnbc.ca/cnbc/cnbc-statement-of-faith>.

³⁰ “2025 NAMB Ministry Report,” North American Mission Board, accessed November 24, 2025, <https://www.namb.net/resource/2025-namb-ministry-report/>.

³¹ Jeannie Hayes, office manager and ministry assistant, Montana Southern Baptist Convention, email message to author, November 25, 2025.

³² McKinley, *Evaluating Leadership*, 159.

³³ Ibid., 156. The basic framework of McKinley’s Leadership Assessment Matrix is provided in appendix 1.

Phenomenology is an investigation focused on understanding individual perceptions regarding the meaning of a phenomenon or event.³⁴ According to Clark Moustakas, a quintessential phenomenological researcher “has set aside biases and has come to a place of readiness to gaze on whatever appears and to remain with that phenomenon until it is understood, until a perceptual closure is realized.”³⁵

Microsoft Teams is a “cloud-based team collaboration software that offers core capabilities, including business messaging, calling, video meetings and file sharing.”³⁶ *Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis* (CAQDAS) refers to software programs that “facilitate data storage, coding, retrieval, comparing, and linking.”³⁷ *Delve Tool* is the CAQDAS employed in this dissertation to aid analysis of qualitative data.³⁸

³⁴ Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research Planning and Design*, 12th ed. (New York: Pearson, 2019), 233; Peoples, 3.

³⁵ Clark Moustakas, *Phenomenological Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), 73.

³⁶ Scot Robinson, “Microsoft Teams,” TechTarget, April 12, 2024, <https://www.techtarget.com/searchunifiedcommunications/definition/Microsoft-Teams>.

³⁷ Michael Quinn Patton, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*, 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2001), 442.

³⁸ Delve Tool, <https://delvetool.com>.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Biblical Basis for Leadership

The Bible never claims to be a book about leadership, yet the subject of leadership is engaged directly and indirectly throughout the biblical corpus. A few examples illustrate the point. Jethro advised Moses on the effectiveness of delegation (Exodus 18). Namaan's servant girl demonstrated the value of delivering prophetic truth at the right moment (2 Kings 5). Nehemiah modeled how to mobilize people in completing a large project despite internal and external distractions. In the New Testament, Paul redefined leadership in terms of the self-sacrificial example of the crucified Christ (1 Corinthians 4). As noted by Gregory Smith at Liberty University, Paul goes on to embed leadership principles in 2 Corinthians for general, Christian, and spiritual leadership such as the need for accountability, integrity, mission-centeredness, prioritizing the welfare of followers, accurately conceptualizing oneself, embracing personal weakness and adverse circumstances, balancing boldness and gentleness, advocacy in calling others to embrace necessary sacrifice, and shared responsibility.¹ While this compilation of leadership principles falls short of an exhaustive review, the Bible retains a much grander theological purpose while communicating valuable concepts regarding the praxis of leadership.

¹ Gregory A. Smith, "Leadership Principles in 2 Corinthians," Faculty Publications and Presentations, 2011, https://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lib_fac_pubs/63.

If Northouse's morally neutral definition of *leadership* can be entertained (see p. 15), then numerous examples of commendable but imperfect leadership as well as episodes of deplorable leadership grace the pages of Christian Scripture. Some of the paragons of faith commended in Hebrews 11 illustrate the point. Abraham chose Yahweh in a religious context that normalized polytheism and became the father of many nations (Gn 17:5), but he also chose his own self-preservation over the safety and honor of his wife twice (Genesis 12; 20). Isaac honored his father's spiritual legacy but also employed deceit similarly by placing his wife in a vulnerable situation for his own political gain (Genesis 26). Moses killed an Egyptian man in a fit of rage (Exodus 2) but also led God's people out of Egyptian captivity. Rahab protected Israelite spies (Joshua 2) but also bore a vile reputation as a prostitute. David reigned in the golden era of Israel's history but also participated in treachery with Bathsheba and Uriah (2 Samuel 11; 12). Human leadership as captured in the Bible is a mixture of laudable conduct worthy of emulation and shameful acts warranting disapproval.

Against this descriptive backdrop of inconsistent human character, the leadership exhibited by Jesus stands prescriptively distinct. The Lord's ontological essence and natural inclinations are, according to Mt 11:29, "lowly and humble," and the apostle Paul's call for every believer to "adopt the same attitude as that of Christ Jesus" (Phil 2:5) has profound implications for believers in the practice of self-sacrificial leadership.² The Son willingly poured himself out for the benefit of others by prioritizing their needs over his own. His pursuit of those far from

² Jason B. Palmer, review of *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Suffers*, by Dane Ortlund, *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* 22, no. 2 (Fall 2025): 369–71. All Bible citations are from the Christian Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.

him involved the king of heaven condescending from the splendor of heaven to the vulgarity of earth where he embraced the status of a slave. Only a divine love could divest itself of deserved advantages, entitlements, and privileges and manifest its essence in the performance of duties that were relegated to slaves for the well-being of others.³ From that profoundly low estate, Jesus condescended even further to endure a mode of execution reserved for the most extreme offenders. He was brutalized as a criminal of the state by people he created who were cooperating in a governmental system he established (Rom 13:1, 6). In so doing, Jesus's "pattern of humility" sets the standard for love unbounded by personal sacrifice.⁴ Paul commanded believers to assume this same mindset.⁵ Christ-followers are instructed to demonstrate the same love—the same intended purpose—even if it costs them every earthly resource under their stewardship (1 Cor 4:1). The leadership of Jesus compels the highest commendation.

In the practice of such genuinely altruistic servanthood, the New Testament twice includes the concept of leading among lists of spiritual gifts: προϊστάμενος in Rom 12:8 and κυβερνήσεις in 1 Cor 12:28. The verbal form of the noun used in 1 Cor 12:28 [κυβερνάω] conveys a nautical premise that invokes maritime pilots steering and guiding vessels safely from one harbor to the next despite the prevalence of threats until the mission is completed

³ Gordan D. Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 197, 208.

⁴ John Calvin, *The Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians*, ed. David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, trans. T. H. L. Parker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965), 246. Fee, 217, 226.

⁵ Fee, 191–2, 195–9, 204, 208–9, 211, 214, 228.

successfully.⁶ Paul's word choice in 1 Cor 12:28 calls to mind Prv 11:14 where King Solomon selects a word for *guidance* with a root [תִּקְּלָה] that suggests "rope pulling" and relates to steerage and direction of ships.⁷ As pilots carefully train and practice the skill of stewarding nautical vessels through uncertain circumstances, so believers are equipped to demonstrate leadership and administration within the body of Christ for the accomplishment of the church's mission. The nautical metaphor captures a biblical construct of leadership that is characterized further by Christ's example of radical servanthood.

General Literature Review

Christian writers contribute to the multidisciplinary field of leadership with diverse theological assumptions and positions concerning the acceptability and utility of popular leadership theories. Many writers embrace contemporary leadership models in a way that seems to lack much critical theological analysis of the theories involved.⁸ Others, such as Marty McMahon, proffer a more nuanced argument for theoretical appropriation by arguing—or at

⁶ Frederick William Danker, ed., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 573. Palmer, "Surveying Leadership Theory Integration," 75.

⁷ Francis Brown, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2004), 287; Ernest Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the Hebrew Language for Readers of English* (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 697; Palmer, "Surveying Leadership Theory Integration," 75.

⁸ Larry G. Locke, "The Clay Feet of Servant Leadership," *Journal of Biblical Integration of Business* 22, no. 1 (2019): 34, 40.

least inferring—that a leadership theory must be consistent in principle with Christian orthodoxy, rather than distinctively Christian, to be useful in the Christian community.⁹

Still other Christian authors call for critical reflection followed by employment of contemporary leadership theories in modified form. After completing some process of Christianization, these scholars are apt to use certain popular leadership theories. As an example, Tod Bolsinger, an ordained Presbyterian Church (U.S.A) minister currently serving as Senior Congregational Strategist and Affiliate Professor of Leadership Formation at Fuller Seminary, presented a modified version of adaptive leadership theory draped in the historical Lewis and Clark adventure to a Christian audience in *Canoeing the Mountains*.¹⁰ The work of J. Keith McKinley—a Southern Baptist missiologist serving as Professor of Christian Missions; Director of the Bevin Center for Missions Mobilization; and Chair of the Department of Missions, Evangelism, and World Religions at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary—offers a novel framework for analyzing leadership theories and applies his model to transformational leadership theory in his 2015 dissertation and more recently in book form: *Evaluating Leadership*.¹¹ McKinley’s findings suggest the need to modify transformational leadership to address theological gaps.

⁹ Marty McMahon, “A Solid Foundation for Servant Leadership,” *Journal of Biblical Integration of Business* 26, no. 1 (2023): 60.

¹⁰ “Tod Bolsinger,” Fuller Seminary, accessed November 26, 2025, <https://www.fuller.edu/adjunct/tod-bolsinger>. Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2015).

¹¹ J. Keith McKinley, “A Missiological Analysis of Transformational Leadership Theory” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015).

Still other Christian scholars find some theoretical elements to diverge too far from Christian orthodoxy to warrant reconciliation. For example, an increasing number of Christian scholars argue that Robert Greenleaf's concept of servant leadership is unsupportable by Christian theology.¹² While Christianized versions of servant leadership theory are not hard to find, Greenleaf's seminal works on the subject invite some uncomfortable theological questions.¹³ Christian scholars present intriguing alternatives to Greenleaf's construct. Jamie Dew defined biblical *servanthood* as "the character that causes us to place others before ourselves, helping where people have need, and finding joy in a life focused on others." Yung criticizes servant leadership theory in favor of genuine biblical servanthood.¹⁴ One of McMahon's colleagues in the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor's McLane College of Business, Larry Locke, joins this lot by prioritizing holiness and theological fidelity to the extent

¹² Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (New York: Paulist, 1977). Examples include Jack W. Niewold, "Incarnational Leadership: Towards a Distinctly Christian Theory of Leadership" (PhD diss., Regent University, 2006); Jack W. Niewold, "Beyond Servant Leadership," *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* 1, no. 2 (2007): 118–34; Audrey V. Shirin, "Is Servant Leadership Inherently Christian?" *Journal of Religion and Business Ethics* 3, Article 13 (2014): 23–25; Locke; Stephen G. Kimotho, "Is Servant Leadership a 'Christian Theory?' A Critical Examination of Greenleaf's Servant Leadership Concept," *International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies* 6, no. 3 (2019): 71–8.

¹³ Palmer, "Theologically Analyzing Secular Leadership," 79–102.

¹⁴ James K. Dew Jr., *Let This Mind Be in You* (Brentwood, TN: B&H, 2023), 1, 66. Yung, *Leadership or Servanthood?*, 12–4, 128. Jason B. Palmer, review of *Leadership or Servanthood?: Walking in the Steps of Jesus*, by Hwa Yung, *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 67, no. 2 (Spring 2025): 127–9.

of calling for the rejection of leadership theories that rest on heretical foundations, replacing them instead with biblically supported ideas.¹⁵

The ability to organize the literature into the three categories of acceptance, modification, and rejection is not limited to servant leadership theory. James MacGregor Burns popularized transformational (or transforming) leadership and juxtaposed it with transactional leadership, but he did not tether his concept of leadership to Christian orthodoxy even generally.¹⁶ Bernard Bass and others further developed transformational leadership without improving on the theological compatibility of the theory. McKinley showed that a theological analysis of transformational leadership and every other leadership theory is critically important for Christians endeavoring to integrate leadership concepts well.¹⁷

Ronald Heifetz's adaptive leadership theory relates leader behaviors with individuals' work and promotes defining and solving tough problems through changes "in values, beliefs, or behavior" that may involve the inclusion of "competing value perspectives" for success to be realized.¹⁸ The essence of adaptive leadership theory is to equip and mobilize practitioners to engage adaptive problems in a way that clarifies aspirations, moves them closer to a solution,

¹⁵ Locke, 34–42.

¹⁶ James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978).

¹⁷ McKinley, *Evaluating Leadership*.

¹⁸ Ronald A. Heifetz, *Leadership without Easy Answers* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 1994), 22, 23, 25. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 10th ed., 277–312.

and fosters thriving in the face of formidable adversity.¹⁹ The expectation that tackling tough problems will necessitate an evolution in values is a distinguishing component of progress within the framework of adaptive leadership theory; nevertheless, many Christians insist upon the establishment of theological limits to acceptable adaptation in tackling tough problems.²⁰ Critical review of the remaining leadership theories highlighted by Northouse are likely to yield similar results. That outcome might be unsurprising to many Christian scholars, but the question of how to respond to leadership theories with theological gaps invites a deeper discussion.

The decision about theoretical acceptance, modification, or rejection is complicated by what Benjamin Forrest and David Nemitz bemoaned to be “too little crossover between practical and academic theology” especially as it relates to the study of leadership.²¹ Some authors, however, are active in this space. Ian Parkinson, for example, locates himself in the modification

¹⁹ Ronald A. Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership: Tools and Tactics for Changing Your Organization and the World* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 14, 303; Bernard M. Bass, *The Bass Handbook of Leadership: Theory, Research & Managerial Applications*, 4th ed. (New York: Free Press, 2008), 17; Heifetz, 87. See also Linda Louise Schubring, “A Study in Adaptive Leadership: How Christian Associates’ Teams and Individuals in Europe Navigate Change” (DIS diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2012).

²⁰ Heifetz, 26, 34, 35; Joseph Mathew, “Persistent Pioneers: Training Leaders for Mission to Unreached People Groups through India’s Light the World Missions” (DIS diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2020), 16–7; Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*, 41, 65–66, 94, 104, 106, 128; Jason B. Palmer, “Missiological Adaptation as a Framework for Chaplains in Civil-Military Engagement,” *Military Chaplaincy Review* (November 2024): 19–25.

²¹ Benjamin K. Forrest and David Nemitz, “Toward a Biblical Theology of Leadership: Shepherds and Servants on Behalf of the King,” in *Biblical Leadership: Theology for the Everyday Leader*, ed. Benjamin K. Forrest and Chet Roden (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2017), 513.

camp. He supports critical reflection on leadership theory, acknowledges the theological angst expressed by some in accepting theories originating from non-Christian sources, and calls for a reduction in and more nuanced view on the sacred-secular divide.²² He cited Origen in welcoming “all proven wisdom from whatever source which might enable the Church to fulfil its divine calling more effectively,” going so far as to consider the choice to reject “tried and true methodology” as irresponsible.²³ Parkinson sees theory modification as routine and seeks to “formulate some criteria that might encourage us to take a discerning and constructive critical approach to secular leadership wisdom and to its deployment in the Church.”²⁴

Jeff Iorg admitted that secular concepts need to be Christianized prior to appropriation but did not specify in *Leading Major Change in Your Ministry* by what optimal process that Christianization should occur.²⁵ Galen Jones overviewed several theologies of leadership from a Baptist viewpoint in his dissertation, and Jennifer Strawbridge offered an Anglican theology of leadership.²⁶ Michale Ayers proposed “a common language for the convergence of theology and leadership” by encouraging the utilization of three terms in exploring the convergency of

²² Ian Parkinson, *Understanding Christian Leadership* (London: SCM, 2020), xv–xvii, 123–4.

²³ Ibid., xvi, 124.

²⁴ Ibid., xvi, xvii.

²⁵ Jeff Iorg, *Leading Major Change in Your Ministry* (Nashville: B&H, 2018), 8.

²⁶ Galen Wendell Jones, “A Theological Comparison between Social Science Models and a Biblical Perspective of Servant Leadership” (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2012). Jennifer Strawbridge, “The Word of the Cross: Mission, Power, and the Theology of Leadership,” *Anglican Theological Review* 91, no. 1 (2009): 61–79.

theology and leadership theory: ontology, methodology, and teleology.²⁷ McKinley built on Ayers's work and suggested theological examination of leadership theory on teleological, ontological, authority, and ethical grounds.²⁸ Teleology clarifies one's purpose, sources of motivation, and objectives.²⁹ Ontology speaks to one's sense of calling, character, and holistic competency.³⁰ Authority captures one's capacity as well as authority and responsibility.³¹ Ethic considers the practice of servanthood with respect to two audiences: God and others.³² The present dissertation builds on these contributions and advances the understanding of how one subset of Christian scholars is thinking through the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory in their academic engagements with undergraduate, master's, and doctoral students.

John David Trentham, Professor of Leadership and Discipleship and Dean of Students at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, argued for the responsible appropriation of social

²⁷ Michale Ayers, "Toward a Theology of Leadership," *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* 1, no. 1 (2006): 3, 8.

²⁸ McKinley, "A Missiological Analysis," 1–3, 14–6, 23, 81–2, 126, 179. McKinley, *Evaluating Leadership*, 17.

²⁹ McKinley, *Evaluating Leadership*, 156.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

science models, which has bearing on the field of leadership.³³ Trentham engaged the conversation from a classically Reformed perspective and called for a careful theological reading that maintains needed distance from secular theories while extending a qualified version of charity to those same theories.³⁴ He proposed the *principle of inverse consistency* rooted in common grace that charts “a third way that avoids the potential pitfalls of deferential charity as well as nullifying criticism.”³⁵ His principle opposed unqualified charity toward secular models, which may resemble uncritical deference, and it also opposed polemical approaches that he finds unhelpful.³⁶ Instead, he proposed a doctrinally-established hermeneutic for interpreting secular theory and commended approaches that look for aspects of “qualified legitimacy.”³⁷

A particularly intriguing aspect of Trentham’s argument, which builds on the work of Rickard Mouw, is his observation that proponents of natural law often gravitate toward a collaborating-integrationist stance—a posture that exaggerates the significance of the enduring light retained by all image bearers while perhaps not doing enough to acknowledge the full

³³ John David Trentham, “Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 1): Approaching and Qualifying Models of Human Development,” *Christian Education Journal* 16, no. 3 (2019): 459–60.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 459–60.

³⁵ John David Trentham, “Reading the Social Sciences Theologically (Part 2): Approaching and Qualifying Models of Human Development,” *Christian Education Journal* 16, no. 3 (2019): 486.

³⁶ Trentham, “Reading (Part 1),” 465, 470. Trentham, “Reading (Part 2),” 485–6.

³⁷ Trentham, “Reading (Part 1),” 471.

implications of the fall.³⁸ Readers more akin to the Anabaptist tradition, he contended, typically posture themselves as nullifying-integrationists and reject the errant premises of secular models while perhaps doing too little to preserve a place for the enduring divine image in secular theorists.³⁹ Trentham identified many in his own Reformed camp as qualifying-integrationists who “tend to evaluate developmental models with a dual measure of critical distance and affirmative interest.”⁴⁰ He claimed maintaining an equal blend of critical distance and charity sets conditions for wise engagement of secular paradigms.⁴¹ His advocacy for this third option is developed convincingly but incites little surprise given his acknowledged theological convictions. His Inverse Consistency Protocol progresses the scholarly conversation, but the question invites further reflection, How are scholars to appropriate leadership models that maintain “anthropocentric rather than Christocentric values and purposes?”⁴² If the object of *all truth*—the kind of truth frequently attributed to God’s truth—refers to ultimate, not temporal, things, then how do Christian academics address intellectual concepts that are not just extrabiblical but include certain elements that some find to be unbiblical?⁴³

³⁸ Trentham, “Reading (Part 2),” 482. Richard Mouw, *He Shines in All That’s Fair: Culture and Common Grace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

³⁹ Trentham, “Reading (Part 2),” 482.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 483.

⁴¹ Ibid., 492.

⁴² Ibid., 478.

⁴³ Ibid., 480, 484.

Jim Wilson and Earl Waggoner argued for the use of extrabiblical sources of truth in *A Guide to Theological Reflection: A Fresh Approach for Practical Ministry Courses and Theological Field Education*. In proposing a theological reflection loop, they contended that holding to the primacy of biblical authority does not preclude the use of other sources of truth.⁴⁴ The oft-quoted paraphrase of Augustine's affirmation that *all truth is God's truth* occupies a central role in their case.⁴⁵ Stanley Grenz's synchronization of the Holy Spirit's work with biblical truth is referenced in this culminative statement: "Our theological reflection can draw from the so-called 'secular' sciences, because ultimately no truth is, in fact, secular."⁴⁶

To understand contemporary perceptions on the use of extrabiblical knowledge in leadership studies, the *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* recently published my research surveying a small group of faculty teaching leadership theory ($N = 12$) at the undergraduate level in selected IABCU member schools in the continental United States located west of the Mississippi River.⁴⁷ The findings suggest some trends regarding the rate at which faculty introduce leadership theories to undergraduate students. Among the theories examined by Northouse in the ninth edition of *Leadership: Theory and Practice* in print at the time I

⁴⁴ Jim L. Wilson and Earl Waggoner, *A Guide to Theological Reflection: A Fresh Approach for Practical Ministry Courses and Theological Field Education* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 34.

⁴⁵ Ibid. Footnote 32 captures Augustine's actual statement from *On Christian Doctrine* 2.18.28: "Let every good and true Christian understand that wherever truth may be found, it belongs to his Master."

⁴⁶ Stanley Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 310.

⁴⁷ Palmer, "Surveying Leadership Theory Integration."

conducted the aforementioned research, responding faculty members assigned pole position in terms of theological compatibility to servant leadership followed, in order, by transformational leadership, authentic leadership, adaptive leadership, situational approach, skills approach, behavior approach, leader-member exchange theory, path-goal approach, and trait approach.⁴⁸

The data further support an almost direct correlation between respondents' perspectives on the theological compatibility of each leadership theory with Christian practice and the frequency with which surveyed scholars introduce that theory to students during undergraduate coursework. Participating faculty members reported introducing leadership theories to their undergraduate students at a rate almost directly proportional to their assessments of the theological compatibility of each theory. Further, respondents indicated that in 91.5 percent of instances all ten leadership theories are either inherently theologically compatible with Christian orthodoxy or can be made sufficiently compatible through modification. While the ability to generalize data from such a small survey group is limited, the findings call for further research while underscoring the importance of faculty members critically examining leadership theory through a theological lens given the potential for direct and indirect associated impacts on student learning experiences. This dissertation is a response to this call for research with a more comprehensive examination of faculty and academic supervisor experiences regarding popular leadership theory at four like-minded seminaries.

⁴⁸ Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 9th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2022).

Importance of the Study

This dissertation contributes to the academy by collecting empirical data from the field that provide important experiential context to some observable trends in the integration of Christian theology and leadership theory at selected Baptist institutions of higher education. I am not aware of any published studies investigating faculty and academic supervisor experiences with this juncture. As such, this dissertation is a response to a gap in the literature with a more extensive exploration of lived experiences with four IABCU member schools sharing similar mission sets, a common statement of faith, and kindred doctrinal stances. Expanding understanding of how participating faculty at selected Baptist seminaries handle leadership theories illuminates scholarly practice in the field of Christian leadership. The study demonstrates the usefulness of leadership theory assessment tools like McKinley's while learning how research participants are guided in the use of these assessment tools in evaluating and responding to popular leadership approaches, theories, and models, some of which include content that seems to challenge the boundaries of Christian orthodoxy.

The intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory is an area suitable for contribution. Regardless of the degree to which Christian scholars find various leadership theories to be theologically compatible with and redeemable for use in Christian practice, demonstrating the significance of critically reflecting on theoretical systems like leadership theory through a theological lens refines the ongoing scholarly conversation. The process of critical examination equips scholars to differentiate descriptive and prescriptive treatment of leaders and leadership found in the Bible from the array of popular leadership approaches, theories, or models often rooted in heterodox assumptions and principles. In so doing, Christian

researchers are outfitted further for the ongoing quest to develop a truly Christian understanding of leadership.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Niewold, “Incarnational Leadership.”

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Rationale

The phenomenon of Baptist academics engaging popular leadership theories and presenting those theories in a way that coheres with their understanding of Christian theology constitutes a lived experience. Therefore, the phenomenological approach is the best approach for answering the related quintessential question, “What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?”¹ This research contributes to understanding the meaning structure, and essence of this group’s experience with the integration of theology and theory and provides insight into the broader work of this field. This qualitative dissertation utilizes a phenomenological approach to investigate participating faculty perceptions at the four SBC and CNBC seminaries geographically positioned closest to students in the American Mountain West using my present ministry context of Whitefish, Montana, as the epicenter. In order of proximity from closest to farthest, four institutions were identified: Canadian Baptist Theological Seminary and College (CBT), Gateway Seminary (GS), Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (MBTS), and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SWBTS). I reviewed each institution’s publicly available academic catalogs and

¹ Patton, 104.

identified at least one course which appeared to include leadership theory that would contribute to the proposed dissertation research.

Canadian Baptist Theological Seminary and College

CBT's 2025–2026 academic catalog lists two leadership courses with descriptions that include leadership theory. CBT offers undergraduate and master's programs but no doctoral programs. CBT's college offers two undergraduate degrees: Bachelor of Christian Studies (120 credits) and Bachelor of Christian Ministry (96 credits); two diploma programs: Diploma of Christian Studies (60 credits) and Diploma of Christian Ministry (60 credits); and two certificate programs: College Certificate in Christian Studies (24 credits) and Samuel Program Certificate (24 credits). Every undergraduate student at CBT in all six of those programs is required to take Principles of Leadership (1P3322, 3 hours). According to the academic catalog, the Principles of Leadership "course will survey leadership theories" and "examine biblical examples and principles of leading people."² CBT has approximately twenty-five students enrolled in undergraduate-level programs.³

CBT's seminary has four graduate-level degree options: Master of Divinity, Master of Christian Ministry (55 or 56 credits depending on degree track), Master of Biblical Studies (48 credits), and Master of Christian Studies (36 credits). The seminary provides two certificate

² "Academic Catalogue 2025–2026," Canadian Baptist Theological Seminary and College, accessed December 10, 2025, <https://indd.adobe.com/view/0cea464e-ca06-49dc-8680-fb732583f514>, 51.

³ Barry Nelson, Vice President of Institutional Advancement, Canadian Baptist Theological Seminary and College, personal communication with the author, December 1, 2025.

program options as well: Seminary Certificate in Spiritual Care/Chaplaincy (21 credits) and Seminary Certificate in Christian Studies (18 credits). A version of the graduate-level course Spiritual Leadership (2P3231, 2 hours or 2P3331, 3 hours) is required for all CBT Master of Divinity, Master of Christian Ministry, and Master of Christian Studies students as well as students in both graduate-level certificate programs. The Spiritual Leadership course is an optional elective for Master of Biblical Studies students. According to the academic catalog, the Spiritual Leadership course “introduces students to the major concepts and resources for spiritual leadership and assists them in examining their current leadership effectiveness.”⁴ CBT enrolls approximately fifty students in its graduate-level seminary programs.⁵

Gateway Seminary

GS does not offer undergraduate programs. Master’s students at GS take leadership theory courses at the beginning of their program and at the end. Introduction to Ministry Formation (P1111, 1 hour) is “an entry course designed to assist students in beginning to build the necessary foundation—personally, spiritually, intellectually, and professionally—for lifelong ministry. The course must be taken in the student’s first or second semester as their introduction to seminary.”⁶ Reflection on Ministry Formation (P1116, 1 hour) is

⁴ “Academic Catalogue 2025–2026,” Canadian Baptist Theological Seminary and College, 39.

⁵ Barry Nelson, Vice President of Institutional Advancement, Canadian Baptist Theological Seminary and College, personal communication with the author, December 1, 2025.

⁶ “2025–2026 Academic Catalog,” Gateway Seminary, accessed December 10, 2025, https://account-media.s3.amazonaws.com/16780/uploaded/2/0e20010267_1763077838_2025-2026-academic-catalog-final-111325.pdf, 312.

an exit course designed to assist students in assessing the various components of their seminary career, including learning effectiveness, ministry preparedness, personal growth and development toward lifelong ministry. The course also seeks to help the student in building a vision for post-graduation ministry and for learning and development beyond the seminary classroom. The course must be taken in the last or next to last semester only.⁷

Doctor of Philosophy students at GS can minor in applied theology.⁸ Doctor of Ministry students must take a seminar called The Theory and Practice of Ministry and Leadership (DM 411, 3 hours), which “focuses on the study of biblical, theological, and theoretical concepts of ministry and leadership, with particular emphasis on the relation between these concepts and the performance of the minister’s tasks.”⁹

Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

MBTS’s 2025–2026 academic catalog lists several leadership courses with descriptions that include leadership theory. Spurgeon College, the undergraduate program at MBTS, teaches at least one related course: Christian Leadership (CE210, 3 hours), which is “a study of servant leadership, leadership accountability, and reliance on God in one’s personal life and ministry. Emphasis is given to applying teambuilding and change processes in ministry contexts.”¹⁰ On the master’s side, MBTS offers at least three courses that are relevant for the present research:

⁷ “2025–2026 Academic Catalog,” Gateway Seminary, 312.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid., 139.

¹⁰ “2025–2026 Academic Catalog,” Spurgeon College, accessed December 10, 2025, <https://spurgeoncollege.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/07/2025-2026-CatalogCollege67.pdf>.

Christian Leadership (5410, 3 hours), Organizational Theory and Management Practicum (5482, 3 hours), and Leadership Team Development Practicum (5484, 3 hours).

MBTS offers Doctor of Philosophy students majoring in applied theology the opportunity to specialize in leadership. One of the associated seminars in the leadership track is Organizational Theory and Development (DR31060, 4 hours), which the academic catalog describes as “an advanced study of leadership models and organizational development theory, with attention given to their worldview presuppositions, empirical adequacy, and contribution to the development of Christian approaches.”¹¹ The leadership specialization for Doctor of Ministry students includes a course titled Christian Leadership (DR31010, 4 hours), in which students investigate “biblical, theological, historical, and contemporary models of leadership” then “write and justify a strategy for leading Christian ministries.”¹²

Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

SWBTS’s 2025–2026 academic catalog lists several leadership courses with descriptions that include leadership theory. SWBTS offers at least one course at the master’s level that engages leadership theory. Current Issues in Christian Leadership (PASMN 4423) is one of a list of five courses from which Master of Divinity students majoring in pastoral ministry must choose two. That course analyses “emerging theological issues in current Christian leadership,”

¹¹ “Doctor of Philosophy (PhD, Applied Theology),” Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, accessed December 10, 2025, <https://www.mbts.edu/degree/phd-applied>. “2025–2026 Academic Catalog,” Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, accessed December 10, 2025, <https://www.mbts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/2025-2026-CatalogSeminary.pdf>, 106.

¹² “2025–2026 Academic Catalog,” Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 106.

explores “models of current leadership theory and practice,” examines “biblical resources,” and makes recommendations “for integrating leadership models and Christian faith.”¹³

The Doctor of Philosophy program at SWBTS does not include a leadership-related major or minor.¹⁴ Students pursuing the Doctor of Education degree who opt into the Organizational Leadership concentration are required to take Leadership and Management Theory (EDDOL 7014, 4 hours).¹⁵ Both professional doctoral programs—Doctor of Ministry and Doctor of Educational Ministry—offer concentrations in Christian Leadership and Executive Leadership.¹⁶ On the basis of this non-exhaustive survey of degree programs and course descriptions at CBT, GS, MBTS, and SWBTS, all four institutions met the parameters for inclusion in the present research.

Researcher Role and Assumptions

As a retired military officer, I bring to the present research twenty-five years of personal experiences and professional military education in that cultural milieu. This period constitutes

¹³ “2025–2026 Academic Catalog,” Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, accessed December 10, 2025, <https://swbts.edu/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Academic-Catalog-2025-26.pdf>, 339.

¹⁴ “Doctor of Philosophy,” Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, accessed December 10, 2025, <https://swbts.edu/degree/doctor-of-philosophy>.

¹⁵ “2025–2026 Academic Catalog,” Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 219. “Doctor of Education,” Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, accessed December 10, 2025, <https://swbts.edu/degree/doctor-of-education>.

¹⁶ “Doctor of Ministry (DMin) and Doctor of Educational Ministry (DEdMin),” Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, accessed December 10, 2025, <https://swbts.edu/degree/professional-doctoral-studies>.

half of my life, and these lived experiences must be acknowledged as a potential source of researcher bias. As an adjunct faculty member who has taught leadership in undergraduate coursework at a Baptist university, I recognize some shared experiences with research participants. While I had become acquainted with one participating faculty member and one participating academic supervisor prior to the present study through professional interactions, I have no history of interaction with the other thirteen participants prior to the present research. Having authored peer-reviewed journal articles and book reviews that engage aspects of the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory, I have endeavored to manage those historical experiences such that they do not distort a genuine understanding of the phenomenon as experienced through the lens of the research subjects. These potential biases were balanced through use of the hermeneutic circle.¹⁷

I presuppose several acknowledged assumptions. First, *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*—the statement of faith affirmed by all four selected seminaries—faithfully communicates core tenets of Christian orthodoxy.¹⁸ While some IABCU member schools may adopt other statements of faith such as *The Baptist Faith and Message 1963* or institutionally specific statements, the assumed doctrinal lodestar of the present investigation involving the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory is the current version of *The Baptist Faith and Message*. Second, I assume a degree of theological homogeneity among participating faculty and administrators represented by their shared doctrinal commitment to *The Baptist Faith and*

¹⁷ Peoples, 35.

¹⁸ Southern Baptist Convention, *The 2000 Baptist Faith and Message*, SBC.net, <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000>.

Message 2000. Third, I assume that regional affinity plays a role, amid a complex collection of contributing factors, when prospective students in the American Mountain West decide where to submit postsecondary admissions applications and register for classes—especially for increasingly advanced academic programs. Fourth, given the relative novelty of Christian leadership as a field of contemporary scholarship, I presume that most of the faculty teaching leadership theory at the four selected seminaries majored in academic subjects other than leadership during their doctoral studies and have established academic credentials for teaching in the field through a process of personal research and experience. Interviews with participating faculty explore academic history and either validate or debunk this presumption.

Participants

As Peoples reminded, phenomenological research prioritizes the goal of data saturation over a large number of participating research subjects where saturation is defined as “reaching a point where no more new data are being obtained from participants.”¹⁹ The research methodology begins with setting conditions for purposeful sampling by identifying the Chief Academic Officer (CAO) at each of the four selected institutions using each seminary’s publicly accessible website and engaging said CAO via email to request a list of all full-time and adjunct faculty members at their respective seminary who currently teach courses introducing leadership theory at the undergraduate, master’s, and/or doctoral level and the academic supervisors to whom each professor reports. An example of this email is provided in appendix 2. The CAO at CBT is Steve Booth, Academic Dean and Professor of New Testament and Greek. The CAO at

¹⁹ Peoples, 49.

GS is Alexander Stewart, who serves as Dean to the Faculty, Vice President of Academic Services, and Professor of New Testament Studies. The CAO at MBTS is Jason G. Duesing, Professor of Historical Theology, Provost, and Senior Vice President for Academic Administration. The CAO at SWBTS is W. Madison Grace II, Provost and Vice President for Academic Administration, Dean of the School of Theology, and Professor of Theology. Each of these gentlemen responded with a willingness to provide the requested information and subsequently did provide the requested information.

CBT's CAO identified one faculty member and one academic supervisor. GS's CAO identified nineteen faculty members and one academic supervisor. MBTS's CAO identified four faculty members and one academic supervisor. SWBTS's CAO identified eight faculty members and two academic supervisors. The total number of eligible participants aggregated from all four schools was thirty-two faculty members and five academic supervisors. Thirty of the faculty members were male, and two were female. All five academic supervisors were male.

I contacted each identified faculty member and academic supervisor and individually invited them to participate voluntarily in the study by sending an email that included an informed consent form approved by the NOBTS Institutional Review Board (IRB).²⁰ The informed consent form communicated my intent to avoid correlating individual participants' viewpoints to their respective institutions and my intent to report aggregated findings on the group. Ethical accountability in the treatment of subjects was supported by the NOBTS IRB approval process and the steps to document informed consent.

²⁰ See appendices 3, 4, 5, and 6.

I anticipated enrolling twelve to fifteen total subjects in this study. Thirteen faculty members submitted signed informed consent forms opting into the study, all of whom were male. One faculty member withdrew for personal reasons prior to completing any interviews. Another faculty member completed only the first of three interviews, so the resulting transcript was not included in the research findings. Eleven faculty members completed all three interviews, which constituted 34 percent of the eligible subjects identified by their respective CAOs. This group of eleven included representation from all four selected seminaries. Six held Doctor of Philosophy degrees. One had earned a Doctor of Education degree. One had completed two doctoral degree programs: Doctor of Education and Doctor of Ministry. Three held Doctor of Ministry degrees.

In addition, four of the five identified academic supervisors submitted signed informed consent forms opting into the study. All four completed the single interview designed for academic supervisors, which constituted 80 percent of the eligible subjects identified by their CAOs. Each of the four selected seminaries had one academic supervisor participant in the study. All four had completed Doctor of Philosophy degrees. Three of these supervisors are New Testament scholars, and one is a religious education scholar. In all, a total of fifteen faculty members and academic supervisors fulfilled the research parameters for inclusion in the study.

Data Collection

The data collection process involved scheduling a series of three recorded video interviews with each faculty member who opted into participating. The format of these phenomenological interviews followed a variant of Irving Seidman's approach in which the first interview concentrates on the subject's "focused life history" to contextualize lived experiences,

the second interview investigates “the details of experience,” and the third captures participants’ reflections on experiences related to the phenomenon.²¹ Interviews adhered to rigorous ethical standards and were conducted using Microsoft Teams software capable of employing artificial intelligence to produce a transcript of the verbal conversation for ease of subsequent coding.²² In addition to the series of three interviews with each participating faculty member, I conducted one interview with each academic supervisor who opted into the study. When more than one direct report of a given supervisor participated in the study, aggregation of the faculty members’ responses during conversations with academic supervisors worked to protect the autonomy of the human subjects involved.

Following the conclusion of each video interview, I edited each interview transcript manually by rewatching the interview video to ensure accuracy and then sent that edited transcript to the interviewee for review and approval before coding the content. This manual editing included the removal of filler words, repeated words, and vocal disfluencies such as uh, you know, and um. Microsoft Teams did not generate a transcript for one of the thirty-seven interviews: one of the eleven Interview #1 meetings with a faculty member. I manually summarized the content of that interview from my handwritten notes and memory and sent the summary to the participant for approval. Participants approved the content of all thirty-seven transcripts before the coding process commenced.

²¹ Irving Seidman, *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2019), 21–23.

²² Wayne C. Booth et al., *The Craft of Research*, 5th ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2024), 285–91.

Twelve faculty members completed Interview #1 between October 7, 2025, and October 27, 2025. After completing the interview and approving the transcript, one participant subsequently withdrew from the research project before completing Interview #2 or Interview #3. As a result, this twelfth interview was not coded or included in the research report. The eleven other transcripts constituted 170 pages of material.

I provided the eleven faculty members who continued in the study with the Interview #2 questions between five and fourteen days ahead of their interview depending on when they approved the transcript from Interview #1. These eleven participants completed Interview #2 between October 20, 2025, and October 29, 2025. These eleven transcripts constituted 123 pages of material.

I provided these same eleven faculty members with the Interview #3 questions on October 31, 2025, which was between three and seven days ahead of their interview. The eleven participants completed Interview #3 between November 3, 2025, and November 7, 2025. These eleven transcripts constituted 97 pages of material.

I provided the four participating academic supervisors with their interview questions on November 3, 2025, which was between three and seventeen days ahead of their interview. The four academic supervisors completed their single interview between November 6, 2025, and November 20, 2025. These four transcripts constituted 50 pages of material. Combining engagement with eleven faculty members and four academic supervisors, the research report includes data collected through thirty-seven interviews with fifteen scholars over forty-five days—from October 7, 2025, until November 20, 2025—yielding 440 pages of transcript material.

Procedures

I analyzed the data by uploading the transcripts into a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). I selected Delve Tool as the CAQDAS to be employed for this research due to its intuitive functionality and modest cost. Raw transcripts are not included in the final research report; however, selected phrases and paragraphs—either presented anonymously or attributed to a named research subject in cases where consent was sought and granted—are included in the research report. The structure of the interview questions is provided in appendices 7 and 8 and coding categories were selected based on the trends in participants' responses to those questions. I interpreted the coded data by identifying trends and patterns that contribute to making meaning of the phenomenon considered. Coding began with uploading the transcripts into the Delve Tool on November 30, 2025, and concluded on December 13, 2025.

Validity and Reliability

Qualitative rigor was maximized by prolonged engagement with each faculty member participant over a series of three interviews each of which was designed to last up to one hour.³⁴ These extended observations bolstered credibility. Validity and reliability were enhanced further through the triangulation of participants' lived experiences in appropriating popular leadership theory originating from non-Christian sources with their observations regarding the way counseling theory is appropriated for use in seminary settings.³⁵ This triangulation intended to

³⁴ Peoples, 69, 84.

³⁵ Ibid., 69.

test the coherence of individual and institutional stances related to the functional employment of general revelation and the place of popular leadership theory in seminary coursework.

The purposeful sampling, percentage of research subjects identified as eligible for the study who participated, and the relative theological and doctrinal homogeneity of the institutions selected support limited transferability and generalizable nature of the insights gleaned from these interviews for other populations.³⁶ The provision of a thorough explanation of research process and adherence to that process during data collection and analysis advances the dependability of the study and anticipates comparable findings during further research of the phenomenon in similar contexts.³⁷ Research confirmability was protected against researcher bias through the process of regular self-reflection and feedback from one disinterested scholar experienced in leadership and Christian theology.³⁸

³⁶ Peoples, 85.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Faculty Formation

The process by which each participating faculty member came to understand Christian theology and leadership is important to contextualize any findings. The first research interview generated the bulk of the historical information presented here. The order in which data in this section are presented is randomized to maximize individual and institutional anonymity.

Locations during Adolescence

Diverse influences and experiences helped shape participating faculty members' perceptions in the areas of Christian theology and leadership theory. One area of consideration is the geographic locations in which they spent their formative adolescent years and the potential for cultural influences stemming from those locales. The first participant spent his childhood in Vancouver, British Columbia, and remained there until he left for college. The second grew up in the Texas panhandle oil towns of Pampa and Skellytown, spent summers in western Oklahoma, and moved to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, as a fifteen-year-old. The third was born in Chester, Montana, moved to the panhandle of Texas at age two, and remained there thorough high school. The fourth was born in Dothan, Alabama; moved to Indian Town, Florida, when he was three; and then later made what he described as a challenging move into Palm Beach County, Florida, where he finished high school. The fifth grew up in and around Chicago, Illinois, and then

experienced culture shock of moving to the much smaller town of Kilgore, Texas, at fourteen years old.

The sixth was born and raised in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The seventh grew up in Fresno, California, and lived there until leaving to attend his undergraduate institution. The eighth spent his childhood in Cabool, Missouri. The ninth traces his family's Lone Star State roots all the way back to the Texas Revolution; however, his father's job requirements necessitated his leaving Texas and living in eight states before seventh grade. He would reside in Chicago, Illinois; New York, New York; Columbus, Ohio; Detroit, Michigan; and Jackson, Mississippi, before moving back to Lewisville, Texas, for middle school and high school. The tenth grew up in Texas but conducted intrastate relocations every four to five years for his father's career. The eleventh was born and raised in the Houston, Texas, area.

Denominational Influences

Adolescent exposure to denominational influences forms a second area of consideration regarding the development of Christian theology and leadership norms. Five participants grew up consistently in churches affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention. A sixth began his childhood attending Methodist churches, but his family later switched to attending Southern Baptist churches. The seventh noted his father's upbringing in a family boasting several prominent leaders in the Assemblies of God, and he mentioned the work of a Nazarene preacher in his father's conversion. After relocating to Texas to attend an Assembly of God college, his father's experience in reading the Bible led to him to renounce his Pentecostal convictions, embrace Baptist identity, and transfer to a Baptist college in Texas. This research subject

subsequently grew up in Southern Baptist churches. An eighth grew up in Southern Baptist churches and mentioned the influence of the Jesus Movement on his life during his formative years. The ninth grew up in Wesleyan churches and became a Southern Baptist after moving to Texas as a teenager and developing an awareness of what he described as confusion regarding issues of eternal security, God's sovereignty, and the nature of God's faithfulness. The tenth grew up in the Regular Baptist Convention, a group he described as fundamentalist in nature. The denomination later changed its name to the Fellowship of Evangelical Baptists. He did not join the Southern Baptist Convention until moving to Texas as an adult. The eleventh indicated that he grew up in a denomination which he described simply as Christian, but not Baptist.

Conversion Experience

Participant experiences around their conversions to Christianity constitute a third area of consideration further elucidating present perceptions about Christian theology and leadership. All eleven participating faculty members made at least an initial profession of faith in Jesus prior to the conclusion of high school. One simply described his decision as coming to faith at a young age. A second said he trusted Christ for salvation around age six. The event took place when he was alone and had locked himself into the bathroom of his family's house for a time of undisturbed reflection. He expressed that he had been wrestling with acute fear about the possibility of spending eternity in hell—an awareness borne out of the doctrinal stances and preaching ministry of his local church. He placed his faith in Jesus early in life, driven to God out of concern about the horror of eternal separation from God rather than being drawn to the splendor of God's excellencies. He would go on to make a series of choices indicative of

growing spiritual maturity. One of these subsequent waypoints came during his eleventh-grade year when he made a particularly meaningful decision at a revival service that resulted in a deepening commitment to his Christian practice. A third participant responded to series of clear gospel presentations in corporate worship gatherings at six years old, but his father—the pastor—expressed concerns about false assurance of conversion and did not permit him to get baptized until he had been interviewed by a respected Baptist professor.

The fourth participant began following Jesus at eight years old at a camp meeting where like-minded churches gather each summer. A fifth participant expressed interest in following Jesus to his family while they sat at their dinner table when he was eight years old. His parents arranged a meeting with their pastor a couple of days later during which he prayed to receive Christ. A sixth made a profession at a young age but did not understand what his decision entailed. He subsequently attended an open-air revival in a football stadium at the age of nine and, later that evening, he knelt with his father and prayed to receive Jesus. He was baptized soon thereafter. The seventh came to faith in the sixth grade when a school classmate's father, a local Baptist pastor, gifted him a copy of David Wilkerson's *The Cross and the Switchblade*.¹ As he read about the dramatic conversion experience of the protagonist, the research subject followed suit and also trusted Christ for his own salvation.

The eighth trusted Christ during a worship service in the latter half of his sixth-grade year following intentional instruction from two Sunday school teachers at consecutive Baptist churches. He approached the pastor during the call for response toward the end of the worship

¹ David Wilkerson, *The Cross and the Switchblade* (New York: Bernard Geis Associates, 1963).

service and expressed his interest in becoming a Christian. He was baptized two weeks later. The ninth trusted Christ around twelve or thirteen years of age but did not participate in believer's baptism until his grandfather led the ordinance for him in the Jordan River during his senior year of college. The tenth participant experienced the death of a close friend by suicide during a period of high school marked by his rebelliousness, which catalyzed his decision to accept Jesus as Savior at a summer youth camp in east Texas. The eleventh made a first profession of faith when he was "really young" and a second public declaration of faith around fifteen years old at a church revival meeting; however, he assesses that he fully surrendered his life to Christ as a senior in college at one of Bill Gothard's "Basic Institutes" events.

Call to Christian Ministry

Each participant's experience in accepting a call to Christian ministry comprises a fourth area of concentration. The first research subject described a memorable revival service during his childhood marked by an outpouring of the Spirit that took place at a Baptist Church in Texas where his father was pastoring. With the church building occupied one night by a crowd that almost doubled the population of their small town, the participant, at just eight years of age, observed a pastor from a visiting church profess Christ as Savior and get baptized. The interviewee described that pastor's act of obedience in baptism as the catalyst God used to call the participant "to preach," but he did not make that decision public until he was a teenager.

Five research subjects answered a call to ministry during high school. The second participant similarly connected his call to ministry at a revival service—a type of service that he recalled as rare in his congregation. One evening of revival focused on young adults and youth.

The preacher challenged believers to deepen the seriousness with which they followed Christ. An eleventh grader at the time, he indicated that something happened in his heart whereby he became convinced that one day he would be a pastor. The third participant surrendered to a call to ministry leadership at the age of seventeen after a season of intense personal Bible reading. His local church subsequently affirmed the decision by licensing him to preach. A fourth said that he sensed God's call late in high school as he prepared to return to a summer youth camp where he had trusted Christ the summer before. The decision came as a surprise to his parents. The eventual seminary faculty member returned to his local church after camp, told his pastor about his ministry decision, and publicly announced to his local church his intent to pursue a ministry call. The fifth participant preached at a youth event and was encouraged by church members. After two weeks of prayer and seeking the counsel of spiritual mentors, he accepted the call to ministry and shared the decision publicly with his church. His church promptly licensed him for ministry. The sixth experienced what he described as a spiritual outpouring at his Baptist church in Florida late in high school. He described God calling him to ministry, and he responded by enrolling in a Baptist college.

The remaining five assumed ministry leadership paths publicly as young adults. The seventh participant became a worship pastor at a church, which led to licensure and then ordination. The eighth was employed in his community while also taking on roles of spiritual leadership at his church. He attended an event at Ridgecrest Conference Center in Black Mountain, North Carolina, with a group of Sunday school teachers from his church and sensed God's call on his life. He promptly quit his job and moved to seminary to start a master's program. A ninth began a Doctor of Philosophy program at a state university but withdrew after

experiencing some inconsistency between the assumptions undergirding that program and his Christian worldview, so he withdrew and moved to seminary. While completing a master's degree in a field not directly related to ministry, the tenth participant obeyed a clear command from God to move in a different direction. He finished the graduate program in progress despite his diminished interest in the field. After graduation, he started seminary. The eleventh experienced a near fatal health crisis in one of his children's lives. As church leaders supported him and his family in a time of acute need, he realized that God wanted to do something new in their lives. After two years of exploring a call to ministry and receiving the affirmation of people at their church, he accepted a call to ministry at twenty-seven years old, made the decision public to his church, and started seminary.

Most of the eleven participants experienced a wave of affirmation once they publicly declared their decisions to pursue ministry leadership. Support came from a variety of sources including family members, friends, spiritual mentors, church leaders, and fellow church members. Interestingly, four of the eleven participants—36 percent—recounted a discouraging response from at least one of their parents, at least initially. The withholding of parental support created a memorable challenge for those participants.

Family Influence

Family dynamics introduce a fifth area of concentration for understanding the formation of Christian theology and notions of leadership. The first participant described his parents as Christians who worked as teachers and coaches. He prayed and trusted Christ as Savior with his father. Members of his family widely recognized his mother as their spiritual pillar even when

his father went through a spiritually dry season. While morally upright, he described his family as lacking a functional commitment to discipleship. He followed his family's educational footsteps and earned two degrees from his father's alma mater before enrolling in a graduate-level seminary program. He pointed to prominent Christian leaders whose teaching was accessible in that era (e.g., John Piper and Tony Evans) as well as the early Passion conferences as chief influencers in his formation of Christian theology. At the same time, he noticed a pronounced void in influence on Christian leadership and saw this gap filled by sports coaches.

The second participant grew up attending church services and events consistently. As job relocations forced family moves, his father served as deacon or elder in the various churches where they were members. His mother taught Sunday school classes and served as the Vacation Bible School director. All the moves contributed to the research subject being unable to cultivate long-standing pastoral relationships. His primary theological influence came from his parents, whom he described as committed to the authority of the Bible and its truthfulness. His father provided the principal influence in his understanding of leadership stemming both from his local church and professional responsibilities. He described his father's leadership and thinking as methodical, systematic, intentional, and strategic.

The third participant's father served in the Army in Vietnam. Once his father was discharged from military service, their family moved frequently with his father's civilian job. Through these transitory years, he identified his parents and his youth pastor in high school as the primary contributors to his Christian theology. As for leadership influence, he highlighted his father and other sports coaches, many of whom used an overtly authoritarian leadership style.

The fourth participant grew up in a home that he described as saturated with Christian teaching and normalizing excellence in education. His father was a medical doctor and demonstrated a cogent theological framework. His mother was a nurse before stepping away from that career to focus on child-rearing, and she provided most of the biblical teaching to her children. His maternal grandparents were international missionaries for sixty years. The research subject highlighted his maternal grandfather as the most noteworthy theological influence on his upbringing. He identified his home church pastor and his maternal grandfather as the individuals who most shaped his understanding of Christian leadership.

The fifth participant grew up in a traditional Baptist church, but his parents divorced shortly after his profession of faith in Jesus at an early age. As a result, the local church became a source of stability when his family life was challenging. He pointed to Tim Keller as the principal influence in the formation of his Christian theology but clarified that he did not embrace Keller's ecclesiology. He attributed virtue ethics as a system of thought, rather than any given person, as the foremost influence in his understanding of Christian theology.

The sixth participant grew up in a traditional Baptist family with consistent church participation. He described both of his parents as strong Christians. His childhood pastor was at the vanguard of his theological formation along with his copy of the New King James Scofield Reference Bible, which he obtained in his early years and, later in life, his seminary coursework. He identified Ronald Reagan as a paragon of leadership worthy of emulation, and he identified several employment supervisors as poor examples. He indicated that observing Reagan helped him formulate an archetype of what admirable leadership could be.

The seventh participant grew up in a fractured family, living in four different settings before the end of high school. A long-term foster placement with a Christian family provided the context in which he became rooted in Christian identity. Conversations with his uncle in Texas who was a Baptist pastor strengthened his doctrinal convictions. While appreciative of these role models, he highlighted the pulpit ministry of faithful pastors plus his own personal Bible reading as the most notable influences on the formation of his Christian theology. He pointed to his eventual practice of Christian ministry as the most influential force in the formation of his concept of leadership.

The eighth participant grew up in a home in which his mother attended church but his father did not. Interactions with several former Army Chaplains preceded the research subject eventually serving a military career in that same capacity. Rather than specific individuals, he recognized the body of literature produced by many evangelical writers to whom he was exposed as the principal influences on his Christian theology. While he did not identify any clarion influence on his formation in leadership, the leadership principles gleaned from his military service presented as dominant contributors.

The ninth participant's father owned a gas station before serving as a bi-vocational pastor until eighty-five years of age. His family had to work hard to subsist. His father was the principal influence on theology due to his strong emphasis on the gospel in preaching. He described school and athletic experiences in which authority was centralized and set the conditions for the mistreatment of young people by contemporary standards. Within this paradigm, he observed coaches having the foremost influence regarding leadership.

The tenth participant described his adolescent homelife as a peculiar blend of Christian identity and unchristian dysfunction. His parents divorced three years after his birth. He grew up with his father, while his younger brother grew up with their mother. He did not experience regular visitation with his mother and brother while growing up. Amid these circumstances, his paternal grandmother functioned as the family's spiritual leader. His father served in the Army National Guard and stopped attending church for several years after his divorce but kept dropping off his son for church services. The research participant spent summers with grandparents. His paternal grandmother led their church's Vacation Bible School in the summer, and she taught Sunday school throughout the year. His paternal grandfather dropped out of school with a third-grade education to support his family, had a strong influence in their church, taught a men's Sunday school class, and stepped in as music leader when necessary. The participant identified the commitment of his father and paternal grandparents to keep him involved in the local church as an important factor in his theological development, especially until his sixth-grade year when his father started attending church services again, singing in the choir, and eventually remarrying. The primary leadership influence in his life was his father's military model—a complex set of experiences that still have lingering effects on the research participant today. His paternal grandfather, a hardworking sharecropper of meager financial means, taught him leadership by example, including the value of common sense and ingenuity.

The eleventh participant saw his parents consistently involved with local church leadership throughout his life. His father was a deacon, ran the teenage boys' ministry at church for thirty years, and filled in as song leader for corporate worship services when needed. His parents co-led the youth group in a volunteer capacity. His father was a public-school teacher,

and his mother was a homemaker. He experienced spiritual and geographical stability at home. He recounted the value of witnessing his parents' "radical consistency" and lack of hypocrisy in their spiritual practice. His father was the largest theological and leadership influence on his life, followed closely by his uncle.

Role of Crisis

A sixth area of concentration is how crisis experiences contributed to participants' formation in the areas of theology and leadership. Nine out of eleven faculty participants identified at least one pivotal crisis that shaped their Christian theology, leadership, or both. Two participants described being young adults with graduate education in lucrative fields and then deciding to step away from the anticipated financial security to pursue seminary coursework and ministry leadership. Two suffered the pain of watching their Christian parents get a divorce. Two described relocations due to their father's employment and the culture shock that ensued. Two mentioned the way that a near-death experience of an immediate family member paved the way for formative growth in theology and leadership. Two described the impacts of close, personal losses: one who lost a parent to a motor vehicle accident and the other who lost a close friend to suicide.

Athletic Influences

A persistent subtheme in the formation of participants' concept of leadership is the role of coaches and sports teams. The place of athletics was raised by four of eleven—36 percent—of participants without any prompting by the researcher. One participant indicated a dream during high school to become a coach. He worked as a physical education teacher in a public school and

coached women's junior varsity volleyball, men's junior varsity basketball, and varsity baseball. A second participant played Little League baseball and Texas high school football. He acknowledged the role of "coaches, for better or worse" as influencers in his own formation in leadership. Many of his coaches were professing Christians and taught him to work through adversity, lead from one's strengths, persevere through weaknesses, not settle for disrespectful conduct, get up after being knocked down, and never quit.

A third was a three-sport athlete in his Texas high school in baseball, basketball, and football. He observed an authoritarian style of leadership in some of those contexts. He was eventually able to contextualize better the heavy-handed approach once he compared it to his experience with a different high school coach who employed more of a transformational model. He juxtaposed his negative experiences with coaches who normalized yelling and verbally abusing players to his positive experiences with coaches who encouraged players, underscoring his value of leadership models that honor the objects of leadership: the players. A fourth participant mentioned both positive and negative leadership examples observed among his sports coaches from a young age as he grew up in Texas. He attributed the heavy void he experienced in his life regarding empowering leadership to his disappointments in the leadership of certain coaches during his childhood. The trend of exposure to leadership in sports contexts continued through high school and was supplemented by his parents, both of whom, at one point, taught high school athletics.

Early Ministry Leadership Opportunities

Most participants highlighted the way local churches afforded them unusual leadership opportunities at early ages. At the age of eight, one began doing regular evangelistic work among his friends, led many to Christ, and functioned as a de facto chaplain on sports teams through high school. A second participant occupied his first named leadership position in a church at age twelve and was teaching his own Sunday school class at age thirteen. A third preached youth revival services across his state regularly during high school and accepted his first full-time local church pastorate position as a nineteen-year-old undergraduate student. Five other participants mentioned how leading youth or young adult Bible studies when they were in their twenties proved to be formative in their development as ministry practitioners in terms of praxis and the concept of Christian leadership.

Educational Background

The undergraduate majors of the eleven participating faculty members reflect a diverse array of early interests. Three majored in religion with one of those double majoring in physical education. Two majored in Christian ministry. One double majored in Bible and theology. Another majored in biblical studies. One doubled majored in history and English. One studied philosophy. The remaining two were engineering students: one electrical and one metallurgical. Participants finished their undergraduate education at varied institutional types. Four graduated from state universities in British Columbia, Colorado, New Mexico, and Texas. Four graduated from Baptist colleges and universities in Texas. Three graduated from other evangelical colleges in Georgia, Illinois, and Missouri. Two participants started at Baptist colleges and transferred to

other institutions where they ultimately graduated: one to an evangelical institution affiliated with another Protestant denomination and a second one to a state university. Another participant started at a Protestant university before transferring to a different Protestant college where he graduated.

Ten of the eleven participants completed Master of Divinity degrees. Six of these ten earned Master of Divinity degrees from the seminary where they presently teach. Two others earned Master of Divinity degrees from Baptist seminaries other than where they presently teach. Two others earned Master of Divinity degrees from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (TEDS). Seven indicated that they completed standard Master of Divinity tracks that did not include an area of concentration. The three who indicated an area of concentration identified evangelism, theology, and a dual focus on history and New Testament as their fields of special emphasis. The eleventh participant earned a Master of Arts in Religious Education with a concentration in youth ministry from the SBC seminary where he now teaches.

Participants' master's-level educations were not limited to seminary programs. One participant earned a Master of Science in an engineering discipline from a state university before enrolling in a Master of Divinity degree at an SBC seminary. Both participants who earned Master of Divinity degrees from TEDS also earned another master's degree. One holds a Master of Arts in Christian Education from an SBC seminary. The other earned a Master of Arts in philosophy from a state university. One participant earned a Doctor of Philosophy from a Baptist seminary and then went on to earn a Master of Business Administration degree from a Baptist university, which provided his first exposure to leadership theory on an academic level.

Four of the eleven participants earned Doctor of Ministry degrees that included leadership coursework. All four of these professors teach at the institution from which they earned their Doctor of Ministry degree. Two of the eleven earned Doctor of Education degrees, one of whom also holds a Doctor of Ministry degree. Both Doctor of Education graduates described their program as focused on the study of leadership. One of those two graduates teaches currently at the institution from which he earned his Doctor of Education. Six of the eleven participants earned Doctor of Philosophy degrees: two majored in New Testament, one majored in Christian ethics and minored in church history, one majored in systematic theology, one majored in biblical theology, and one majored in leadership studies. Two of these six PhD-level participants teach at the same institution from which they earned their terminal degree.

The five participants with research doctoral degrees in fields other than leadership were quick to acknowledge their academic expertise lies primarily in another discipline.² Three of those eight participants mentioned that most seminaries did not offer leadership tracks in Doctor of Philosophy programs, and the subject of leadership was not a focus of most seminary programs when they were doctoral students. The five faculty members with research doctorates in fields other than leadership described their exposure to leadership literature coming from a combination of sources: master's-level pastoral ministry courses; seminary coursework in other fields (i.e., ethics and history) that assessed exemplars of leadership; and personal experience including personal reading, co-curricular seminary interactions, and service in ministerial and non-ministerial roles. Six of the seven who indicated they had completed courses that included

² Both the Doctor of Education and Doctor of Philosophy are considered research degrees.

leadership theory stated that they were exposed to those theoretical constructs for the first time at the doctoral level. The remaining four participants had no formal history of coursework involving leadership theory.

Leadership Courses Taught

All eleven participants interact with students on the integration of Christian theology and leadership in a variety of academic settings. Master's-level courses currently taught by the participants include Spiritual Leadership, Introduction to Ministry Formation, Reflection on Ministry Formation, Leadership Formation Practicum, Leadership in Ministry Practicum, Ministry Leadership, Church Leadership and Administration, and Strategies of Leadership and Management. As a group, they teach the following classes to professional doctoral students: Principles and Practices of Ministry Supervision, Executive Leadership, Theory and Practice of Ministry and Leadership, The Leader as Strategist, as well as project supervision.³ On the research doctoral front, participants teach Leadership and Management Theory, Theological Foundations for Leadership, and dissertation supervision.

Intersection of Christian Theology and Leadership Theory

Each participant's experience at the intersection of Christian theology and popular leadership theory brings clarity to the academic landscape at these selected Baptist seminaries positioned to serve students and churches in the American Mountain West. Data about these experiences were collected in the second and third faculty interviews. To assist with the

³ The Doctor of Ministry and Doctor of Educational Ministry are considered professional degrees.

correlation of data while still prioritizing individual and institutional anonymity, each of the eleven faculty participants will be referenced by number (e.g., Faculty Participant 1).

Process for Determining Theoretical Compatibility

Participating faculty members started the second interview by considering this question: What process do you use to determine whether a leadership approach, model, or theory is compatible with Christian belief and practice? Faculty Participant 1 indicated a two-pronged test of compatibility. The first element was “biblical alignment and theological alignment,” which he refined with this question: “How does it align with what I understand to be the parameters of Scripture?” The second element in considering compatibility was “effectiveness or outcomes.” He provided a Christian definition of leadership to which he subscribes and by which he assesses any given leadership theory and its outcomes. He questioned the “utility of a leadership model that does not accomplish anything God-sized.” In lockstep with such a spiritual characterization of utility, he confessed a bias for developing spiritual leaders who engage with hurting people over those who devalue such work.

Faculty Participant 2 described a process of determining compatibility chiefly based on whether he trusted the source of the leadership model. He named an influential scholar and a national-level denominational entity as examples of trusted sources. When a source has earned his trust, he described approaching that source’s current and future leadership frameworks with a favorable posture.

Faculty Participant 3 identified The Reflection Loop proposed in *A Guide to Theological Reflection* as the method by which he assesses the compatibility of a given theory with Christian

belief and practice. The reflection loop model identifies the influence of “beliefs, thoughts, and feelings” on actions, aligns those actions “to our best understanding of God’s truth,” and explores “possibilities for future ministry responses.”⁴ Faculty Participant 4 demonstrated a general commitment to using the Bible to evaluate the consistency of a leadership model with his Christian worldview, but he did not articulate a more detailed assessment process.

Faculty Participant 5 stated that he approaches “all the body of knowledge related to research and practice of leadership theories as being a subset underneath the theological.” He indicated that one’s “underlying theology” constitutes “the starting place” for rightly considering and navigating the compatibility of any given leadership theory. Key theological elements for evaluating leadership theory includes one’s beliefs about God, God’s mission, and how humans derive their identity.

Faculty Participant 6 admitted that he has neither developed nor adopted any specific process for assessing the theological compatibility of leadership theories. While commenting on his approach, he mentioned “servant leadership specifically focusing on Jesus Christ.” He also defined transformational leadership as his desire “to transform and influence students and people around me” and said it was one of his core values. These examples communicate a practice of appropriating selected leadership theories that can be viewed through a lens of Christian theology. He added that he employs leadership frameworks to bolster the terminal learning objective of self-awareness about God’s past, present, and future work in students’ life.

⁴ Wilson and Waggoner, 43.

Faculty Participant 7 proffered a framework for analyzing the compatibility of leadership theories that uses a series of graduated theological tests. The outer ring or first test is “does [the theory] direct a person or require oneself to do something that is flatly forbidden in Scripture?” He clarified his intent for the outer ring by saying, “If [the theory] violates that initial standard, then you do not go any deeper with it” and provided examples such as models that direct the manipulation of people, use of deception, and affirmation of biblically prohibited behavior patterns. If that test is passed, then this second ring is considered: “Does the theory in question rest on presuppositions that are deeply problematic for a Christian?” If that test is satisfied, then one can move beyond moral acceptability to determine compatibility on an individualized basis using this third question, “Does [the theory] fit you as a person?” This third test considers the practitioner’s personality type.

Faculty Participant 8 admitted to not having “any formalized process.” Instead, he endeavors to understand each theory “on its own terms.” When he engages theories to develop a casual appreciation of its content, then he tries to “compare [the theory] to Scripture and theology and Christian experience and try to discern in what ways [the theory] can be affirmed, in what ways it needs to be denied, in what ways it can be amended or modified.” He inferred that when he approaches a theory for a more technical understanding, then a more critical review is required.

Faculty Participant 9 identified two facets of his process. First, he appeals to the preeminence of biblical authority compared with other sources of authority. He posited, “Do the areas within a contemporary leadership theory match up with a biblical understanding of what it means to follow Jesus?” He continued that first line of inquiry by asking about the essence of

leading God's people and what is the end goal of leadership. Christians must compare theoretical claims to the biblical teaching. The second facet he highlighted was the extent to which the theory aligns with "Western evangelical orthodoxy" and, for him as a Baptist scholar, "evangelical Baptist orthodoxy." This doctrinal test often invites discussion regarding topics such as soteriology, ecclesiology, and church polity. Faculty Participant 10 said he follows an Augustinian model from which he argues for a right use of general revelation including its proper value and limits. From this posture, he allows "for a chastened use of worldly learning" by which his understanding of general revelation leads him to contend that "there are certain principles that a Christian can use that are gained from an investigation of the world around us."

Faculty Participant 11 described a process whereby he determines whether a given theory comes from a theological center or an anthropological center. He considers models that originate out of a humanist approach to be flawed, and he cannot accept those theories for full appropriation or employ the theories as presented. Nevertheless, he appreciates the sound principles that can be appropriated biblically from these flawed theories for use in Christian service. Rather than employing a process of theoretical adaptation or appropriation, he described his process as starting from a theological center and adding redeemable elements of flawed leadership theories to a patently Christian understanding of leadership. This fixed theological foundation allows him to assess theoretical content for consistency with biblical truth.

Theory Compatibility Requirements

Participating faculty members next considered this question: In your experience, how compatible must a leadership approach, model, or theory be with Christian orthodoxy to warrant

commending its use to seminary students? Faculty Participant 1 roots his compatibility requirement in foundational questions such as, To what end do Christian churches and ministries exist? While he stops short of discrediting leadership constructs simply because they are popular in the marketplace, he does not assume that those same models are capable of achieving biblical ends regarding the mobilization of people to participate in the realization of God's agenda. When churches become viewed more as corporate institutions, then he indicated that popular leadership theories become increasingly sufficient to accomplish the associated aims; however, pastors tethered to a self-concept of biblical servanthood and humility often find popular leadership theories lacking for reaching the highest ends.

Faculty Participant 2 said a given leadership theory must be "completely compatible" with Christian orthodoxy to warrant commending its use to seminary students. A lack of harmony with biblical truth, in his experience, would necessitate rejection rather than theoretical modification. He demands that leadership theories meet a standard of being "very compatible," and he avoids those that fail to pass this test.

Faculty Participant 3 saw no need to assess a leadership theory's compatibility to prove its usefulness. He appealed to the source of truth—God, who maintains superintendence over all truth. The research subject preferred to assess leadership theories based on how helpful they are at elucidating truth. Some models demonstrate truth, and some merely outline the contours of truth, illustrating error. In this way, he suggested that all leadership frameworks have some value for training Christian ministry leaders. In stratifying degrees of theoretical usefulness, he shared his aim to teach students how to utilize leadership theories to solve present and future problems efficiently.

Faculty Participant 4 conveyed that a leadership theory must be compatible with “Christian morals and values” before the approach warrants commendation to seminary students for use. He then provided several examples of leadership practice from his experience that violated those boundaries. He did not specify the degree of compatibility that a theory would require to meet his morals and values standard.

Faculty Participant 5 expressed a three-pronged test for determining sufficient compatibility for commendation. One test considers the “foundational truth assumptions” of the theory and requires that they “be totally in alignment with the character and nature and mission of God” as defined by Christian Scripture. Extrabiblical theories assessed to achieve this level of alignment can be commended to seminary students. By comparison, “if the founding assumptions or the truth claims or the true assumptions are at odds with the character, nature, and the design of God, then I would discard it out of hand.” A second test looks at the ways a theory could be used to advance the gospel and necessitates a methodology that is “compatible with the character and nature of God.” The final test is teleological and preserves a general openness to ideas regardless of their source provided they are effectively advancing the “gospel mission.”

Faculty Participant 6 affirmed the need for theological compatibility. How much compatibility is a function of the practitioner’s ability to adapt or modify a leadership theory originating outside the Christian community in a way that draws it into conformity with Christian orthodoxy. Given that he indicated theoretical adaptation to achieve congruity with biblical core values as a regular part of his practice, the threshold for establishing theological compatibility for any given leadership theory generally appeared to be in range.

Faculty Participant 7 championed the need for emphasizing a holistic Christian anthropology when determining the leadership theories worthy of commendation to seminary students. In his experience, theoretical approaches that cater to behavioral modification instead of spiritual transformation miss the strategic priority of discipling fellow image-bearers. This disciple-making priority comported to what he described as “a fuller spectrum approach to people” that predicates sustained right praxis on a regenerated ontological condition.

Faculty Participant 8 called for wide appropriation of worldly wisdom provided the plundered content meets the standard of “usefulness.” The manner of applying appropriated content must be characterized by thoughtfulness and prudence to safeguard important theological limits. He affirmed the wariness of some regarding “the wrong appropriation of a secular principle or any kind of extrabiblical thought” while maintaining a hopeful outlook on the prognosis for constructive and extensive acquisition.

Faculty Participant 9 expects commended elements of leadership theories to be compatible with Scripture and confessional statements to include *The Baptist Faith and Message 2000*. Against that theological backdrop, he does not experience a sense of obligation to commend any leadership theory in its original form to students. This lack of compulsion to recommend leadership theories for use in the life of the church extends to models more commonly embraced by the Christian community such as servant leadership, shepherd leadership, and transformational leadership. In summary, he argued that any theory adopted in wholesale or piecemeal form must be compatible with Christian orthodoxy to be commendable.

Faculty Participant 10 founds his response in general revelation and experiences a sense of responsibility to ensure that any assessed leadership principle or philosophy does not

contradict Scripture. He expressed a cognizance to avoid the use of “a poor hermeneutic to find a leadership principle.” In assessing theoretical approaches to leadership for potential trajectories that might lead into heresy, he draws a distinction between “ontology and economy (or ontology and function): beingness and what does it do.” A framework possessing a genuine biblical anthropology is a place from which he can work and then determine whether the model leads “to some form of a heretical trajectory.”

Faculty Participant 11 varies the compatibility threshold based on the theological maturity of the students he is teaching. For example, the theological sophistication of undergraduate students might not warrant commending certain leadership principles or systems, whereas doctoral students could be expected to demonstrate a level of erudition commensurate with more advanced concepts. Acknowledging this scaled application, he is “always looking to redeem elements of the things around [him] from a biblical perspective.” His work of theoretical redemption does not mandate that an approach be accepted completely, but rather he searches for “attributes of the model that are beneficial for me in the process of leadership or management.”

Perceptions of Incongruity between Theology and Theory

The next inquiry invited participating faculty members to respond to this question: Do you ever experience a feeling of reticence in introducing one or more modern theories of leadership to seminary students because of perceived incongruity between the theory and your biblical worldview? Faculty Participant 1 experiences no reticence in introducing modern leadership theories provided that a careful critique of the theory follows. Faculty Participant 2 has limited experience with introducing contemporary leadership models of leadership because

he tends to introduce models that come from trusted denominationally aligned sources. He indicated no hesitation in his experience using those models. Faculty Participant 3 has experienced feelings of reticence but does not always act on that feeling when interacting with students on leadership topics. He often introduces theoretical concepts that extend beyond his own preferential boundaries. Personal feelings of reticence due to theological reservations do not necessarily impact the scope of content that he presents for shaping ministry leaders because theology and leadership theory have distinct functions in his view. The former commends “what is right,” and the latter suggests “what is likely to work.”

Faculty Participant 4 experiences no reticence in introducing leadership content provided it represents that area of overlap between accepted theology and useful theory. His pace of theoretical introduction is a function of his assessment of student theological maturity. Faculty Participant 5 experiences no hesitation in introducing modern leadership theories, but he does experience reluctance when imagining that he might not have taught some of his students well enough to assess critically a concept or theory of leadership on theological grounds. Faculty Participant 6 did not recall an experience of reticence in introducing content, but he is aware that he does not need to tout things that do not line up with his “core biblical values.” For example, he has introduced useful content authored by Steven Covey despite the intense theological concerns that Baptists would hold regarding Covey’s theological stances.

Faculty Participant 7 does not have a history of introducing contemporary leadership theories in classroom settings, but he regularly interacts with professional and research doctoral students who are considering projects and dissertations associated with contemporary leadership theory. Faculty Participant 8 acknowledged reticence in introducing certain modern leadership

theories to students. Faculty Participant 9 identified no reticence in introducing contemporary leadership theories because he wants his “students to read widely” and “to understand full concepts.” He is “not hesitant” because the exposure helps students “wrestle with the tension of what they do and what they do not believe, and what is applicable and not applicable to them as Christian leaders.” He takes ownership of his responsibility to guide classroom discussions toward biblical truth and Christian orthodoxy. He remains concerned that some students might interpret a secular theory in a Christian context in a “wrong way” or have concerns about presented material that do not get resolved in a spirit of collegiality.

Faculty Participant 10 is “not going to be reticent to introduce [modern leadership theories] at all,” but each theory is coupled with critique. His theoretical criticisms often stem from Christological, anthropological, and general revelation angles and allow for a chastened view of a theory that does not dismiss the theory’s utility based on the identification of concomitant heretical elements. Faculty Participant 11 introduces modern leadership theories willingly but calls attention to theoretical elements of each model that he finds incompatible with a Christian worldview. In this process, he admitted feeling “hesitant at points” but balances that sentiment through honesty about theoretical strengths and weaknesses. A contributing factor, in his experience, is the accuracy of terms. He provided an example of the divergence in meaning between *servant leadership*—a term which is regularly used in Christian circles—and *biblical servanthood*.

Theoretical Contextualization

Participating faculty members next considered this question: Do you ever feel compelled to—or do you in fact—excuse, defend, or otherwise contextualize leadership theories in light of your biblical worldview? Faculty Participant 1 assessed that he is “not excusing unbiblical theory” to the extent that he can attain a truthful self-awareness. He identified the need for colleagues and friends who assist in character development, a careful examination of his presuppositions to ensure consistency with biblical fidelity, and the avoidance of siloed leadership. In this context, he professed a history of contextualizing leadership theories. Faculty Participant 2 has observed some modification of contemporary leadership theory in his institution’s curriculum during his tenure, and he has taught one theologically adapted theory to students. He does not, however, have a history of contextualizing leadership theories.

Faculty Participant 3 indicated that he has felt compulsion to excuse, defend, or otherwise contextualize leadership theories; however, he does not tend to act on those feelings. He sees “no need to Christianize theory. No need at all.” Instead, he aims to shape leaders who can engage leadership theories and draw their own conclusions. Faculty Participant 4 limits the inclusion of modern leadership theory in his curriculum, and to the extent that contemporary models get presented, he does not excuse, defend, or contextualize them. He does not perceive leadership theory as having a profundity or a “significant theological component” apart from critiquing clear abuses of authority. Faculty Participant 5 does not excuse or defend leadership theories, but he reflects on contextualization and concludes “we are always doing that.” He then illustrated the point by demonstrating how he assesses emotional intelligence considering general revelation and argued that this concept has “something to contribute to the conversation” in theologically

significant matters. The rubric for contextualization is “the truth of the gospel and the mission of God.” The contextualization can happen in both ways in his experience. One effort starts with the trust of God and sees ideas originate from that point. The other tack is to assess that something works and then investigate the biblical compatibility of the system.

Faculty Participant 6 also rejected defending and excusing but indicated that he “would feel compelled to contextualize” leadership content through the lens of Christian theology. Faculty Participant 7 described working with students who are contextualizing leadership theories on theological and cultural grounds. He did not provide an answer on his own experience regarding theoretical contextualization. Faculty Participant 8 showed his commitment to contextualization by stating, “The answer is always—without fail.” He expressed neither a willingness to commend leadership theories to students in their unmodified form nor encourage their implementation. On the contrary, he declared, “I will always say that it must be considered captive to your Christian theology, your philosophy of ministry, and discipleship. And, so, it will always be contextualized in some way.”

Faculty Participant 9 affirmed contextualization also by saying, “Yes, I do that.” He went on to explain, “I will try as best I can to contextualize it theologically, theoretically, practically, within the context of what we consider to be Christian orthodoxy in our worldview and to be able to say, here is a statement that is made within the context of this theory that is true to an extent as it matches up against what we believe as Christ-followers.” His practice is to invite students to wrestle with theories, compare them to Scripture, and identify compatible elements of the theory. Faculty Participant 10 indicated that he contextualizes certain leadership theories and provided an example. Leadership approaches must be filtered “through the lens of Scripture” and

reviewed “to ensure that what lays at the foundation is our core Christian beliefs. How do we view the world? How do we view other people? How do we view ourselves? How do we view the responsibility of leadership?” In the example of contextualization he offered, he identified Christological and anthropological issues with a certain model and argued that beneficial elements of the model remain useful. In his words, “There are some things that we can gain from those who may not necessarily come from a Christian perspective, and yet they help us critique ourselves in terms of how we might be more effective without being biblically unfaithful.” Faculty Participant 11 also found value in secular theories for those analysts who have a firm biblical foundation. He saw no need to defend secular theoretical systems. His role redeems those “things that are consistent with our biblical understanding of truth.” As a separate example, he introduced Bolsinger’s *Canoeing the Mountains* and compared that author’s application of adaptive leadership theory to his own practice of contextualization. In the end, the research subject commended contextualizing theory and advocating for the utility of the redeemable components.

Use of Biblical Examples

Participating faculty members next considered this question: Do you ever strive to—or do you—use biblical examples of modern leadership theories? Faculty Participant 1 indicated that he uses “biblical examples all the time” to discuss spiritual leadership, but he does not use biblical characters to illustrate modern leadership theories. Faculty Participant 2 recalled only one memory of using a biblical character in his leadership coursework: Jesus, who illustrates the four stages of the situational leadership model. Faculty Participant 3 uses biblical characters due

to student familiarity with those figures but not “to give the theories credibility.” He clarified further, “I feel no need to give theory credibility, nor do I feel need to give theology credibility.”

Faculty Participant 4 suggested that he does introduce biblical characters as examples of modern leadership theories. Faculty Participant 5 introduces biblical characters in his leadership coursework “both as good examples and what not to do. . .but I do not necessarily link them or connect them with modern theories so much.” Faculty Participant 6 indicated that he does “use biblical examples” to illustrate general concepts of spiritual leadership more so than specific leadership theories. He did, however, appear to make exceptions for servant leadership and transformational leadership, for which he suggested Joshua and Moses as exemplars.

Faculty Participant 7 encouraged the illustrative use of biblical material but questioned the legitimacy of starting with a leadership theory and then attaching biblical content to validate said theory. A text may not principally address the topic of leadership, but it may hold implications for the practice of leadership. Moreover, he strongly supported exegeting leadership principles from the Bible. As an example, he noted how 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians are replete with “secular and sacred leadership dynamics” that speak to how the churches under Paul’s influence were to be led. Faculty Participant 8 stated that he does use biblical examples of contemporary leadership models “in the sense that I think that any genuine benefit of appropriating a modern leadership theory should have some kind of biblical rationale.” He appealed to narrative and descriptive texts as options. He contended, on the other hand, that Christian practitioners of leadership do not “have to have an example of a leader in Scripture applying some particular paradigm or method for it to be considered useful.”

Faculty Participant 9 revealed that he uses biblical examples of modern leadership theory but “in more of a character study format” than in an illustrative manner. He invites students to consider how modern theories apply to biblical scenarios and to wrestle with the conduct of biblical characters when elements of leadership theories are encountered in Scripture. Faculty Participant 10 also uses biblical examples “to the degree that they are illustrative.” He advised against employing a poor hermeneutic that would be understood to support attempting to extract leadership principles out of biblical texts that are not fundamentally about leadership. Faculty Participant 11 revealed that he uses biblical examples and often finds good and beneficial elements to glean from these historical figures. Except in the case of Jesus, he said this usage stops short of creating a rule prescribing the leadership actions of biblical characters.

Practice of Theoretical Modification

Participating faculty members continued the second interview by considering this question: Should you assess a leadership approach, model, or theory to require modification—a process of Christianization—to achieve adequate conformity to Christian orthodoxy before being employed, how do you go about the work of modification? Faculty Participant 1 preferred carefully assessing leadership theories to determine theological congruency rather than modifying them to make them congruent. To the extent that compatible elements are identified in a theory, those aspects are open for incorporation. To illustrate his process, he celebrated Tod Bolsinger’s approach with adaptive leadership theory in *Canoeing the Mountains*. The research subject described his own process using an agricultural metaphor in which he discards the chaff surrounding a seed and harvests the nutritious grain. He expressed concern with the idea of

Christianizing a secular theory because doing so might give “the false impression that a student should go buy that book and immerse themselves in the study of that theory where it may not be as helpful as encouraging them in a different direction.” Faculty Participant 2 had no history of personally modifying leadership theories to fit his seminary teaching context, but he had observed at least one respected colleague modify and then use a variant of situational leadership theory.⁵ While the research subject had used this modified theory in his courses, he believed he could accomplish the same teaching objectives without modifying a leadership theory.

Faculty Participant 3 clarified that he does not modify theories. If the theory as a whole or elements of the theory are incompatible with Christian—or Baptist—orthodoxy, then he “will either lay it out where it is incompatible or get the candidates to discern that on their own.”

Faculty Participant 4 simply responded about the prospect of theoretical modification by saying, “That is not a concern that I have.” Faculty Participant 5 would approach the work of theoretical modification with this guiding question: “Does this theory advance the gospel?” Tethered to his perspective on common grace, he called for reviewing the theory with discernment and considering whether the theory contained beneficial elements. The earthly source of the truth mattered to him less than the essence, person, character, and nature of God from whom all truth ultimately originates and receives validation. Such a stance opposes the penchant of some to reject secular theories out of hand. He prefers to “take what you can learn and utilize it, baptize it, missionalize it, and. . .put the asterisk by it” that categorizes content into ideas capable of being redeemed for use and those required to be rejected. His technique is to “link [ideas] with

⁵ Paul H. Hersey, Kenneth H. Blanchard, and Dewey E. Johnson, *Management of Organizational Behavior: Leading Human Resources*, 10th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2012).

what we already know to be true about God, and, if that linkage is hard to make, well then maybe we should set that idea aside if we cannot make that linkage.”

Faculty Participant 6 stated the modification sequence with Bible authority by asking, What does the text say? Leadership constructs that contain “biblical truth” are eligible for adaptation or contextualization for leader development in Christian contexts, even if they originate from non-Christian beginnings. If the leadership concept can be brought into alignment with the biblical text through modification, then “it is fair game for use.” On reflection, he surmised that this process of modification is a somewhat regular part of his practice. Faculty Participant 7 questioned whether some leadership theories could be modified adequately to fit the Christian community. Some ideas cannot be Christianized “successfully without just making it into something totally different.” For those theories possessing a sufficient vestige of redeemable material, the process of modification begins with two steps. The first is assessing “the downrange objective” of the model. The objective of the approach must have a moral quality that exceeds mere neutrality. The second is reviewing “how you are going to get there.” To be eligible for modification, the methodology of a given theory must remain inside biblical guardrails.

Faculty Participant 8 described that the modification process begins by understanding the worldview associated with this leadership concept. Models making assertions about what is “good, true, and beautiful” as well as “ultimate things” express a theology. Theories suggesting humankind’s chief goal lay claim to some variety of teleology and eschatology. Approaches commenting on human nature, relationship, and conditions for flourishing have an anthropology. Frameworks identifying a problem that needs to be addressed have a hamartiology, and those

suggesting solutions to that problem wade into soteriology. As these elements are identified and explored, he decides on the extent to which the construct is “roughly aligned with Christianity.” Any process of modification begins from that place of understanding. Faculty Participant 9 concluded that “this transition point from theory to practicality in the life of the church has to go through some type of modification—some type of contextualization to the local church” since “most leadership theories have not been developed by Christians.” He raised the example of Tod Bolsinger who, in his estimation, “has done a great job in baptizing Heifetz and Linsky's work out of Harvard on adaptive leadership to contextualize it to the local church” in *Canoeing the Mountains*. He suggested Bolsinger “has done something that could be inspirational to other scholars in the Christian world by taking these ideas and bringing them into the life of the church so they can be applicable.” Following Bolsinger, he called for the baptism of secular theory to increase the exposure of church leaders to leadership theories beyond servant, shepherd, and transformational leadership concepts. His process of modification involves testing a theory against biblical teaching and doctrinal positions, identifying and correcting theological gaps, and delivering the adapted theory to the Christian community for practical application.

Faculty Participant 10 urged Christians to approach the work of modification by reading broadly the scholarship of those outside their own theological camp to include the works of secularists. He qualified this exhortation by extolling a scaled approach to reading that factors in theological maturity. In this way, he called believers to “read texts of unbelievers and see what principles we may be able to use or use them to either strengthen our own theological persuasions and why we believe that doing it from a Christian worldview is a much better approach.” He gathered that the Holy Spirit could use these experiences to engender either

learning from those divergent authors or “deepen our own convictions about why we approach it the way that we approach it.” Faculty Participant 11 shunned the notion of modifying or Christianizing leadership theory and argued instead for “trying to flip it and glean things from it that can help connect to my biblical worldview.” Rather than force what he described as a square peg into a round hole, he described a process of gathering and gleaning “truths in these systems that are biblically accurate and true and useful” for Christians. The process of gathering and gleaning “goes back to knowing the Scriptures, knowing the truth of God’s word, and really knowing your Bible well to be able to come back and see, is this consistent with who God has called us to be?” He appropriates content from a perspective of biblical consistency rather than “trying to Christianize something that is a secular model.”

Scholarly Influences

The second interview then invited participating faculty members to consider this question: Which scholars and sources most influenced your current thinking about the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory? Faculty Participant 1 began by describing J. Oswald Sanders as a pioneer in the field with his book *Spiritual Leadership*.⁶ He also commended the profound influence of Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby’s book *Spiritual Leadership* on his thinking.⁷ Considering the two most recent decades, he pointed to the

⁶ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership: Principles of Excellence for Every Believer* (Chicago: Moody, 2017).

⁷ Henry T. Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership: Moving People onto God’s Agenda*, rev. ed. (Nashville: B&H, 2011).

impact of Aubrey Malphurs's book *Being Leaders*.⁸ Beyond *Canoeing the Mountains*, he complimented Bolsinger's recent four-part series.⁹ He knew of no other monograph that uses secular theory as skillfully as Bolsinger's and "addresses trauma in life as shaping who we are and how to actually incorporate that in our leadership." Another work that had proven significant in his experience is Gary McIntosh and Samuel Rima's *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership*.¹⁰ He reflected fondly on the "tremendous effect" that John Piper's *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals* had on his understanding of leadership.¹¹ Other Christian and non-Christian authors whom he considered helpful in harmonizing leadership with theology are Kent Humphreys's *Shepherding Horses*; Patrick Lencioni's *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*; Bill Haslam's *Faithful Presence*; Robert Welch's *Church Administration*, the most recent edition of which was co-authored with Jody Dean; Clay Scroggins's *How to Lead When You're Not in*

⁸ Aubrey Malphurs, *Being Leaders: The Nature of Authentic Christian Leadership* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003).

⁹ Tod Bolsinger, *How Not to Waste a Crisis: Quit Trying Harder* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2024); Tod Bolsinger, *Invest in Transformation: Quit Relying on Trust* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2024); Tod Bolsinger, *Leading through Resistance: Quit Pushing Back* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2024); Tod Bolsinger, *The Mission Always Wins: Quit Appeasing Stakeholders* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2024).

¹⁰ Gary L. McIntosh and Samuel D. Rima, *Overcoming the Dark Side of Leadership: How to Become an Effective Leader by Confronting Potential Failures*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007).

¹¹ John Piper, *Brothers, We Are Not Professionals: A Plea to Pastors for Radical Ministry*, rev. ed. (Nashville: B&H, 2013).

Charge; John Kotter’s *Our Iceberg is Melting*, co-authored with Holger Rathgeber; and *The Leadership Challenge* by James Kouzes and Barry Posner.¹²

Faculty Participant 2 identified the effect of Doran McCarty’s body of scholarship on his evolution of thought related to the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory. Three of Jeff Iorg’s books made his list: *Leading Major Change*, *Character of Leadership*, and *Seasons of a Leader’s Life*.¹³ He found Mike Bonem and Roger Patterson to demonstrate “a grasp on our role as ministry leaders despite our position in the organization” in *Leading from the Second Chair*, which helped him understand that element of praxis from a theological perspective.¹⁴ He has enjoyed drawing from Lencioni’s works—especially *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* and *Silos, Politics and Turf Wars*.¹⁵ The last two books that he highlighted as helpful at this

¹² Kent Humphreys, *Shepherding Horses: Understanding God’s Plan for Transforming Leaders*, vol. 1 (Oklahoma City: Lifestyle Impact, 2010); Patrick Lencioni, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2002); Bill Haslam, *Faithful Presence: The Promise and the Peril of Faith in the Public Square* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2021); Robert H. Welch and Jody D. Dean, *Church Administration: Creating Efficiency for Effective Ministry*, 3rd ed. (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2025); Clay Scroggins, *How to Lead When You’re Not in Charge: Leveraging Influence When You Lack Authority* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017); John Kotter and Holger Rathgeber, *Our Iceberg is Melting: Changing and Succeeding under Any Conditions* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2017); James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations*, 7th ed. (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2023).

¹³ Iorg, *Leading Major Change*; Jeff Iorg, *Character of Leadership: Nine Qualities That Define Great Leaders* (Nashville: B&H, 2007); Jeff Iorg, *Seasons of a Leader’s Life: Learning, Leading, and Leaving a Legacy* (Nashville: B&H, 2013).

¹⁴ Mike Bonem and Roger Patterson, *Leading from the Second Chair: Serving Your Church, Fulfilling Your Role, and Realizing Your Dreams* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2020).

¹⁵ Lencioni, *Five Dysfunctions of a Team*. Patrick Lencioni, *Silos, Politics and Turf Wars: A Leadership Fable about Destroying the Barriers That Turn Colleagues into Competitors* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006).

intersection point are *Advanced Strategic Planning* by Aubrey Malphurs and *Leadership Mosaic* by Daniel Montgomery.¹⁶

Faculty Participant 3 singled out the constructive effect of theologian Earl Waggoner on the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory. Waggoner serves as Dean of the School of Biblical and Theological Studies at Colorado Christian University.¹⁷ Faculty Participant 4 praised the work of Robert Greenleaf in *Servant Leadership* and a variety of authors who have published on the application of that theory. Faculty Participant 5 noted the influence of transformational leadership theory which wrestles with the essence of Christian leadership. He appreciated what he has learned from *Harvard Business Review* and described it as “some of the better thinking that is out there in the domain of leadership.” He has gleaned from Robert Kaplan and David Norton’s *The Balanced Scorecard* and mentioned that he had Christianized some of these authors’ ideas for use in Christian contexts.¹⁸

Faculty Participant 6 lauded the influence of Iorg’s *Character of Leadership*, as well as Jim Wilson, Waggoner, Lencioni, Malphurs, and Reggie McNeal.¹⁹ He praised the depth of Wilson’s thinking, which had helped him “with leadership and critically thinking through

¹⁶ Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A 21st-Century Model for Church and Ministry Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013). Daniel Montgomery, *Leadership Mosaic: 5 Leadership Principles for Ministry and Everyday Life* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016).

¹⁷ “Faculty Spotlight: Dr. Earl Waggoner,” Colorado Christian University, accessed December 25, 2025, <https://www.ccu.edu/spotlights/faculty/ewaggoner>.

¹⁸ Robert S. Kaplan and David P. Norton, *The Balanced Scorecard: Translating Strategy into Action* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1996).

¹⁹ Iorg, *Character of Leadership*. Wilson and Waggoner.

leadership.” He mentioned the strong work of Will Mancini in *Church Unique* and *God Dreams* (co-authored with Warren Bird) as well as Mac Brunson and James Bryant’s *The New Guidebook for Pastors*.²⁰ Faculty Participant 7 assigned “intensive studies of 1 and 2 Corinthians, commentaries, [and] monographs” with the distinction of the foremost influence on his current thinking about the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory. Other more recent commentaries have contributed to his understanding of Christian leadership, and two were at the top of his mind: Andrew Clarke’s *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth* and Timothy Savage’s *Power through Weakness*.²¹

Faculty Participant 8 appealed first to the influence of Tim Keller, about whom he said, “I just do not think anyone has done that better from a reformed evangelical perspective in recent years” regarding cultural and contextual thinking. Secondly, he referenced a more obscure work by Craig Hamilton titled *Wisdom in Leadership*.²² The research subject summarized Hamilton’s position as one that accepts concepts from all sources and seeks a path for making the ideas “useful and helpful in the ministry context if we do not take it too far.” He also recognized Justin

²⁰ Will Mancini, *Church Unique: How Missional Leaders Cast Vision, Capture Culture and Create Movement* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008); Will Mancini and Warren Bird, *God Dreams: 12 Vision Templates for Finding and Focusing Your Church’s Future* (independently published, 2016); Mac Brunson and James Bryant, *The New Guidebook for Pastors* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007).

²¹ Andrew C. Clarke, *Secular and Christian Leadership in Corinth: A Socio-Historical and Exegetical Study of 1 Corinthians 1–6* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006). Timothy B. Savage, *Power through Weakness: Paul’s Understanding of the Christian Ministry in 2 Corinthians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

²² Craig Hamilton, *Wisdom in Leadership: The How and Why of Leading the People You Serve* (Sydney: Matthias Media, 2015).

Irving as an influential figure in this space who is “really explicitly interacting with leadership theories on the terms of leadership theorists and thinking of them in Christian perspective.”

From a secular perspective, Faculty Participant 9 commented on the value of Heifetz and Marty Linsky’s work on adaptive leadership and John Kotter’s *Leading Change*.²³ He referenced Greenleaf’s Christian perspective and his contribution around servant leadership, Barbara Kellerman’s *Followership*, and Ira Chaleff’s work on followership.²⁴ He spoke well of the influence of Bolsinger’s work and that of Blackaby and Blackaby as well as Michael Hyatt on vision; Carey Nieuwhof on time, energy, and self-management; Gene Wilkes on servant leadership; and Northouse on theory summarization.²⁵

Faculty Participant 10 underscored the edifying effect that Rick Langer and John Shoup’s scholarship have had on his current thinking about the intersection of Christian theology and

²³ Heifetz; Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line: Staying Alive through the Dangers of Leading* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2002); Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky; John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2012).

²⁴ Greenleaf; Barbara Kellerman, *Followership: How Followers Are Creating Change and Changing Leaders* (Boston: Harvard Business Review Press, 2008); Ronald E. Riggio, Ira Chaleff, and Jean Lipman-Blumen, eds., *The Art of Followership: How Great Followers Create Great Leaders and Organizations* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008); Ira Chaleff, *The Courageous Follower: Standing Up to and for Our Leaders*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2009).

²⁵ Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains*; Blackaby and Blackaby; Michael Hyatt, *The Vision Driven Leader: 10 Questions to Focus Your Efforts, Energize Your Team, and Scale Your Business* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2025); Carey Nieuwhof, *At Your Best: How to Get Time, Energy, and Priorities Working in Your Favor* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2021); C. Gene Wilkes, *Jesus on Leadership: Timeless Wisdom on Servant Leadership* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 1998); Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 10th ed.

leadership theory.²⁶ He also introduced the work of Franklin Markow, who engages organizational leadership using secular theory and general revelation from a Pentecostal perspective.²⁷

Faculty Participant 11 spoke of the profound influence Michael Wilder, who presently serves as Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at Charleston Southern University, has had on his thinking in this area.²⁸ He finds Timothy Paul Jones's definition of leadership published in *The God Who Goes before You* to be a foundational place from which he starts evaluating leadership theories: "The Christ following leader living as a bearer of God's image in union with Christ and his people develops a diverse community of fellow laborers who are equipped and empowered to pursue shared goals that fulfill the creation mandate and the Great Commission in submission to the Word of God."²⁹ He also appreciated the work of Aubrey Malphurs, Gene Wilkes, Timothy Lanick's *Shepherd after My Own Heart*, and some of Ken Blanchard's work.³⁰

²⁶ John S. Burns, John R. Shoup, and Donald C. Simmons Jr., eds., *Organizational Leadership: Foundations and Practices for Christians* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2014). Rick Langer contributed chapter 2.

²⁷ Franklin A. Markow, *Organizational Behavior in Christian Perspective: Theory and Practice for Church and Ministry Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2024).

²⁸ "A New Provost Chosen for CSU," Charleston Southern University, March 24, 2023, <https://www.charlestonsouthern.edu/new-provost-chosen-for-csu>.

²⁹ Timothy Paul Jones and Michael S. Wilder, *The God Who Goes before You: Pastoral Leadership and Christ-Centered Followership* (Nashville: B&H, 2018), 16, Kindle.

³⁰ Timothy S. Laniak, *Shepherds after My Own Heart: Pastoral Traditions and Leadership in the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006).

Baptist Scholarship Observations

The second interview concluded by asking the participating faculty members this question: In your experience, how do you observe Baptist scholars addressing the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory? Faculty Participant 1 said he observes Baptist engagement of leadership as “fine,” but he remains concerned about the need for more emphasis on the self-sacrificial character necessary to undergird good leadership. He calls for less emphasis on “servant leadership” and more focus on “shepherding” and “pastoring God’s people.” He urged the promotion of leadership that is bonded inextricably to Christian character. Faculty Participant 2 has observed far too few Baptist seminaries benefiting from participation in the Evangelical Association of Theological Field Educators, a caucus group of the Association of Theological Field Education.³¹ He indicated that all schools accredited by the Association of Theological Schools are required to offer field education. He does not know why any other Baptist scholars are not presently participating in this arena.

Faculty Participants 3 and 4 stated that they did not have anything to add on this subject. Faculty Participant 5 observes Baptist scholars demonstrating “an openness to learning from all sources but yet at the same time rooted in the fundamental, foundational understandings of God and his mission.” He has witnessed a constructive pragmatism that combines curiosity about effective methods with doctrinal commitment to God and the promotion of his kingdom. Faculty Participant 6’s admittedly anecdotal experience is that “Baptist scholars are usually behind the curve in most disciplines except biblical [studies]”; however, “when they get on the curve, I

³¹ “Caucuses,” Association for Theological Field Education, accessed December 26, 2025, <https://atfe.org>.

think they do a great job.” He would like to see Baptist scholars outside the realm of biblical studies generating more “critical original thought” rather than waiting to adopt and adapt ideas generated by others.

Faculty Participant 7 has seen waves of research on applied theology subjects such as leadership. One theme that, in his experience, garnered intense interest from around 2000 until 2010 was mentoring, which linked to an influence-oriented definition of leadership focused on small-group impact eventually replicated onto others. More recently, he has “seen a renewed interest in servant leadership and how we manage that paradox,” optimally realized in Jesus Christ. Interesting extrapolations include leading upward from the perspective of subordinate positions and implementing servant leadership in diverse—particularly non-Western—cultural contexts.

Faculty Participant 8 has benefitted from the scholarship of Justin Irving at SBTS, “who is one of those doing what I would think is a pretty robust analysis and contextualization. . . of leadership theories on their own terms.”³² Another from whom he said he has benefitted is Nathan Finn, who “has written and led various sorts of initiatives and institutes at North Greenville University on leadership.”³³ While some Baptist scholars are engaging this intersection in a productive way from his vantage point, others might not be thinking deeply enough about the intersection between Christian theology and leadership theory. He observes

³² “Justin A. Irving,” The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, accessed December 26, 2025, <https://www.sbts.edu/faculty/justin-a-irving>.

³³ “Nathan Finn, PhD,” North Greenville University, accessed December 26, 2025, <https://www.ngu.edu/faculty/nathan-finn>.

“there are those who have exemplified thinking critically about how those things intersect.”

Those in this first group often find leadership theories are “useful, but not necessary.” A second group is comprised of “those who just like to appropriate leadership theories but are not thinking a lot about it in that way and are maybe more hesitant of leadership theories.” A third group is marked by “very uncritically appropriating or thinking of leadership as being in a completely different discipline.” As a result of this approach, those in this third group “are essentially just doing secular leadership theory and leaving the Christian stuff for a different sort of a discipline.”

Faculty Participant 9 reported being encouraged because he has “not seen a lot of Baptist scholars dealing with [the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory],” but he is “starting to see some glimpses of light there.” He identified Justin Irving as “the prominent name that has come up in Baptist life.” He commended the “biblical and theological work” in Irving and Mark Strauss’s book *Leadership in Christian Perspective*.³⁴ He also celebrated the edited work of Benjamin K. Forest and Chet Roden in *Biblical Leadership* which he described as more biblical and theological but less theoretical.

Faculty Participant 10 stated that he too is “encouraged” by the emergence of conversation on the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory. He has been refreshed by the return of certain theological conversations to prominence in the local church (e.g., the Trinity and the *imago Dei*). He has been invigorated similarly by Christians beginning

³⁴ Justin A. Irving and Mark L. Strauss, *Leadership in Christian Perspective: Biblical Foundations and Contemporary Practices for Servant Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019).

“to have conversations at an academic level about leadership and its partner management and organizational behavior” because he asserted “that some of our leadership practices have gone awry over the last few decades.”

Faculty Participant 11 lamented the state of Baptist’s scholarly engagement at the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory because he simply does not see it happening. The first time he observed anyone addressing this intersection well was during his doctoral studies. In general, he sees seminary graduates who are ready to parse texts in the original languages but are insufficiently equipped to lead people well. Too many are uncritically appropriating secular theory or rejecting it out of hand. He wishes more seminary graduates had greater proficiency in training the next generation to “appropriate and value things that can be valued in the culture from a biblical-centric position.”

Observations on Consistency in the Use of General Revelation

The third interview began by framing a situation in a sister field.

Christian leadership is not the only academic field engaged in Baptist seminary coursework that introduces a decision point regarding one’s stance on the appropriate role for theory originating outside the Christian community for utility inside the Christian community. For example, some Southern Baptist seminaries engage the field of counseling from an integrative angle that positions graduates for state licensure while other Southern Baptist seminaries engage counseling from a nouthetic or biblical approach that does not place students on a trajectory for state licensure.

Participating faculty members then responded to a pair of associated questions intended to unpack their lived experience through conceptual triangulation:

In your experience at your current seminary and other sister seminaries, how does a seminary’s general posture on the role of general revelation in other academic fields such as counseling influence the conversation among faculty regarding the role of general

revelation in the comparatively newer academic field of leadership? Do you experience any connection?

Faculty Participant 1 identified that his seminary sees general revelation as helpful in developing a Christian approach to counseling. While he had not previously thought of connection between the fields of counseling and leadership on this topic, he concluded “there is a connection.” Regarding both fields, he commented

that in general what I sense is a hesitancy or a reluctance to adopt too open a posture to general revelation; however, again, having said that, there is a willingness to say counseling incorporates all sorts of learnings that we have had, and it does not matter if those learnings were from Christians or non-Christians. We have incorporated them. So, what might be the difference in leadership?

He suspected “there is no policy at any seminary that would state the consistent role of general revelation” across all courses “because it would eliminate in Old Testament a tremendous amount of non-Christian study.” He argued that, in general, Baptist scholars would not exclude discoveries and word studies conducted by Orthodox Jewish scholars on Old Testament material because non-Christians generated them. Baptist scholars would tend to do the same for research on the Greco-Roman world that impacts New Testament studies. He proffered, “If there is going to be a push to restrict what resources are accessed as far as teaching, then how would that be consistent across all disciplines?” Given his assumption that no Baptist seminary has a formal policy on the role of general revelation in handling secular theory, he defaulted to the assumption that faculty enjoyed a degree of discretion but consistency across academic disciplines on the role of secular wisdom is valuable.

Faculty Participant 2 recalled that his seminary had never required him to hold a certain position on the role general revelation plays in leadership theory or the need for consistency

across academic departments. He experienced “freedom within the confines of basic biblical and Christian orthodoxy to teach.” Faculty Participant 3 described his acute weariness with the back-and-forth debates regarding the integration of secular theory in the counseling field. His critique of that often-vitriolic parley led him to hope that the same debate will not come to contaminate the field of Christian leadership. Too often, in his view, the debates have devolved into “a contest for who is more biblical.” He views integration positively and maintains affinity with the counseling scholars whom he perceives to be in the majority—those who allow “some theory” and view theory “as helpful but not essential.” As he surveys the conversations about integration in the field of leadership, he entreats colleagues to resist the temptation to “define the walls so tall that we cannot help people learn how to lead.”

Faculty Participant 4 observes his own Baptist seminary embracing a consistent posture of openness to general revelation across many fields, including Christian approaches to leadership and counseling. He described his institution as “fairly comfortable with general revelation and verifiable truth through other disciplines.” Faculty Participant 5 “would say this about both counseling and leadership: we come with the presupposition that there is a theological foundation that underlies both of them.” He observes his seminary approaching both fields in an increasingly similar way that holds firm to a biblical foundation as their starting point while accepting conceptual support from extrabiblical sources wherever helpful.

Faculty Participant 6 was quick to note the openness of many Baptist scholars in the field of biblical studies to contemporary theory in areas such as linguistics, inferring support for a consistent position for secular theory in Christian leadership. He noted an openness to the proper utilization of theoretical concepts that have originated from outside the Christian community and

to utilizing those things when packaged correctly for the Christian community. Faculty Participant 7 sees no formalized connection between a seminary's general posture on the role of general revelation with different academic fields including the relatively newer fields of counseling and leadership. Despite the lack of formal connection, he suggested an argument could be made for an assessment of overlap between fields based on common "anthropological commitments." In his estimation, some interlocutors perceive integrationist approaches as tending toward the adoption of divergent anthropologies. Regardless of the competing views, he proposes this about the use of general revelation in the two academic fields: "What you say about the one, you are probably going to end up saying about the other" and "some possible models. . . do not fit very well within a Christian framework."

Faculty Participant 8 saw a "deep connection" and affirmed the importance of scholars demonstrating consistency in their approach to the use of general revelation across academic fields. He argued that "one's approach to counseling and one's approach to secular leadership theories probably ought to be very closely aligned" to the point that "you are being inconsistent if you do not take the same approach to both [fields]." In his view, a complexity emerges in that application of this conviction because institutions would not be expected to declare a formal stance on the systematic use of general revelation across disciplines. As a result, the application tends "to come down to individual professors," some of whom might show inconsistency "because they have just thought more about one issue than the other."

Faculty Participant 9 has experienced academic supervisors at his seminary demonstrating an "openness to general revelation" in his leadership coursework. His observation includes "taking the ideas that are in other disciplines and applying those in leadership

specifically.” As an adjunct faculty member, he admitted not having access to many of the informal conversations that likely occur among full-time colleagues. Faculty Participant 10’s experience did not include any conversations on this subject at his institution “since the concept of leadership is really new” at his seminary “from an academic standpoint”; however, he did infer support for a consistent application of general revelation across fields. Faculty Participant 11—who is an adjunct professor—has not witnessed a “holistic approach to all of these sorts of categories” communicated from seminary leaders. While he has not had access to hallway conversations at the same rate as full-time faculty members, what has been communicated to him “through example and then through [his] experience is that an openness to...redeem the things that are redeemable through these models and utilize them under kind of a biblical lens in all that we are doing” has been normalized.

Theoretical Contributors to Personal Flourishing

The third interview with participating faculty members continued by posing this question: From which contemporary leadership theories have you gleaned concepts that you found to be most helpful to your spiritual flourishing as an individual? In the preview copy of questions provided to each participant, they were informed that the term “contemporary leadership theories” refers to those identified by Northouse in *Leadership: Theory and Practice* such as trait approach, skills approach, behavior approach, situational approach, path-goal approach, leader-member exchange theory, transformational leadership, authentic leadership, servant leadership, and adaptive leadership. Faculty Participant 1 indicated that he had been “influenced by servant leadership most likely by those who have taken it, digested it, and served it up in a Christian

buffet” but stopped there since he did not consider himself to have been classically trained as a leadership theorist. Faculty Participant 2 had not read Northouse’s book but appreciated the modified version of Blanchard’s situational leadership theory with which he had become familiar through a colleague. He evaluated the helpfulness of that construct and other models both personally and professionally based on whether a sustained series of testimonies confirmed that the approach was reported to have worked successfully.

Faculty Participant 3 contended that “the concept of servant leadership has been very helpful for me at a spiritual level” to resist admitted feelings of entitlement to be served and, instead, to serve those around him. Faculty Participant 4 reflected on the constructive contribution of adaptive leadership, situational leadership, and servant leadership—the latter of which he designated as “a Christian model” and “clearly a biblical construct.” Faculty Participant 5 named one contemporary leadership theory, Blanchard and Hersey’s situational leadership, but he added several models and concepts that, while not summarized by Northouse, had proven helpful to his flourishing. He listed Peter Senge’s work—particularly *The Fifth Discipline*, systems thinking, emotional intelligence, family systems theory, Richard Swenson’s ideas on margins, and Edward de Bono’s *Six Thinking Hats*.³⁵

Faculty Participant 6 made his initial foray into leadership studies through the books and conferences of John Maxwell and was influenced later by the work of Kouzes and Posner. He

³⁵ Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*, rev. ed. (New York: Currency, 2006). Edward de Bono, *Six Thinking Hats*, rev. ed. (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1999).

spoke well of the role of *Experiencing God* in his life.³⁶ The two contemporary theories that had most contributed to his flourishing are transformational leadership and servant leadership.

Faculty Participant 7 acknowledged the limits of his acquaintance with leadership theories but found affinity with servanthood concepts as engaged by Paul in 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians.

Faculty Participant 8 focused on a “Christianized version of entrepreneurial leadership” as commended by Charles Smith, president of the University of Mobile.³⁷

Faculty Participant 9 said he has “pulled from most of them” during his lifetime. He sees “elements of all of these playing in but it is not a wholesale acceptance of every one of these theories.” He mentioned the impact of trait approach, skills approach, behavioral approach, situational approach, Leader-Member Exchange, adaptive leadership, transformational leadership, authentic leadership, and servant leadership but clarified that the latter three theories in that list form the core of his personal leadership.

Faculty Participant 10 highlighted four theories. He mentioned transformational leadership first because it assists him “to see beyond the current situation.” He then called attention to authentic leadership, which reminds readers of their weaknesses. Thirdly, he noted servant leadership, which, in his experience, results in “a great deal of. . .spiritual fruit and development” due to the natural Christological connections. Finally, he mentioned the team leadership model as a contributor to his flourishing.

³⁶ Henry T. Blackaby, Richard Blackaby, and Claude V. King, *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God* (Nashville: B&H, 2021).

³⁷ “Meet Our President,” University of Mobile, accessed December 27, 2025, <https://umobile.edu/president>.

Faculty Participant 11 has pulled from the skills approach, especially the growth and development elements popularized by Carol Dweck. The trait approach has not helped him flourish. He has benefitted from the path-goal approach to include “vision of where we are trying to go and accomplish,” but said he is redeeming still those ideas “with a lens of understanding what aspects are biblical and what are humanistic.” He appreciates a small number of redeemable elements of servant leadership. He likes “Heifetz’s work in adaptive leadership pretty extensively” but laments the complete lack of a moral center to that construct. Authentic leadership also stands out for him but would require reanalysis from a biblical perspective to identify valuable elements. He has not connected with transformational leadership because he cannot reconcile his definition of transformation with the definition embedded in the theory. He finds the nature of situational leadership to be “untethered to anything that has a moral or biblical center.” The behavior approach has enduringly helpful elements that are redeemable but is largely a model of the past. In summary, he is “cognitively trying to think through all of these in some ways and looking for things that are valuable” for extraction. Nevertheless, he has relegated some leadership models into the category of familiarity rather than engaging them on a more personal or professional level.

Trends Regarding the Role of Leadership Theory

The next portion of the third interview considered this question: What trends have you experienced among your seminary students related to their perspectives on the role of contemporary leadership theories in Christian belief and practice? Faculty Participant 1 indicated his students have not typically studied classical leadership theories; however, his first reportable

trend is the increase in students who are entering seminary with considerable experience in the business world where they have been exposed often to corporate sector leadership training. Their theoretical experience might be limited, but they may arrive to the classroom with observations about certain practices working or not working. He has students with backgrounds in law, business, and medicine—many with graduate and even terminal degrees. The second trend is that the term *servant leadership* is “the term referenced most often” as a Christian shorthand for leadership.

Faculty Participant 2 indicated that students increasingly prefer classroom leadership discussion in the context of real-world, collaborative, problem-solving efforts outside the classroom. Faculty Participant 3 observed that his students approach leadership studies as practitioners who want tools to respond to crises and initiate change—not drawn to leadership in a more theoretical sense. Also, his doctoral students have rarely if ever studied leadership before starting their present academic program. Faculty Participant 4 did not have any observed trends to convey. Faculty Participant 5 has seen a trend toward “openness to bring conceptual thinking to the table” and a trend away from rejecting concepts that are not expressly mentioned in the Bible. His students are increasingly asking probing questions of extrabiblical ideas. Is it missional? Is it God-honoring? Does it go contrary to what God has already said? The trend of openness invites these questions and the related discussions.

Faculty Participant 6 appreciates a trend of students’ preference for leadership exercises that help them gain perspective on the pivotal experiences in their lives. Faculty Participant 7 has observed an increasingly trend over the last two decades whereby students have reported different aspirations in ministry leadership than those who preceded them. In the past, the

majority of ministers wanted church ministry staff, parachurch, and denominational roles. Now they increasingly desire to serve in identifiable pastoral leadership roles in local congregations. Faculty Participant 8 observed “most students are. . .predisposed to. . .wanting to glean benefit from leadership theories” without wholesale adoption and often after “some sort of adjustment.” Secondly, he observes a trend at his seminary of students getting younger. A third trend that he sees is a growth of “suspicion or skepticism” toward ideas “that do not originate explicitly from Scripture” such as “secular leadership theories.”

Faculty Participant 9 observes two parallel trends among his students: a dearth of leadership theory exposure and a strong repertoire of “anecdotal stories that speak into theory, but they do not know they are speaking into a certain leadership theory.” Faculty Participant 10 highlights two trends. First, seminary students have increasingly grown up under pastors who have been willing to admit that their seminary master’s program insufficiently equipped them with an academic understanding of leadership. Second, a rising number of students are willing to adopt a hermeneutic that evaluates leadership theories through Scripture, even if those theories were not deduced directly from Scripture. Faculty Participant 11 observes trends of absence or disconnection. He observes a complete absence of seminary student engagement with contemporary leadership theories—often engaged only through doctoral work. When students have engaged with leadership theory, he observes a disconnect between the theory and the Christian belief or practice that should inform it, as if these elements exist on “parallel tracks.”

Positive Examples of Theoretical Integration

The penultimate aspect of the third interview considered this question: How have you experienced the integration of contemporary leadership theories into the Christian life in ways that you found to be sufficiently consistent with your convictions on the role of general revelation and contributing to the flourishing of the body of Christ? Faculty Participant 1 commended the way Chick-fil-A has developed and normalized their SERVE Leadership Model. Faculty Participant 2 celebrated his seminary's practitioner-focused leadership model, which has reportedly garnered considerable feedback from graduates validating its simplicity and effectiveness. Faculty Participant 3 humbly noted his seminary's track record of scriptural primacy joined with theoretical fluency. Faculty Participant 4 did not offer any experiences in response to this question.

Faculty Participant 5 sees local churches using educational theories to help people better understand the Bible, demonstrating an openness toward the application of general revelation to kingdom objectives. Faculty Participant 6 marveled at Jeff Iorg's leadership in relocating what is now Gateway Seminary from Mill Valley, California, four hundred miles away to Ontario, California. Per the research subject, this praiseworthy leadership included the integration of transformational leadership and servant leadership principles. Faculty Participant 7 has observed his seminary president integrate insightful leadership readings into cabinet gatherings, and some of which have been authored potentially by non-Christians. The research subject lauded the way these readings had been utilized without allowing the conversation to shift away from biblical priority.

Faculty Participant 8 reiterated his respect for Charles Smith, who teaches leadership theory “with a theology-first approach.” Faculty Participant 9 has seen it done well in local churches and holds leadership cohorts that consider leadership theory and “the application of those ideas within a Christian or a church context.” He has observed how these learning experiences have had positive ripple effects into participants’ familial or professional settings. Faculty Participant 10 sees the way many Christian businessmen and businesswomen with whom he regularly interacts have implemented biblical leadership principles in their organizations with marked success. Faculty Participant 11 has seen contemporary leadership theories generally integrated well into the Christian life in academic settings but has observed mixed reviews on implementation in local church settings. Leaders in church settings who excel in this area address real challenges by applying redeemable elements of leadership models within a holistic biblical framework, rather than appropriating a leadership theory in wholesale fashion without discernment.

Negative Examples of Theoretical Integration

The final question of the third interview presented this question: How have you experienced the integration of contemporary theories from any academic field originating outside the Christian community for utilization inside the Christian community in ways that led to distraction for the body of Christ? Faculty Participant 1 drew attention to the distractions in Christianity incited by moral relativity and situational ethics. He extended this critique in some cases to virtue ethics, which, as a system of thought, has the potential to create a conviction “that virtues are an end to themselves” and can lead Christians to self-assess favorably because certain

virtues manifest in their lives. Faculty Participant 2 gravitated to the popularity of the Enneagram among younger pastors and new churches. He questioned the compatibility of some of the conceptual roots undergirding the tool compared to the less theologically problematic origins of some of the other personality assessment tools.

Faculty Participant 3 saw distraction in the church growth movement in the 1980s and 1990s due to its “use of the homogeneous unit principle. . .where they took observations from sociology and missed the theological implications of implementing that strategy or the strategies that would grow out of that theory and the observation that 10:00 on Sunday morning is the most segregated hour of the week.” He claimed that churches used this logic to justify targeting certain groups for ministry engagement and excluding others. The research subject contended that organizing church outreach around the normalization of demonstrating preferential treatment toward certain groups at the expense of other groups is inconsistent with biblical teaching and “not right.” Faculty Participant 4 did not identify any examples of integrating contemporary theories from any academic field that distracted the church.

Faculty Participant 5 raised the distraction of integrating Enneagram into sermons, because he sees an issue with starting with an extrabiblical concept in a sermon and then working to incorporate biblical elements. Faculty Participant 6 introduced the distraction caused by social media since, in his view, Christians were ill-prepared for its ascendance and failed to deliver sufficient “forward-thinking leadership that gave guidance” on the subject. He has learned recently about at least one company helping posture artificial intelligence by injecting a biblical worldview. Faculty Participant 7 called out the proclivity of some in theology to exaggerate their

affection for Aristotelian metaphysics to the point that their biblical theology is untenably degraded in quality.

Faculty Participant 8 rebuked the distraction caused by popular personality assessment tools such as the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and, more recently, the Enneagram because they bear the allure of “heuristic power” without adequate “critical pushback or amendment.” In his view, these tools, which are expressly not empirical in nature were assumed to be “irrefutably empirical” but are in fact insufficiently qualified for wholesale adoption. Faculty Participant 9 lamented the distraction of integrating political theory into the life of the church with Christian nationalism representing a foremost threat. He broadened his critique to include psychological theory, critical theory, and educational theory because if those ideas are handled poorly, then they “can become divisive in the life of the church.”

Faculty Participant 10 found distraction in the use of psychodynamic approaches to leadership that attempt to influence the actions of others by appealing to their psyche. Faculty Participant 11 appealed generally to the distracting practice caused by the practice of adopting secular theories “without critical analysis.”

Academic Supervisor Experiences

Each of the four selected seminaries supplied one academic supervisor at their school to whom all participating faculty members from their institution report. These supervisors participated in a single interview to help contextualize some of the data collected from participating faculty members. To assist with the correlation of data while still prioritizing

individual and institutional anonymity, the four participating academic supervisors will be referenced by number (e.g., Academic Supervisor 1).

Scholarly Influences

The first question of the supervisory interview engaged this question: Which scholars and sources would you identify that have most influenced your current thinking about the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory? Academic Supervisor 1 started by commending the influence of four distinguished members of the Blackaby family. Henry Blackaby (1935–2024) earned a Master of Theology from Golden Gate Baptist Theological Seminary and co-authored *Spiritual Leadership* with his son, Richard, who majored in church history during his Doctor of Philosophy program at SWBTS.³⁸ Rob Blackaby and Mel Blackaby majored in Christian ethics and theology, respectively, in their Doctor of Philosophy programs at SWBTS.³⁹ Additionally, Academic Supervisor 1 pointed to Sanders’s *Spiritual Leadership* and Kouzes and Posner’s *The Leadership Challenge* as influential to his current thinking about the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory. Academic Supervisor 2 highlighted “John Maxwell and some of these, I guess, more popular-level Christian leadership guys.” He said, “The most influential person is probably Jeff Iorg. . .in terms of my own sort of integration and approach” to the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory.

³⁸ Blackaby and Blackaby; “Henry Thomas Blackaby,” Blackaby Ministries International, accessed December 28, 2025, <https://blackaby.org/henry-blackaby>; “About,” Dr. Richard Blackaby, accessed December 28, 2025, <https://richardblackaby.com/about>.

³⁹ “Faculty,” Canadian Baptist Theological Seminary and College, accessed December 28, 2025, <https://cbtsc.ca/faculty>. “Mel Blackaby,” First Baptist Church Jonesboro, accessed December 28, 2025, <https://fbcjonesboro.com/member/01-blackaby-mel>.

Academic Supervisor 3 extolled the “thoughtful” work of biblical scholar Mark Strauss in the field of leadership.⁴⁰ He also affirmed Don Carson’s contribution to “leadership out of a seed bed of New Testament scholarship,” Sanders’s classic monograph, and the work of Paul Tripp.⁴¹ Academic Supervisor 4 “could not think of many” who intersect Christian theology and leadership theory, so he defaulted to general influences in the area of leadership. Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby’s work “helped my understanding of leadership.”⁴² He also mentioned Ken Blanchard, Oswald Sanders, John Maxwell, and Max Dupree.

Observations on Consistency in the Use of General Revelation

The supervisory interview continued by framing a situation in a sister field:

Faculty members at Southern Baptist and Canadian National Baptist seminaries hold a variety of personal stances on the role of general revelation in assessing how leadership theories, models, and approaches originating from non-Christian sources offer utility to the Christian community. Looking at the academic field of counseling suggests the same might be said of SBC and CNBC seminaries on an institutional level. For example, some Baptist seminaries offer biblical or nouthetic counseling programs that typically do not track students for state licensure, while others adopt an integrative model that intentionally places students on a trajectory toward state licensure.

Participating academic supervisors then responded to a pair of associated questions intended to unpack their lived experience through conceptual triangulation:

As an academic supervisor of faculty members who introduce leadership theories to seminary students, how have you experienced your seminary generally posturing its expectations regarding the role of popular theories originating outside the Christian

⁴⁰ Irving and Strauss.

⁴¹ “D. A. Carson,” Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, accessed December 28, 2025, <https://www.tiu.edu/divinity/faculty/d-a-carson>. D. A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry: Leadership Lessons from 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993). Sanders.

⁴² Blackaby and Blackaby.

community in preparing ministry leaders? Do you sense correlation between your seminary's stance on the role on popular theory in counseling and your seminary's stance on the role of popular theory in leadership studies?

Academic Supervisor 1 sees his faculty taking a theocentric approach to both fields. While his institution has no formal position on the utilization of general revelation when assessing secular theory, he expressed an openness to theory originating from outside the Christian community provided the character of the integrator has been affirmed by the learning community. He appeals to "all truth is God's truth" and inferred resistance to the position characterized by an exaggerated protectiveness and narrowness regarding knowledge. Academic Supervisor 2 assessed no prescriptive correlation but identified a descriptive correlation. He sees professors in both disciplines at his institutions "open to healthy integration or a posture of openness to learning." Academic Supervisor 3 affirmed, "I do see correspondence there."

Academic Supervisor 4 has seen positions on integration in counseling at his institution shift from affirmation to rejection to affirmation again.

But we are on different pages when it comes to teaching and leadership. In teaching, we are discussing social sciences and how they fit in scholarship—what we can acknowledge what we leave out. We're trying to train the students how to read the landscape. And then, in the area of leadership, I have found that there is probably the least certainty in that area. No one is really engaging in this conversation. We do not have a leadership professor. We have adjuncts. In every other area we have full-time faculty guiding the ship in the area in which they specialize, but in leadership we are dependent on our adjuncts. It means a little less oversight in this area. I find as I am talking to different professors I get different responses. Some are heavily dependent on non-Christian sources. Some are right in the middle. Some are on the other side. We have got a mixture.

At present, he finds considerable diversity between the field of counseling and other fields regarding decisions about the use of secular theory.

Trends Regarding the Role of Leadership Theory

The next portion of the supervisory interview considered this question: What trends, if any, have you experienced among faculty members and seminary students at your seminary related to their perspectives on the role of contemporary leadership theories in Christian belief and practice? Academic Supervisor 1 identified two trends. First, he observes that his seminary has

attracted students or had students in recent years that come out of a more strict Reformed tradition who are less comfortable maybe with secular approaches to things and are maybe wrestling with this question of what do we do? And, so, that might behoove us to be more savvy in articulating where we stand and understanding where they are coming from so that the friction that may be in a classroom where a professor is more open to bringing in studies, and they would say, why are we even talking about that? How do we communicate that more winsomely?

Second, “the Christian reaction in a highly secularized society to withdraw or hunker down or draw battle lines” is accentuating the need to train savvy spiritual leaders who know how to apply ethical discretion on complex issues with shrewdness and innocence (Mt 10:16). Academic Supervisor 2 has observed a trend over the last twenty years of moving from an institutional stance that embraced trendy “pop leadership stuff and church growth movements and seeker sensitive church movements” with the diminishment of focus on theology to a more balanced stance that values leadership while rightly prioritizing theology.

Academic Supervisor 3 identified several trends involving leadership. First, how do Scripture and the gospel message shape leader practices? How often must the gospel message be included for an effort to be characterizable as gospel centered? Given most popular leadership theory is rather devoid of a firm Christology and rife with anthropological problems, how does the Scripture guide practice of employing said theory among Baptists? The second is the

conversation about egalitarian church leadership practices in the broader Evangelical community. A third is the “fault lines of cooperation regarding leadership.” The fourth is the threat of Christian nationalism and its intersection with Christian patriotism. Academic Supervisor 4 observes an openness “to using these theories much more readily without a lot of discernment” because leadership theories are not scrutinized to the same degree as “teaching theory and psychological theory.” If leadership “is a field, and I think it is, there is not a lot written about it regarding biblical and secular models. If any trend, I think it would be that we are open to using the theory and picking up books, but some are reading them as gospel without a lot of discernment or a lot of thought about ‘How does this match biblical scholarship?’”

Supervisory Expectations on Theory Compatibility Assessments

The supervisory interview then turned to this question: Based on your collective experiences, what process or guiding principles would you expect the faculty you supervise to employ when assessing a leadership approach, model, or theory’s assessed compatibility with Christian belief and practice and usefulness for the Christian community? Academic Supervisor 1 appealed first to the expectation that the Bible serves as a “guide” and “our rule by which we live.” The way his faculty are “grounded in the Scripture” is to be tethered to the leading of the Holy Spirit in decision making and following God’s leadership. Academic Supervisor 2 prioritized “the subordination of these different theories or approaches to what we find in Scripture.” He commended the cross-disciplinary work of academic council meetings that “vet and explore” new ideas, such as leadership theories, and assess theological compatibility and avoid adoption of models that could prove distracting later.

When interpreting the compatibility of leadership philosophies, Academic Supervisor 3 requires that all faculty members embrace four faith statements “as an expression of our interpretation of Scripture, which would be the ultimate guide”: the Baptist Faith and Message, the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy, the Danvers Statement on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood, and the Nashville Statement on Biblical Sexuality. Academic Supervisor 4 mentioned the Bible as the first and highest source of authority that faculty are expected to use. Biblical authority is used to develop theology, and theology provides a system through which people can assess theories for elements of truth. Following biblical, theological, and theoretical-derived truths, he added experience as a source of authority to which faculty can appeal. He also commended John David Trentham’s call for a pattern of adopting a charitable rather than a defensive posture to theoretical constructs whenever possible.

Baptist Scholarship Observations

The supervisory interview concluded by asking the participants this question: In your experience, how have you observed Baptist scholars handling the intersection of Christian theology and popular leadership theory? Academic Supervisor 1 had not observed Baptist scholarship on this subject. Academic Supervisor 2 expressed observing a reticence to “pseudoscience” such as the Enneagram. In his experience, leadership studies tend to represent an academic “Wild West” of narrative, motivation, or anecdotal engagements rather than rigorous scholarship in a manner akin to the biblical studies area, and this diversity of academic rigor diminishes the receptivity of critical seminary thinkers to leadership research.

Academic Supervisor 3 sees Baptist scholarship in leadership running “the gamut” with those leadership works rooted firmly and chiefly in biblical studies—as opposed to those more rooted in attraction, marketing, and cultural sensitivity—bearing the most value. Baptist leadership studies that are rooted in Scripture and biblical studies present “a filter by which we can bring in some of those [theoretical] ideas and see them in Scripture or see them particularized for us today and be helpful but without losing a focus on God for the sake of just people and pragmatism in the situation.” Academic Supervisor 4 said, “I cannot honestly say that Baptist scholars are” engaging the intersection of Christian theology and popular leadership theory because of an observed lack of published scholarship in this space.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

A distillation of the data reveals some intriguing information about 34 percent of research participants. The first might seem like a peculiarity: the prevalence of common experiences in Texas. Seven of the eleven participating faculty members—64 percent—spent some of their adolescence or attended at least one higher education institution in Texas. Fifteen of the participants' thirty-eight academic degrees—39 percent—came from Texas institutions, thirteen of which are Baptist schools. Four of their eight research doctoral degrees—50 percent—were completed at Baptist institutions of higher education in Texas. While all four of the group's professional doctorates were earned in California, no state other than Texas and no international country produced more than a single research doctoral graduate in this research group.

Given that most seminary students do not study leadership theory until their doctoral program, the influence of Baptist culture in Texas appears to be noteworthy. Spring 2025 enrollment data showed that 57 percent of doctoral students hailing from Montana enrolled in one of the four surveyed schools, suggesting that these four seminaries may have a disproportionately high influence on conceptions of leadership in the American Mountain West. Curiosity about this pattern grows when recognizing that, while six participants grew up in Southern Baptist churches, at least four participants switched to Southern Baptist churches from other denominations after relocating to Texas. While a full appreciation for the way Baptist

culture in Texas impacted participants is beyond the scope of this study, the thread of common experience is immediately apparent.

Not only do the participants have an inordinate amount of common experience in Texas, but they also have a dearth of aggregated personal experience living in the American Mountain West. The participant with the most regional experience spent his entire adolescence and obtained an undergraduate degree in Colorado; however, his longevity is the exception. A second participant lived the first two years of his life in Montana and then moved to Texas. A third transferred from a college in Missouri to a state university in New Mexico where he finished his undergraduate degree and subsequently moved outside of the American Mountain West. The scarcity of lived experiences in the American Mountain West appears to complicate participants' collective appreciation for the unique complexities manifesting in this region.

Local churches played a dominant role in most of the participants' conversion experience to Christianity and their subsequent decision to pursue Christian ministry. Revival meetings were catalysts in three of their salvation moments and three of their decisions to pursue Christian ministry. Christian camp programs and youth events were either a direct or an indirect factor in two of their choices to trust Christ as Savior and two of their determinations to serve in vocational ministry. Interestingly, three participants publicly responded to a call to ministry while actively leading a program or event organized under the auspices of their local church. Local church influence made a profound impact on participants' spiritual and academic journey.

Familial experiences, local church influences, and crises presented as key sources for participating faculty members' development of understanding Christian theology and leadership. Two named their parents as the principal influences in their formation of theology, with two

mentioning their fathers, two recognizing their grandparents, and three highlighting their pastors. Regarding the formation of leadership concepts, five pointed to their fathers as the foremost influence. The influence is complexified by the fact that two of these five participants described their fathers as military veterans who demonstrated authoritarian tendencies and fostered a somewhat dysfunctional homelife. Two other participants identified grandparents at the vanguard of leadership influence. Two other participants focused on the key role that sports coaches played in teaching them about leadership. One participant noted a complete void of Christian leadership influence. Nine faculty participants reported at least one prominent crisis during their formative years, constituting 82 percent of the faculty research subjects. Participants generally described these events as pivotal moments that shaped their Christian journeys and deepened their understanding of theology and leadership.

At least eight participants—73 percent—described how early spiritual leadership opportunities proved formative in their development as ministry practitioners and eventual professors working with students on courses and research engaging Christian leadership. These eight faculty members were almost evenly split between those holding professional and research doctoral degrees. The choice of ministry leaders to extend these opportunities to research subjects while they were still young resulted in leadership iterations that impacted their later conceptions of the proper integration of Christian theology and leadership theory.

Eight of eleven participating faculty members—73 percent—either completed an undergraduate major that was overtly religious (e.g., religion, Bible, biblical studies, theology, Christian ministry, or Christian ministries) or finished a philosophy major at an overtly Christian college. The remaining three participants earned undergraduate degrees in other majors. Not only

did faculty participants prefer the Master of Divinity degree with ten of eleven—91 percent—earning that flagship seminary degree, but a pronounced connection also emerged between the institution where they earned master’s degrees and where they presently teach. Seven of the eleven participants—64 percent—hold a master’s degree from the school where they now serve. Master’s-level coursework provided these participants with negligible understanding of leadership theory. Regarding doctoral education, those four participants with professional doctorate degrees focus their present teaching on practitioners in professional doctoral programs. Only two of the remaining seven participants who hold research doctorate degrees—29 percent—have formal academic training in the field of leadership. The recency of seminaries focusing on leadership as a field of research stands as a plausible explanation; however, a gap between academic preparation and scope of teaching remains. Most participating seminary professors who engage with research doctoral students about Christian leadership—and specifically the intersection of their Christian theology with leadership theory—have not been formally trained or published in the field. Instead, these instructors guide their interactions with students by drawing on some combination of personal reading, ministerial experience, and concepts of leadership drawn from pastoral ministries.

In turning to participant experiences intersecting theology and theory, all eleven approach leadership theory in a way that prioritizes biblical authority and demonstrate commitment to testing leadership theories—and theoretical elements thereof—against the scriptural standard. Beyond that shared starting point, considerable diversity of practice exists. One participant articulated having no discernible process for assessing compatibility. A second described determining compatibility of a leadership construct on the basis on the trustworthiness of the

source, which would be difficult to describe as a critical review process. The process of five other participants could be defined broadly as general theological approaches whereby scholars subordinate leadership theories to their understanding of Christian theology and, by some methodology, set apart the redeemable ideas for use. An eighth participant expressed a qualified variant of the last methodology: a two-step theological analysis with step one being a test against Christian orthodoxy and step two being a test against Baptist doctrine. Only three participants could be said to have developed processes for assessing compatibility of leadership theories with Christian belief and practice that include substantial details. The first of these participants—the ninth overall—uses The Reflection Loop introduced by Wilson and Waggoner to assess utility.¹ The tenth utilizes a three-stage, graduated system that employs two theological questions and a third question focusing on individual suitability to determine objective and subjective compatibility. The eleventh uses a two-pronged approach that determines biblical and theological alignment first and then introduces a teleological test to assess outcomes. Most participants lack processes by which they can determine the compatibility of a given leadership theory with Christian belief and practice, and this finding presents an opportunity to consider assessment models to bolster the effectiveness of existing practices.

Little consensus exists regarding the compatibility standards that theories must meet to warrant commendation to seminary students. One participant denies the capability of popular leadership theories to achieve biblical ends but remains open to integrating compatible elements of those same theories. In broad strokes, two participants appear dismissive of a middle ground,

¹ Wilson and Waggoner, 43.

meaning an idea must be either completely compatible with biblical teaching or rejected. Two other participants appeal to a general standard of theological compatibility. A sixth participant considers usefulness to be the standard of compatibility. Two others require both theological compatibility and usefulness. The ninth focuses on the compatibility of the assessed anthropology of a given theory with Christian theology. The remaining two participants consider any theory to be commendable since, in their view, any concept—or at least elements of the model in question—can be adapted to achieve conformity with Christian belief and practice to the point of being commendable.

Eight of eleven participants—73 percent—experience no sense of reticence in introducing one or more modern theories of leadership to seminary students because of perceived incongruity between the theory and their biblical worldview. A ninth has experienced feelings of reticence but rarely acts on those sentiments. The tenth participant admitted reticence in introducing certain theories. The eleventh does not introduce leadership theories in classroom settings but, instead, engages students more through doctoral projects and dissertations. In the main, participants' lack of feeling reticent or acting on feelings of reticence does not mean those subjects find all aspects of a given leadership theory completely compatible with their worldview. Overall, these professors are confident in introducing content with which they might personally disagree as a technique for setting conditions for student learning through critically analyzing each model.

Participating faculty members indicated no experience of acting upon a sense of compulsion to excuse or defend leadership theories considering their biblical worldview; however, a majority exhibited a history of using their Christian worldview to contextualize

leadership theories. One participant declined to answer the question directly, but seven of the remaining ten who did provide a clear response to this interrogative prompt—70 percent—indicated a practice of theoretical contextualization. The remaining three—30 percent—did not think contextualization of leadership theory was necessary.

Near ubiquity exists among research subjects regarding their principled abstention from using biblical characters as examples of modern leadership theories. Unsurprisingly, all eleven professors introduce biblical figures in seminary coursework involving leadership for illustrative purposes, to develop biblical rationale, or for character studies. Only one faculty participant intimated that he uses biblical characters as examples for modern leadership theories in a general way. A second recalled a single instance where he used Jesus as an example of situational leadership theory. A third participant indicated that he limits his use of biblical characters to exemplify contemporary models to two: servant leadership and transformational leadership. Apart from these exceptions, the remaining eight research subjects—73 percent—refrain from using biblical figures to illustrate contemporary leadership theories.

Two questions arrive, given the aforementioned 70 percent of faculty participants who indicated a pattern of contextualizing modern leadership theories: (1) Does this contextualization include a process of Christianization; and (2) if so, how do they conduct such theological modification? Trentham's hermeneutical typology offers three distinguishable tendencies that provide advantages in addressing data that, on some occasions, resist clean categorization: the *collaborating integrationist* perspective, the *nullifying integrationist* perspective, and the

qualifying integrationist perspective.² The *collaborating integrationist* perspective reflects the natural law tradition, prioritizes general revelation as a source of affirmable knowledge, and assumes a “hermeneutic of solidarity.”³ The integration responses of six scholars appear to align best with this set of tendencies: Faculty Participants 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 10. Faculty Participant 2 does not modify theory because he considers himself able to find another path to the same pedagogical destination presumably by rejecting theologically incompatible elements of a given theory. Faculty Participant 3 leans heavily on general revelation, underscores no need to Christianize or modify leadership theories, and endeavors to point out and discard theoretical weaknesses. Faculty Participant 4 is not concerned with modifying theory. Faculty Participant 5 appeals to common grace but arguably links his stance to an even greater degree to general revelation. He practices contextualization, affirms finding truth in extrabiblical sources, and commends using elements of theories instead of using theories in a wholesale manner. He rejects theoretical elements that cannot be linked to God. Faculty Participant 6 is compelled to contextualize secular theory. He adapts secular theory containing biblical truth and modifies it as needed to conform with his theological boundaries. He affirms using these theologically modified concepts for developing leaders. Faculty Participant 10 appeals strongly to an Augustinian approach to general revelation. He argues that theory must be contextualized and suggests the value of secular work will show up in faithful practice.

² Trentham, “Reading (Part 2),” 481–3.

³ Ibid., 481.

The *nullifying integrationist* perspective reflects the Anabaptist tradition, prioritizes special revelation as a source of affirmable knowledge, and assumes a “hermeneutic of suspicion.”⁴ While all respondents hold special revelation in high regard, the answers of one scholar appear to align best with this set of tendencies: Faculty Participant 1. He would not attempt to Christianize a popular leadership theory, in part because he questions the capability of contemporary leadership theories to achieve spiritually significant ends. Instead, he aims to critique leadership models carefully, integrate aspects that are compatible, and reject the remainder.

The *qualifying integrationist* perspective reflects the Reformed tradition, prioritizes common grace as a source of affirmable knowledge, and assumes a “hermeneutic of caution.”⁵ The experiences of four scholars appear to align best with this set of tendencies: Faculty Participants 7, 8, 9, and 11. Faculty Participant 7 communicated his Reformed leanings during the research interviews and yet inclusion here goes beyond self-assessment. He is guided by a strong Christian anthropology and suggests some theories are beyond the point of redemption. Guided by these boundaries, he assumes a posture of openness to considering contemporary leadership theories on their merits. Faculty Participant 8 also made his Reformed convictions clear during interviews. He uses theology to contextualize leadership theories and generally adopts a charitable stance toward modern leadership models. Faculty Participant 9 zealously prioritizes special revelation but contextualizes and modifies theory as necessary for use. He

⁴ Trentham, “Reading (Part 2),” 481–2.

⁵ Ibid., 482.

indicated that he has drawn broadly from the various theories, models, and approaches summarized by Northouse. Faculty Participant 11 critically reviews secular theory and does not reject models out of hand. He finds redeemable aspects and guards against wholesale appropriation.

To be clear, research subjects were not afforded an opportunity to self-assess using Trentham's hermeneutical typology, and another researcher—or the participants themselves—might categorize these perspectives differently. The discovery of Trentham's previously cited journal articles during the thirty-seventh and final research interview did not afford an opportunity to ask participants to categorize their tendencies using Trentham's typology. Acknowledging an openness to critique on categorization, the research establishes a lack of consensus among a fairly homogenous group of Baptist faculty participants regarding the best way to approach secular leadership theory.

Trends emerged regarding the scholars and sources that have most influenced faculty participants' current thinking about the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory. Four faculty members—36 percent—commended the influence of Aubrey Malphurs. Three faculty participants—27 percent—mentioned the impact of Patrick Lencioni's work. Two research subjects—18 percent—noted the effect of these authors on their thinking: Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, Tod Bolsinger, James Kouzes and Barry Posner, John Kotter, Jeff Iorg, Earl Waggoner, Robert Greenleaf, and Gene Wilkes. On balance, a diverse list of more than forty authors writing from both Christian and secular perspectives were identified as having influenced these participants' thinking.

Observations about Baptist scholarship addressing the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory varied considerably. The most common theme was addressed by Faculty Participants 9, 10, and 11 when they admitted that they have not seen much engagement on the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory by Baptist scholars. Their synopsis comports with Faculty Participant 6's observation that Baptist scholars—except for those teaching and researching in biblical studies—generally lag behind on generating “original critical thought” but typically perform well once others have introduced fresh concepts. Faculty Participants 8 and 9 lauded the work of Justin Irving at SBTS who, together with Mark Strauss at Bethel University, could be described as Baptist pathfinders in this intersection space.

When triangulating the experience of participating faculty members regarding the use of general revelation with the sister field of counseling, the aggregated responses of participating faculty members point to institutional openness for professors using wisdom gleaned from secular models provided they are subordinated to biblical authority and agreed upon standards of doctrine and orthodoxy. All faculty participants reported experiencing no formal directives from their institution defining the practice of operationalizing general revelation, and they do not anticipate forthcoming, formal guidance that curtails existing intellectual freedom within these limits. In the expected absence of prescribed methodology, most participants call for consistent approaches across all disciplines taught at their respective seminaries. Full-time faculty expressed a more complete understanding of de facto practices at their respective seminaries regarding general revelation compared to their adjunct colleagues.

Participating faculty members noted five contemporary leadership theories as having contributed the most to their spiritual flourishing. Eight of eleven participating faculty

members—73 percent—identified servant leadership, a model which outpaced the next most mentioned theory by double. These responses reflect the popularity of servant leadership among Baptist scholars identified in a separate study published in 2025.⁶ Participants highlighted four other theories as benefiting their spiritual flourishing: four mentioned situational leadership; three appreciated transformational leadership; and two celebrated the personal impact of adaptive leadership and authentic leadership.

On the role of contemporary leadership theories in Christian belief and practice, trends surfaced regarding seminary students' perspectives. As a group, faculty participants observed a mixture of student responses on the role of extrabiblical ideas—such as contemporary leadership theories—in Christian belief and practice. These trends include students asking probing theological questions and others displaying suspicion and skepticism. Students appear to be adopting a hermeneutical approach that sifts theories through theology to identify redeemable uses. This approach allows students to forego theological modification of theories for wholesale appropriation. Additionally, participating faculty members are encountering an ignorance among students about leadership theories due to lack of formal academic exposure, a wealth of anecdotal information about leadership often unknowingly connected to leadership theory, and the influence of leadership concepts that students have absorbed from the business world.

While faculty participants listed examples of ways that they had seen secular theory integrated productively into seminary spaces, three of them lamented the impact of personality assessment tools such as the Enneagram. Others critiqued psychodynamic approaches to

⁶ Palmer, “Surveying Leadership Theory Integration.”

leadership, the intrusion of political theory into Christian communities to include Christian nationalism, the unchecked prevalence of social media, and unhealthy ethical constructs. These concerns draw attention to the need for integrating leadership theory more thoughtfully.

Helpful insights were gained from academic supervisors to whom participating faculty members directly report. Many parallels presented between the scholarly influences on participating academic supervisors and faculty members. Three academic supervisors—75 percent—showcased the influence of J. Oswald Sanders and his classic work *Spiritual Leadership* on their thinking about the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory. Two academic supervisors—50 percent—highlighted the influence of Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby in *Spiritual Leadership*, and two others distinguished John Maxwell’s work. Other scholars mentioned by these academic supervisors included James Kouzes and Barry Posner, Jeff Iorg, Ken Blanchard, Mark Strauss, Don Carson, Paul Tripp, and Max Dupree.

Academic supervisors weighed in on the comparative use of general revelation by triangulating its use in the field of leadership with its use in the field of counseling. All four individuals affirmed the value of consistency across academic disciplines and acknowledged that this aspiration is more descriptive than prescriptive. Three of the supervisors affirmed a general openness to secular theory employed with a theocentric approach. The evidence suggests that, in practice, the achievement of this consistency goal depends heavily on the perspectives of individual faculty members.

Academic supervisors identified some insightful trends regarding perspectives on the role of contemporary leadership theories in Christian belief and practice. Some of these experiences dovetailed with the trends identified by participating faculty members such as the reticence of

some students to assign value to secular leadership models and the prevalence of some professors practicing openness to popular leadership theory without a commensurate level of discernment. Awareness of these experienced trends provides important context for understanding the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory.

Academic supervisors, like the faculty participants, presented a united front on the primacy of biblical authority. As a group, they appealed to the leading of the Holy Spirit, the benefit of conceptual vetting by academic colleagues, and the place of confessional statements in providing institutional guardrails. Supervisors' reflections on Baptist scholarship on the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory serve as both an indictment and an opportunity. Two observe a pronounced lack of published scholarship on the subject, while the other two have experienced a vast spectrum of academic quality in leadership research.

Findings

The lived experiences of research participants suggest that Baptist seminaries face a point of decision regarding the academic qualifications expected of those teaching Christian leadership courses especially at the doctoral level. Four Baptist seminaries currently offer PhD degrees with concentrations in Christian leadership or leadership: MBTS, SBTS, NOBTS, and Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary (SEBTS). As these institutions generate an increasing number of terminal degree holders in the field and sister Baptist seminaries launch similar programs that add to the academic pool, the defensibility of assigning leadership courses to venerable scholars whose principal academic expertise resides in domains other than leadership might naturally trend lower. At the same time, the expectation appears to

be growing for seminary professors teaching leadership courses to publish scholarly work within the leadership guild. If these assumed azimuths are correct, then a season of transition appears to be on the horizon when newly minted leadership scholars may be phased into SBC and CNBC seminary faculties and counted on to contribute actively to the literature in their field of specialization. The present study indicates that an area with an acute lack of research and publication is the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory.

The lived experiences of research participants suggest that most faculty members who teach leadership courses at Baptist seminaries use a general theological framework to evaluate leadership theory and could benefit from a more robust theoretical assessment tool. Research participants who articulated standards beyond general theological compatibility argued for the usefulness and anthropological consistency of a theory to be considered. McKinley observed a void of structured approaches to evaluating secular leadership theory, argued that leadership researchers needed “a systematic approach to leadership theory in order to achieve biblically based leadership theory,” and proposed a novel tool for theoretical evaluation.⁷ The theological aspect (Tier 2) of his Leadership Assessment Matrix proposes four areas of analysis: teleology, ontology, authority, and ethic.⁸ Research participants’ advocacy for *usefulness* in expanding God’s kingdom seems to comport with McKinley’s teleological aspect, which he defined as “the examination of God’s missionary purpose through his church.”⁹ The

⁷ McKinley, *Evaluating Leadership*, 176.

⁸ Ibid., 156.

⁹ Ibid., 11–12, 69.

primacy of Christian character in some participants' responses appears to sync partially with McKinley's ontological aspect.¹⁰ Research participants did not introduce an aspect of authority directly. A few research subjects referenced the need for ethics that delve into "desired behaviors or principles of conduct that result from a particular leadership theory."¹¹ The use of McKinley's assessment tool would systematize researchers' theological analysis; however, at a minimum, an assessment of the anthropological commitments of a given leadership theory should be added. Theoretical assumptions about human capacity for sustained positive behavior independent of regeneration must factor into theological analysis of leadership models. The present research indicates that the use of a theological assessment tool among leadership scholars is warranted and McKinley's groundbreaking matrix could be advanced to incorporate a more comprehensive application of systematic theology.

The lived experiences of research participants suggest that SBC and CNBC seminaries appear poised to gain from thoughtful intra-institutional dialogue concerning the value of consistency in integrating secular wisdom across various academic disciplines.

Research participants valued both institutional consistency in the use of general revelation to inform the role of non-Christian academic resources in seminary coursework and academic freedom within confessional boundaries. Amid efforts to harmonize these values, participants observed some diverse practices in the utilization of scholarship originating outside the Christian community in fields such as biblical studies, counseling, education, and leadership. None of the

¹⁰ McKinley, *Evaluating Leadership*, 12, 79–80, 83–5.

¹¹ Ibid., 13–4, 104–13.

fifteen participants called for institutional statements or formal policies directing conformity in theoretical integration; however, they presented a general openness for furthering consistency and collegiality regarding the use of general revelation.

Implications

No previous research is known to have investigated faculty and academic supervisor perceptions regarding the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory. The present study constitutes a step toward filling that gap. The ways in which Christians use their theological convictions and doctrinal frameworks to assess and utilize leadership theories is important for leadership scholars to understand, and an initial exploration of scholarly experiences is one approach.

This dissertation study illustrated that Baptist seminary faculty members and their academic supervisors are committed to biblical fidelity and theological congruency but generally lack a systematized approach to analyze popular leadership theories theologically. McKinley's matrix presents a fruitful starting point with considerable merit, but more could be done to build on his approach and broaden the way theology is employed systematically during assessment. Beyond the expected Christological deficiency that secular leadership theories could be expected to contain, a deeper review of theological anthropology is needed when engaging leadership theories—one that does more to guide thinkers on viable options when theoretical assumptions about anthropology challenge nonnegotiable boundaries of Christian orthodoxy and doctrinal identity.

Generalizations

This phenomenological study focused on four Baptist seminaries in closest geographical proximity to the American Mountain West. Had the scope of research been less constrained by time, expanding the selection of studied schools to include the remaining three SBC seminaries—SBTS, NOBTS, and SEBTS (all of which offer PhD degrees in Christian leadership or leadership)—would have enhanced the generalizability of the findings. When Baptist loyalties are set aside, studying experiences and perceptions among the leadership faculty at institutions of higher education affiliated with other Protestant denominations, interdenominational schools, and professors in academic contexts representing other religious worldviews is likely to generate similar interest and provide data for fruitful comparison.

The extent to which theological factors impact the treatment of leadership theory is a broad area of research interest. The associated experiences of 34 percent of the eligible faculty members at four selected Baptist seminaries arguably achieve enough data saturation to substantiate the findings on leadership faculty credentials, leadership theory assessment methodology, and consistent uses of secular wisdom across academic disciplines.¹² Other findings are perhaps supportable from the data, but the three findings above appear clear.

An earlier recognition of Trentham's hermeneutical typology would have afforded the present research participants an important opportunity to wrestle with describing their own theoretical integration tendencies. Identifying Trentham's work sooner would have allowed interview questions to be adjusted to facilitate a more robust external assessment of participant

¹² Peoples, 49.

tendencies. This unexpected development in the research journey opens the door for future investigators to advance the conversation about faithful approaches to theoretical integration.

Further Research

The leadership field would benefit from additional investigation into how scholars and ministry practitioners experience the intersection of theology and leadership theory. Pending an additional, robust assessment tool, McKinley's Leadership Assessment Matrix could be used as a starting point to evaluate other popular leadership theories. McKinley analyzes transformational leadership in his dissertation and *Evaluating Leadership*. Other contemporary leadership models, such as those summarized by Northouse in *Leadership*, would benefit from similar scrutiny.

Further phenomenological research is needed regarding the comprehensive application of Trentham's theological predispositions for his three integrationist postures regarding social theories. Appreciating how his intriguing framework for understanding tendencies in appropriating secular theories bears out in the lived experiences in scholars representing natural law, Anabaptist, and Reformed traditions would provide worthy insight. The way Trentham's typology moves from concept to application also merits further inquiry.

An understanding of Christian leadership extends beyond the issue of how scholars handle leadership theories originating outside the Christian community. Even so, enough diversity of thought exists among Baptist leadership scholars to suggest more work is needed in this relatively new academic field of Christian leadership. While some scholars have engaged the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory thoughtfully, more work remains to ensure ministry leaders being trained at SBC and CNBC seminaries are equipped to understand

leadership in a way that is consistent with their shared biblical convictions, in sync with their common theological commitments, and aligned with their doctrinal priorities. To that end, the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory represents an area of study primed for substantive investment by current and future researchers.

APPENDIX 1

MCKINLEY'S LEADERSHIP ASSESSMENT MATRIX

Tier 1: Philosophical Aspect

Elements to Assess

Development and Description
of the Theory

Historical context, theory development, and
description

Exercise of the Theory

Purpose, locus of leadership, influence mechanisms,
and stewardship orientation

Outcomes of the Theory

The theory's performance measures, meta-
relationships, contextual influences, and
universality

Tier 2: Theological Aspect

Elements to Assess

Teleology

A leader's purpose, motivation, and objectives

Ontology

A leader's calling, character, and competency

Authority

A leader's capacity, authority, and responsibility

Ethic

A leader as servant of God and servant to others

Tier 3: Cultural Aspect**Elements to Assess**

Power Distance	The degree of existence and acceptance of hierarchy
Individualism vs. Collectivism	Emphasis on personal and family goals and needs vs. that of the group
Masculinity vs Femininity	Assertiveness, competition, distinct gender roles vs. quality of life, cooperation, and overlap of roles
Uncertainty Avoidance	Response to volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity
Long-term vs. Short-term Orientation	Patience and preparation vs. immediate gratification
Indulgence vs. Restraint	Satiating desires vs. compliance with social norms

This reproduction of McKinley's Leadership Assessment Matrix is borrowed from McKinley, *Evaluating Leadership*, 156.

APPENDIX 2

INTRODUCTORY EMAIL TO CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICERS

SUBJECT: Research Inquiry

Good afternoon! I'm a PhD student at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary majoring in Christian Leadership. I'm currently writing my dissertation prospectus. Dr. Reggie Ogea is my supervisor. I'm reaching out to summarize the intended direction of my research, ask if you would be willing to consider participating, and inquire about the IRB approval process.

My proposed dissertation title is "Intersecting Christian Theology and Leadership Theory: A Phenomenological Study of Selected Baptist Seminaries Serving the American Mountain West." As I step down as Dean of Spiritual Life and University Chaplain at University of Mary Hardin-Baylor at the end of June and relocate to Whitefish, Montana, to help plant Goodwater Church in partnership with the Montana Southern Baptist Convention and North American Mission Board, my interest is piqued on how like-minded Baptist seminaries are partnering with local churches to raise up ministry leaders in the American Mountain West—an area that covers 24.2% of the USA and includes Montana, Idaho, Wyoming, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and New Mexico. The absence of any International Association of Baptist Colleges and Universities (IABCU) member school main campuses in the American Mountain West increases the complexity of this task.

I aim to conduct qualitative research with the four Baptist seminaries geographically closest to the American Mountain West: Canadian Baptist Theological Seminary and College, Gateway Seminary, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. I intend to use a phenomenological approach to answer this research question: How do faculty members teaching leadership courses and academic administrators supervising them at selected IABCU member schools integrate leadership theory into academic coursework?

Rather than identify individual faculty and administrator perceptions or attempt to correlate those perceptions to their respective institutions in the research report, this research will aggregate participating scholars' viewpoints and practices across the four schools regarding the use of leadership theory in seminary settings. My goal is to understand better how Baptist scholars teaching leadership theory at the undergraduate, master's, and doctoral levels handle leadership theory in a way that comports with Christian theology. I hope that the findings will contribute

heuristically to the field of Christian leadership by capturing data on the lived experiences of academics intersecting Christian theology and leadership theory at the tactical level and demonstrate the importance of critically assessing leadership theory to the broader community of Christian higher education.

Once you get a chance to review my approved prospectus, which would likely come toward the end of the summer, would you be open to consider participating by (1) identifying those faculty at your institution who teach courses that include one or more leadership theories and (2) identify their academic supervisor, if applicable? I would like to reach out directly to the faculty you identify and invite them to participate in a few interviews. I would also like to invite their academic supervisors to provide feedback on the findings.

My research will have to be approved through the NOBTS IRB process before my prospectus gets approved. Would your seminary accept IRB approval from NOBTS or require that my prospectus also be approved through your seminary's IRB process before the research could commence?

I've copied Dr. Ogea here and provided my cell number below should you have any questions for either of us. I plan to be at the SBC Annual Meeting in Dallas this week if an in-person discussion would be helpful.

Thank you for considering the request.

Jason B. Palmer
PhD Candidate
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary
jpalmer@students.nobts.edu
352.562.6408

APPENDIX 3

INTRODUCTORY EMAIL TO PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS

SUBJECT: Dissertation Research Invitation

I'm reaching out to humbly request your participation in my dissertation research titled "Intersecting Christian Theology and Leadership Theory: A Phenomenological Study of Selected Baptist Seminaries Positioned to Serve the American Mountain West." The attached file summarizes the scope of the approved research, explains how you were carefully selected as a prospective contributor, and overviews the modest time commitment. I'd be grateful if you'd review the attached content and respond by Monday, September 29. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Jason B. Palmer
PhD Candidate
New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary
jpalmer@students.nobts.edu
352.562.6408

ATTACHMENT: Informed Consent Form

APPENDIX 4

INFORMED CONSENT FORM (FACULTY MEMBER VERSION)

Informed Consent Statement

Intersecting Christian Theology and Leadership Theory: A Phenomenological Study of Selected Baptist Seminaries Positioned to Serve the American Mountain West

Researcher: Jason B. Palmer, ThM

Researcher's Contact Information:

143 Granite Drive, Whitefish, MT 59937

(352) 562-6408

jpalmer@students.nobts.edu

PhD Supervisor's Contact Information:

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

ATTN: Dr. Reggie Ogea

3939 Gentilly Blvd, New Orleans, LA 70126

(985) 966-2912

rogea@nobts.edu

About me:

I am a PhD Candidate at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary majoring in Christian Leadership. Following retirement from the U.S. Army Chaplain Corps in 2019, I served for six years as Dean of Spiritual Life and University Chaplain and an adjunct faculty member at University of Mary Hardin-Baylor in Belton, Texas. I currently serve as Executive Pastor of Goodwater Church—a new church being planted in Whitefish, Montana, in partnership with the Montana Southern Baptist Convention and North American Mission Board. My research interests focus on the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory.

Why have you been invited to take part in this study?

My dissertation seeks to understand the lived experiences of faculty members who teach courses involving leadership theory at undergraduate, master's, or doctoral levels at one of the four Baptist seminaries geographically closest to the American Mountain West: Canadian Baptist Theological Seminary and College, Gateway Seminary, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Your Chief Academic Officer has identified you as a faculty member who meets the eligibility criteria for voluntary participation.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to explore how the theology of faculty members teaching leadership courses at selected Baptist seminaries influences their integration of leadership theory into academic coursework.

What will be involved if I take part in this study?

Participants will sign this informed consent statement and take part in three interviews during the Fall 2025 semester. Each interview will be a one-on-one recorded video call hosted on the Microsoft Teams platform. Each interview will take less than one hour. After the researcher uses each video to manually edit the associated transcript for accuracy, participants will approve the polished transcript before the researcher codes the collected content for subsequent analysis.

Will information obtained in this study be confidential?

Participants will be offered the option to be identified in the final research report. Unless that consent is granted, participants' identity will be kept confidential. The findings will be aggregated across all four institutions rather than correlated to particular institutions to mitigate risk to institutional and personal reputation. Any direct quotes drawn from the interviews will be sent to the respective participant for approval prior to inclusion into the research report. Digital copies of consent forms will be stored on the researcher's personal computer and safeguarded in a password-protected folder. Access to the recorded interview videos will be limited to the researcher. Those videos will be stored on One Drive account associated with the researcher's NOBTS Microsoft account. The videos will be deleted following dissertation defense. The polished interview transcripts that have been approved by the respective participant will be downloaded from Microsoft Teams onto the researcher's personal computer and safeguarded in a password-protected folder.

What if I am harmed by the study?

While steps have been taken to minimize harm to participant's reputation and stemming from any loss of confidentiality, the researcher stands ready to provide a list of counseling referrals in response to harm related to the study.

What happens if I do not wish to participate in this study or withdraw from the study?

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. If you do not desire to participate in this study, you are free to do so without providing any reason for your decision.

What do I do now?

If you are willing to participate, please initial the three statements in the section below and email a scanned copy of this consent form to jpalmer@students.nobts.edu by September 5, 2025.

Thank you for your time!
Jason B. Palmer

_____ I have read the participant information sheet.

_____ I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving reason.

_____ I agree to take part in this study.

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

Email: _____

APPENDIX 5

INFORMED CONSENT FORM (SUPERVISOR VERSION)

Informed Consent Statement

Intersecting Christian Theology and Leadership Theory: A Phenomenological Study of Selected Baptist Seminaries Positioned to Serve the American Mountain West

Researcher: Jason B. Palmer, ThM

Researcher's Contact Information:

143 Granite Drive, Whitefish, MT 59937

(352) 562-6408

jpalmer@students.nobts.edu

PhD Supervisor's Contact Information:

New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary

ATTN: Dr. Reggie Ogea

3939 Gentilly Blvd, New Orleans, LA 70126

(985) 966-2912

rogea@nobts.edu

About me:

I am a PhD Candidate at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary majoring in Christian Leadership. Following retirement from the U.S. Army Chaplain Corps in 2019, I served for six years as Dean of Spiritual Life and University Chaplain and an adjunct faculty member at University of Mary Hardin-Baylor in Belton, Texas. I currently serve as Executive Pastor of Goodwater Church—a new church being planted in Whitefish, Montana, in partnership with the Montana Southern Baptist Convention and North American Mission Board. My research interests focus on the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory.

Why have you been invited to take part in this study?

My dissertation seeks to understand the lived experiences of faculty members who teach courses involving leadership theory at undergraduate, master's, or doctoral levels at one of the four Baptist seminaries geographically closest to the American Mountain West: Canadian Baptist Theological Seminary and College, Gateway Seminary, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Your Chief Academic Officer has identified you as the academic supervisor of one or more faculty members who meet the eligibility criteria for voluntary participation. You are being invited to participate in this study to contextualize interview data in light of your institution's broader educational philosophy.

What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study is to explore how the theology of faculty members teaching leadership courses at selected Baptist seminaries influences their integration of leadership theory into academic coursework.

What will be involved if I take part in this study?

Participants will sign this informed consent statement. Whereas participating faculty members will take part in three interviews during the Fall 2025 semester, participating academic supervisors will take part in one interview during the Fall 2025 semester. The interview will be a one-on-one recorded video call hosted on the Microsoft Teams platform. The interview will take less than one hour. After the researcher uses the video to manually edit the associated transcript for accuracy, participants will approve the polished transcript before the researcher codes the collected content for subsequent analysis.

Will information obtained in this study be confidential?

Participants will be offered the option to be identified in the final research report. Unless that consent is granted, participants' identity will be kept confidential. The findings will be aggregated across all four institutions rather than correlated to particular institutions to mitigate risk to institutional and personal reputation. Any direct quotes drawn from the interviews will be sent to the respective participant for approval prior to inclusion into the research report. Digital copies of consent forms will be stored on the researcher's personal computer and safeguarded in a password-protected folder. Access to the recorded interview videos will be limited to the researcher. Those videos will be stored on One Drive account associated with the researcher's NOBTS Microsoft account. The videos will be deleted following dissertation defense. The polished interview transcripts that have been approved by the respective participant will be downloaded from Microsoft Teams onto the researcher's personal computer and safeguarded in a password-protected folder.

What if I am harmed by the study?

While steps have been taken to minimize harm to participant's reputation and stemming from any loss of confidentiality, the researcher stands ready to provide a list of counseling referrals in response to harm related to the study.

What happens if I do not wish to participate in this study or withdraw from the study?

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary. If you do not desire to participate in this study, you are free to do so without providing any reason for your decision.

What do I do now?

If you are willing to participate, please initial the three statements in the section below and email a scanned copy of this consent form to jpalmer@students.nobts.edu by September 5, 2025.

Thank you for your time!
Jason B. Palmer

_____ I have read the participant information sheet.

_____ I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without giving reason.

_____ I agree to take part in this study.

Signature: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

Email: _____

APPENDIX 6

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



August 6, 2025

Jason Palmer,

The Research Doctoral Institutional Review Board of the New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary has reviewed your proposed research project, "Intersecting Christian Theology and Leadership Theory: A Phenomenological Study of Selected Baptist Seminaries Positioned to Serve the American Mountain West." The IRB has given final approval of your research protocol.

According to Section III.I.3b of the Manual for Research Doctoral Programs,

Any changes in the project after approval by the IRB must be resubmitted for review by the IRB before approval is granted. IRB approval is granted for a maximum of two years and may be subject to review at any time during that period.

Therefore, your protocol approval expires on August 6, 2027. If your research has not been completed by that date you will need to resubmit a request for IRB review along with an update regarding the research you have completed. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact my office.

Sincerely,



Dr. Terry Iles
PhD Director

APPENDIX 7

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (FACULTY MEMBERS)

Faculty Member Interview #1

Describe your childhood and upbringing from birth to high school graduation.

How would you characterize the events that led to your profession of faith in Jesus?

Describe your call to ministry.

Who provided the principal influence on the development of your Christian theology between birth and high school graduation? What was most influential about their influence?

How would you describe the foremost influences on the topic of leadership between birth and high school graduation? What was most influential about their influence?

How would you describe your educational journey since high school graduation? What was your major in your undergraduate program? What were your areas of concentration during your graduate programs?

Which higher education courses or other education experiences do you recall that exposed you to leadership theory?

How did you come to begin teaching courses that included leadership theory?

Which courses that include leadership theory have you taught at your current seminary, and which of those courses do you presently teach?

Faculty Member Interview #2

What process do you use to determine if a leadership approach, model, or theory is compatible with Christian belief and practice?

In your experience, how compatible must a leadership approach, model, or theory be with Christian orthodoxy to warrant commending its use to seminary students?

Do you ever experience a feeling of reticence in introducing one or more modern theories of leadership to seminary students because of perceived incongruity between the theory and your biblical worldview?

Do you ever feel compelled to—or do you in fact—excuse, defend, or otherwise contextualize leadership theories in light of your biblical worldview?

Do you ever strive to—or do you—use biblical examples of modern leadership theories?

Should you assess a leadership approach, model, or theory to require modification—a process of Christianization—to achieve adequate conformity to Christian orthodoxy before being employed, how do you go about the work of modification?

Which scholars and sources most influenced your current thinking about the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory?

In your experience, how do you observe Baptist scholars addressing the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory?

Faculty Member Interview #3

Christian leadership is not the only academic field engaged in Baptist seminary coursework that introduces a decision point regarding one's stance on the appropriate role for theory originating outside the Christian community for utility inside the Christian community. For example, some Southern Baptist seminaries engage the field of counseling from an integrative angle that positions graduates for state licensure while other Southern Baptist seminaries engage counseling from a nouthetic or biblical approach that does not place students on a trajectory for state licensure. In your experience at your current seminary and other sister seminaries, how does a seminary's general posture on the role of general revelation in other academic fields such as counseling influence the conversation among faculty regarding the role of general revelation in the comparatively newer academic field of leadership? Do you experience any connection?

From which contemporary leadership theories* have you gleaned concepts that you found to be most helpful to your spiritual flourishing as an individual?

* = The term "contemporary leadership theories" refers to those identified by Peter Northouse in *Leadership: Theory and Practice* such as trait approach, skills approach, behavior approach, situational approach, path-goal approach, leader-member exchange theory, transformational leadership, authentic leadership, servant leadership, and adaptive leadership.

What trends have you experienced among your seminary students related to their perspectives on role of contemporary leadership theories in Christian belief and practice?

How have you experienced the integration of contemporary leadership theories into the Christian life in ways that you found to be sufficiently consistent with your convictions on the role of general revelation and contributing to the flourishing of the body of Christ?

How have you experienced the integration of contemporary theories from any academic field originating outside the Christian community for utilization inside the Christian community in ways that led to distraction for the body of Christ?

APPENDIX 8

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS (SUPERVISORS)

Which scholars and sources would you identify that have most influenced your current thinking about the intersection of Christian theology and leadership theory?

Faculty members at Southern Baptist and Canadian National Baptist seminaries hold a variety of personal stances on the role of general revelation in assessing how leadership theories, models, and approaches originating from non-Christian sources offer utility to the Christian community. Looking at the academic field of counseling suggests the same might be said of SBC and CNBC seminaries on an institutional level. For example, some Baptist seminaries offer biblical or nouthetic counseling programs that typically do not track students for state licensure, while others adopt an integrative model that intentionally places students on a trajectory toward state licensure. As an academic supervisor of faculty members who introduce leadership theories to seminary students, how have you experienced your seminary generally posturing its expectations regarding the role of popular theories originating outside the Christian community in preparing ministry leaders? Do you sense correlation between your seminary's stance on the role on popular theory in counseling and your seminary's stance on the role of popular theory in leadership studies?

What trends, if any, have you experienced among faculty members and seminary students at your seminary related to their perspectives on the role of contemporary leadership theories in Christian belief and practice?

Based on your collective experiences, what process or guiding principles would you expect the faculty you supervise to employ when assessing a leadership approach, model, or theory's compatibility with Christian belief and practice and usefulness for the Christian community?

In your experience, how have you observed Baptist scholars handling the intersection of Christian theology and popular leadership theory?

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TEACHING EXPERIENCE

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Guest Teacher, August 2025 – Present

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Adjunct Faculty, Christian Ethics [Spring 2026, Spring 2025]

UNIVERSITY OF MARY HARDIN-BAYLOR, Belton, TX

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Principles of Servant Leadership (LDCB 2300), *Competency Based Education Program* [Summer 2025, Spring 2025, Fall 2024]

Christian Principles in Business Leadership (BLDR 3350), *McLane College of Business* [Fall 2023, Spring 2023]

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Leading and Managing Change (BLDR 3391), *McLane College of Business* [Fall 2024]

Business Ethics (BADM 4341), *McLane College of Business* [Spring 2024]

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Crisis Ministry (CSMN 4391), *College of Christian Studies* [Fall 2022]

Interprofessional Education: Faith & Spirituality in Healthcare, *Mayborn College of Health Sciences* [Fall 2021, Summer 2021, Spring 2021]

Couse Designer

Leading and Managing Change (BLDR 3391), *McLane College of Business*

U.S. ARMY SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND, Fort Bragg, NC

Instructor, Static Line Jumpmaster Course, July 2015

U.S. ARMY JOHN F. KENNEDY SPECIAL WARFARE CENTER AND SCHOOL, Fort Bragg, NC

Guest Lecturer, Ethics for Officer Students in Special Forces Qualification Course and Special Forces Detachment Leaders Course, January 2013 – October 2013

Guest Lecturer; Ethics for Students in Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape (SERE) Course; August 2012 – November 2013

U.S. NAVY NUCLEAR POWER TRAINING UNIT, Charleston, SC

Junior Staff Instructor, May 1996 – August 1997

ORDINATION

NORTHSHORE CHURCH; Slidell, LA; January 2006

LICENSURE

FELLOWSHIP BAPTIST CHURCH; High Springs, FL; December 2004

EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE

MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE, Helena, MT

Chaplain, District 6 (Kalispell), April 2026 – Present

GOODWATER CHURCH, Whitefish, MT

Executive Pastor, July 2025 – Present

UNIVERSITY OF MARY HARDIN-BAYLOR, Belton, TX

Dean of Spiritual Life and University Chaplain, August 2019 – June 2025

CITY OF GEORGETOWN, Georgetown, TX

Soccer Referee Assignor, February 2020 – May 2021

Head Soccer Referee, August 2019 – May 2021

Soccer Referee, January 2019 – May 2021

UNITED STATES ARMY

Chaplain, February 2009 – December 2019

Chaplain Candidate, January 2007 – January 2009

NORTHSHORE CHURCH, Slidell, LA

Minister of Pastoral Care, November 2007 – January 2009

Church Administrator, December 2006 – October 2007

UNITED STATES NAVY

Submarine Officer, December 2000 – December 2006

Reserve Officer Training Corps Midshipman, August 1997 – December 2000

Submarine Nuclear Machinist's Mate, November 1994 – August 1997

CONESTOGAS RESTAURANT, Alachua, FL

Host, March 1994 – October 1994

Kitchen Staff, December 1993 – March 1994

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA, Gainesville, FL

Facility Manager, Southwest Recreation Center, April 1999 – September 1999

Laboratory Assistant, Department of Entomology, June 1993 – August 1993

Laboratory Assistant, Department of Agronomy, June 1992 – August 1992

MINISTRY EXPERIENCE

MONTANA SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION, Billings, MT

Member, Constitution and Bylaws Review Committee, April 2026 – Present

WHITEFISH POLICE DEPARTMENT, Whitefish, MT

Chaplain, January 2026 – Present

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, Belton, TX

College Ministry Preacher, January 2022 – April 2022

WILLIAMSON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE, Georgetown, TX

Senior Chaplain, May 2024 – June 2025

Chaplain, August 2021 – May 2024

TRAIL LIFE USA TROOP 2300, Georgetown, TX

Troop Chaplain, August 2019 – May 2021

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, Georgetown, TX

Trustee, February 2023 – June 2025

Lay Teacher, August 2016 – June 2025

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, Springfield, VA

Lay Teacher, July 2014 – August 2016

CROSSPOINTE BAPTIST CHURCH, Millington, TN

Lay Teacher, November 2005 – December 2006

UNITED STATES NAVY

Protestant Lay Leader, USS LOUISIANA (SSBN 743)(BLUE), January 2004 – March 2005

OFFICERS' CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

ROTC Contact; University of Mary Hardin-Baylor; Belton, TX; August 2019 – April 2025

Spring Canyon Advisory Committee Member; Spring Canyon Conference Center; Buena Vista, CO; October 2002 – October 2022

Local Area Representative; Kings Bay, GA; July 2002 – December 2004

Local Area Representative; Charleston, SC; March 2001 – April 2002

BAPTIST COLLEGIATE MINISTRIES, Gainesville, FL

Vice President of Fellowship, University of Florida, May 1999 – May 2000

Resident, Baptist Student Center, University of Florida, August 1998 – May 2000

FELLOWSHIP BAPTIST CHURCH, High Springs, FL
Youth Ministry Assistant, August 1997 – January 2001

PULPIT SUPPLY, 1997 – Present

States: Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Kansas, Louisiana, Maine,
Maryland, Montana, North Carolina, South Carolina, Texas, Virginia
Countries: Afghanistan, Germany, Iraq, Italy, Jamaica, Kuwait, Moldova, Qatar,
Romania, South Korea

PROFESSIONAL SOCIETY MEMBERSHIPS

EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL SOCIETY, February 2023 – Present

ACADEMY OF RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP, December 2021 – Present

PUBLICATIONS

Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles

- Palmer, Jason B. “William Wistar Hamilton, Sr.: Exploring the Life and Legacy of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary’s Second President.” *Baptist History and Heritage* 60, no. 1 (2025): 28–41. <https://www.thebhhs.org/resources/baptist-history-heritage-journal>.
- Palmer, Jason B. “Surveying Leadership Theory Integration Trends in Undergraduate Coursework at Selected Baptist Schools.” *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* 15, no. 1 (Summer 2025): 62–88. https://www.regent.edu/acad/global/publications/jbpl/vol15no1/Vol15Iss1_JBPL_Full_Issue.pdf.
- Palmer, Jason B. “Missiological Adaptation as a Framework for Chaplains in Civil-Military Engagement.” *Military Chaplaincy Review* (November 2024): 19–25. <https://mcr.scholasticahq.com/article/133265-missiological-adaptation-as-a-framework-for-chaplains-in-civil-military-engagement>.
- Palmer, Jason B. “Theologically Analyzing Secular Leadership Theory: Evidence of Pelagius’s Teachings in the Servant Leadership of Robert Greenleaf.” *Journal of Religious Leadership* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2024): 79–102. <https://arl-jrl.org/journal-of-religious-leadership>.
- Palmer, Jason B. “Strategic Drivers in the Mission Statements of IABCU Colleges and Universities in Texas.” *Biblical Higher Educational Journal* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2024): 29–52. <https://www.abhe.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/2024.BHE-Journal.pdf>.
- Palmer, Jason B. “Forgotten Sacrifice: Native American Involvement in the Construction of the Castillo de San Marcos.” *Florida Historical Quarterly* 80, no. 4 (Spring 2002): 437–454. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30146371>.

Book Reviews

- Palmer, Jason B. Review of *Chaplaincy: A Comprehensive Introduction*, by Mark A. Jumper, Steven E. Keith, and Michael W. Langston. *Theological Reflections: Eastern European Journal of Theology* 24, no. 1 (Spring 2026). <http://reflections.eeit-edu.info>. [accepted]
- Palmer, Jason B. Review of *Leadership in Ukraine: Studies During Wartime*, by Alexander I. Negrov and Ronald E. Riggio. *Gateway Journal of Theology* 1, no. 2 (Spring 2026). <https://thegateway.press>. [accepted]
- Palmer, Jason B. Review of *Serving God Under Siege: How War Transformed a Ukrainian Community*, by Valentyn Syniy. *Theological Reflections: Eastern European Journal of Theology* 23, no. 2 (Fall 2025): 146–149. <http://reflections.eeit-edu.info/article/view/342494/333955>.
- Palmer, Jason B. Review of *Gentle and Lowly: The Heart of Christ for Sinners and Suffers*, by Dane Ortlund. *Journal for Baptist Theology and Ministry* 22, no. 2 (Fall 2025): 369–371. <https://www.nobts.edu/baptist-center-theology>.
- Palmer, Jason B. Review of *Evaluating Leadership: A Model for Missiological Assessment of Leadership Theory and Practice*, by J. Keith McKinley. *Midwestern Journal of Theology* 24, no. 2 (Fall 2025): 104–106. <https://www.mbts.edu/resources/journal>.
- Palmer, Jason B. Review of *Leadership or Servanthood?: Walking in the Steps of Jesus*, by Hwa Yung. *Southwestern Journal of Theology* 67, no. 2 (Spring 2025): 127–129. <https://equipthecalled.com/swjt-journal-article/leadership-or-servanthood-walking-in-the-steps-of-jesus>.

Other Articles

- Palmer, Jason B. “Montanan Enrollment Growing in Baptist Seminary Graduate Programs.” *Montana Southern Baptist Convention Enews*, March 3, 2026. <https://mtsbc.org/2026/03/montanan-enrollment-growing-in-baptist-seminary>.
- Palmer, Jason B. “Baptist Seminaries Equipping Montanans for Effective Ministry.” *Montana Southern Baptist Convention Enews*, September 23, 2025. <https://mtsbc.org/2025/09/baptist-seminaries-equipping-montanans>.
- Palmer, Jason B. “Discover ‘New’ Things.” *Mountaineer*, October 7, 2007. https://www.fortcarsonmountaineer.com/wp-files/mountaineer-weekly-pdfs/mountaineer_2007-10-05.pdf.

PRESENTATIONS

- “Perspective From the Trail,” University Assembly, University of Mary Hardin-Baylor; Belton, TX; August 2025
- “William Wistar Hamilton, Sr.: Exploring the Life and Legacy of New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary’s Second President,” 2025 Baptist History and Heritage Society Annual Meeting hosted by Baylor University; Waco, TX; May 2025
- “Obedience for the Benefit of Others,” Baccalaureate Service, First Baptist Church Canton; Canton, TX; May 2025

“Transforming Servanthood,” Boards & Commissions Appreciation Luncheon, City of Belton; Belton, TX; March 2025
 “Writing Stories Through Remembering,” Annual Baseball Banquet, University of Mary Hardin-Baylor; Belton, TX; February 2025
 “From the Hills to the Nations,” Baccalaureate Service Address to the 116th Graduating Class, San Marcos Academy; San Marcos, TX; May 2024
 “Crisis Management in Christian Higher Education,” Network of Friends Conference hosted by University of Mary-Hardin-Baylor; Belton, TX; May 2023
 “Driven By Memory,” Memorial Day event hosted by American Legion Post 133; Temple, TX; May 2022
 “Remembering 9/11,” Salute to America event hosted in Crusader Stadium by University of Mary Hardin-Baylor; Belton, TX; September 2020
 “Religious Support and the Operations Process,” U.S. Army 1st Cavalry Division Unit Ministry Team Training; Fort Hood, TX; May 2018
 “Religious Support Operations in Pacific Command,” U.S. Army 1st Cavalry Division Unit Ministry Team Training; Fort Hood, TX; May 2018
 “Religious Support and the Operations Process,” U.S. Army Garrison Area III Unit Ministry Team Training; Camp Humphreys, South Korea; January 2018
 “Ministry in Captivity,” U.S. Army 2nd Infantry Division/ROK-US Combined Division Unit Ministry Team Training; Camp Humphreys, South Korea; September 2017
 “Ministry in Captivity,” U.S. Army 1st Cavalry Division Unit Ministry Team Training; Fort Hood, TX; April 2017
 “Preparing for Mass Casualty Response in a Garrison Context: Lessons Learned from the Fort Hood Shooting on November 5, 2009,” U.S. Army 1st Infantry Division Unit Ministry Team Training; Fort Riley, KS; July 2010
 “Submarine Warfare,” U.S. Navy Midshipman Training aboard USS LOUISIANA (SSBN 743)(BLUE), July 2004
 “Submarine Escape: International Training and Rescue Capabilities,” U.S. Navy Crew Training aboard USS LOUISIANA (SSBN 743)(BLUE), September 2003

INTERVIEWS

The Dr. Nurse Mama Show, *American Family Radio*, September 23, 2024, <https://afr.net/podcasts/the-dr-nurse-mama-show/2024/september/jason-palmer-and-tiffany-horton>.
 The Dr. Nurse Mama Show, *American Family Radio*, February 26, 2024, <https://afr.net/podcasts/the-dr-nurse-mama-show/2024/february/charles-ramsey-and-jason-palmer>.
 The Dr. Nurse Mama Show, *American Family Radio*, October 30, 2023, <https://afr.net/podcasts/the-dr-nurse-mama-show/2023/october/dr-peck-pnp-speaks-with-jason-palmer-dean-of-spiritual-life-and-university-chaplain-at-the-university-of-mary-hardin-baylor>.
North Florida Herald, February 16, 2011, <https://www.dvidshub.net/video/107892/chaplain-capt-jason-palmer-part-1> and <https://www.dvidshub.net/video/107893/chaplain-capt-jason-palmer-part-2>.

UNIVERSITY SERVICE

UNIVERSITY OF MARY HARDIN-BAYLOR, Belton, TX

University Committees

Member, Campus Life Committee, August 2022 – June 2025

Member, Vocaré Steering Committee, August 2019 – May 2022

Member, Global Engagement Consultant Steering Committee, August 2019 – May 2020

Major Campus Events

Financial Coordinator; Association for Christians in Student Development Annual Conference hosted by University of Mary Hardin-Baylor; Belton, TX; June 2024

Advisor, Revival Steering Committee, August 2019 – June 2025

Global Outreach

Team Mentor, Moldova, December 2024

Team Mentor, Montana/Canada, July 2024

Team Mentor, Moldova, December 2023

Team Mentor, Montana, July 2023

Team Mentor, Hungary/Romania, December 2022

Student Organizations

Advisor, Bridges International, April 2021 – January 2024

Advisor, Young Life, October 2020 – June 2025

Advisor, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, October 2020 – March 2023

SELECTED MILITARY TRAINING

Joint Special Operations Chaplain Course

U.S. Army Brigade Chaplain Functional Area Qualification Course

U.S. Army Chaplain Captain Career Course

U.S. Army Chaplain Basic Officer Leader Course

U.S. Army Combat Lifesaver Training – Tactical Combat Casualty Care

U.S. Army Combat Medical Ministry Course

U.S. Army Traumatic Event Management Facilitator

Joint Special Operations Command Personnel Recovery Debriefing

U.S. Army Casualty Notification Training Course

Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (T4T)

Defense Support to Civil Authorities – Phase I

U.S. Army Strong Bonds Instructor Training Course

ACADEMIC HONORS

Robert S. Magee Doctoral Scholar Award, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, May 2025
Service Award, University of Mary Hardin-Baylor, April 2025
Distinguished Honor Graduate, Chaplain Captain Career Course (Class 14-001), United States Army Chaplain Center and School, June 2014
Honor Graduate, Pathfinder Course (Class 08-13), The Sabalauski Air Assault School, United States Army, May 2013
Outstanding Student Award, Master of Divinity Program, New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, May 2009
Honor Graduate, Nuclear Prototype Officer Training (Class 0104), Nuclear Power Training Unit Charleston, United States Navy, April 2002
Carolyn Mays Brevard Award, Florida Historical Society, May 2001

MILITARY AWARDS

Combat Action Badge
Master Parachutist Badge
Pathfinder Badge
Air Assault Badge
Submarine Officer Warfare Insignia
SSBN Deterrent Patrol Insignia (5th award)
Basic Scuba Badge
Driver and Mechanic Badge (Wheeled)

Bronze Star Medal
Meritorious Service Medal (4th award)
Army Commendation Medal with "Combat" device
Army Commendation Medal (5th award)
Navy Commendation Medal
Army Achievement Medal
Navy Achievement Medal (4th award)
Navy Good Conduct Medal
National Defense Service Medal (2nd award)
Afghanistan Campaign Medal with one campaign star
Iraq Campaign Medal with one campaign star
Global War on Terrorism Service Medal
Korea Defense Service Medal
Armed Forces Service Medal
Humanitarian Service Medal
Military Outstanding Volunteer Service Medal (6th award)
Armed Forces Reserve Medal with bronze hourglass
Army Service Ribbon

Army Overseas Service Ribbon
NATO Medal
Navy Expert Rifleman Medal
Navy Expert Pistol Shot Medal

Army Meritorious Unit Commendation
Army Superior Unit Award (2nd award)

British Army Parachutist Badge
German Armed Forces Parachutist Badge in Silver
Senior Chilean Parachutist Badge
Basic Colombian Parachutist Badge
Brazilian Parachutist Badge
Uruguayan Military Paratrooper Badge
Indian Airborne Wings
Norwegian Foot March Skill Insignia in Bronze

Loyal Order of the Eagle and Sword
Noble Patron of Armor
Honorable Order of Saint Barbara
Order of the Spur (Silver & Gold)

LAW ENFORCEMENT AWARDS

WILLIAMSON COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE, Georgetown, TX

Military Service Ribbon
Special Duty Ribbon
Education Award with Numeral 3