

## Leadership and church identity

### A discussion of how leadership in the local church can help to realize the true nature of the church

Jan Inge Jenssen

Norwegian School of Economics, University of Agder  
(Handelshøyskolen ved Universitetet i Agder) and  
Norwegian School of Leadership and Theology  
(Høyskolen for Ledelse og Teologi)

#### Abstract

This article discusses how the theological-spiritual dimension, which has to do with the specific identity of the church, has implications for and partly determines the application of leadership theories and tools in the local church. The article also examines how leadership research can provide the means to realize a church's theological or spiritual identity or its true nature. This implies a two-directional relationship between theology and leadership. On the one hand, theology should influence how churches are led, and on the other hand, leadership may facilitate the realization of the theological-spiritual dimension.

There are several important articles on the theology of leadership. Scripture provides ideas and values relevant to leadership. However, these articles run the risk of pressing the biblical texts to provide advice on leadership in all areas in the church, and they risk ignoring leadership theories that can improve church leadership. A second approach is to base the leadership of churches only on leadership theory. Here, the risk is to treat churches as businesses and not as theological-spiritual entities. A third approach is to make a sharp distinction between the contribution of the leadership profession and theology.

In this article, I argue for a fourth approach. I try to let the theological-spiritual dimension of churches communicate with leadership theories. This dimension should influence leadership, and, on the other hand, leadership should facilitate the development of the theological-spiritual dimension. According to this fourth approach, theology and leadership theories should influence each other. For instance, leadership theories can help the church apply leadership styles and structures that may facilitate the development of the theological-spiritual dimension. Thus, there is an area where theology and leadership overlap and cooperate. To advance this area of research, this article presents a series of themes and topics that future researchers may focus on, both through the literature and in empirical studies.

**Keywords:** Church leadership, church identity, leadership and theology, church development

## Introduction

An important question for leadership in the local church is how the fast-growing research in the field of leadership can contribute to the field of church development and growth. This research may form or create opportunities for developing better leadership practices in churches.

It is widely accepted within ecclesiology that the church has two sides: a theological or "spiritual" side and a sociological or "human" side (Hegstad, 2013, p. 56ff). Theological research has largely dealt with the relationship between these two dimensions of the church. Råmunddal (2011) calls the two dimensions of the church theological and sociological, respectively. The theological dimension stands for the church's identity as formulated and presented in Scripture. In ecclesiology, the term "nature" of the church is also used for this dimension. This relates to what Råmunddal (2011) refers to as the church's historical context, which includes both church tradition and the normative aspect of the Scripture about what the church actually is can be placed. The sociological dimension includes the outer organization of the church. The church also has a contemporary context that expresses the church's presence in its own time.

Leadership research points to the necessity of adjusting the application of leadership to different contexts (Hersey & Blanchard, 1993). However, the two dimensions of churches probably make the application of leadership research to churches more difficult than going from one business industry to another. I argue in this article that theology and spirituality, the true nature of the church, should have a strong influence on church leadership. The article does not provide many answers but instead tries to provide examples of how the theological and spiritual dimensions can, and often should influence the leadership of the local church, without losing sight of how leadership can influence the realization of the theological-spiritual dimension of the church.

To be more precise, this article aims to discuss how some common theological theses from church development (including church growth) literature have implications for and partly determine the application of leadership theories in the local church. This work aims to show how theology and leadership theory can be linked together in the context of church development.

The theses are often found in the referenced literature, mainly in the literature on church development. I sometimes apply theological and leadership sources, in addition to scriptural references, primarily to elaborate on the arguments of the theses found within the field of church development. When discussing the use of leadership theories in church development, selected sources from the leadership literature are also referenced.

This article aims to contribute to practical theology, which concerns religious practices and how they can be improved. For practical theology in academic education, the aim is to develop knowledge that will contribute to the development of the professional leadership skills of ministers. The article also intends to contribute to the field of leadership in one specific context. I try to show how leadership theory may provide knowledge for the

development of churches. The article can be placed within the field of *church development* and the earlier *church growth* thinking. Church development is a growing field of study evolving from the tension between theology and leadership. The article is written in an evangelical and Pentecostal context.

Although the theses discussed below may be presented a little differently in the referred literature, they are quite common in church development literature. *It is beyond the aim of this article to draw conclusions about their normativity.* The *contribution* of the article is in the area of how theological thoughts and theories in the leadership literature are related and how theological thought may influence leadership within the local church. In other words, the article is intended to build bridges between two subjects or fields and attempts to show how they may be integrated into the local church.

## **Examples of theological theses with implications for leadership in churches**

### **Church and church development**

A church is a volunteer and nonprofit organization. These facts have implications for leadership (Askeland, 1996). However, it is more than that. According to Råmunddal (2016), the local church can be defined by four criteria: the presence of Jesus, faith, gathering, and mission. The presence of Jesus is the criterion that makes the local gathering of people a church, in the true sense of the word (Matthew 18:20, Volf, 1998). The entrance to the church is conditioned by faith in Jesus Christ (Matt 9,22; Joh 3,15-18), followed by repentance and baptism (Acts 2,38; 8,12.38; 9,18). The gathering criterion formulated in Matt. 18:20 is also a central ecclesiological criterion, as Paul also writes in 1. Cor. 14.26: “when you are gathered/assembled....” Lastly, the mission criterion is part of the definition of church and of the local church’s identity (Matt 28:19-20) (Gibbs, 2000).

*Church development* is a relatively new approach focusing on how the local church is constituted and led. It is partly an offshoot and an academization of the church growth movement started by Donald McGavran, Professor of Church Growth at the School of World Mission at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, California. According to Hegstad (2003, p. 6), church development can be defined as “a targeted effort to make the church better able to be what it is called to be and to do what it is called to do”. This article is aiming to contribute to the field of church development.

### **The priority of the theological dimension of the church**

Clarke (2008) argues that if we do not let Scripture influence and govern how we think about leadership in the church, we are in danger of adopting secular leadership without the necessary understanding of the ecclesiological context. I agree. However, I will argue – and I think Clarke (2008) agrees – that if we do not learn from contemporary leadership research, we exclude a source of knowledge that Paul did not.

In his discussion of Pauline theology of church leadership, Clarke (2008) shows that Paul, to some extent, applied a leadership terminology formed by contemporary culture. Some of the terms applied in that culture were excluded by Paul because they implied meanings that were not consistent with the values in Paul's theology. In addition, some of the terms were applied, but the content was adapted to fit Paul's theology.

To exemplify how culture might influence church leadership in a nonbiblical manner, Davis (1998) mentions several examples from Latin America, Korea, and Japan, where centralized and authoritarian structures and leadership models apparently work in the church because they match the current culture. Clarke (2008) points out that leaders should not misuse their power, and he acknowledges Paul's valuing of servanthood (e.g., 2. Cor 1:24, 1. Pet 5:13, Matt. 20-25). On the other hand, he argues that leaders, to fulfill their function, should have greater powers of influence than their coworkers. Clarke (2008) points out that the servant leadership theory does not always reflect Paul's use of power in his leadership practices (e.g., 2. Thess. 3:6, 1. Thess. 5:21, 1. Cor. 6:2.5; 12:10; 14:29; 2. Cor. 5.11; Acts 17:11). His arguments for the legitimate use of power, therefore, also hit part of the "attendance" democracy in volunteer organizations in western European's social democracies, as it might not give leadership the authority or role that Scripture prescribes.

A local church will, by necessity, whether consciously or not, adopt one or more leadership styles and organizational forms. A conscious application of leadership practices can provide a better platform for church development than an unconscious one. A context-sensitive application of good leadership practices may reduce obstacles, stimulate necessary change processes, and facilitate growth in the biblically given dimension of the church (see, e.g., Kelly, 1986; McGavran, 1955; McGavran, 1973; Thomas & Olson, 2010). The Christian influence on our culture has had a great impact on society. This might indicate that the use of leadership research in a church context requires less customization regarding values than previously or in other cultural contexts.

In a popular approach, Davis (1998) tries to formulate some premises for leadership assumed to secure that the church is led biblically. He wishes to draw leadership practices directly from the inner organic (theological-spiritual) dimension of the church, and he argues for an organic structure of the outer human-sociological dimension of the church. The underlying thought is that the church is an organism and not an organization. As Baasland (1993) argues, the organism and the organization represent the inner and the outer sides of the church, which cannot be separated, or as expressed by Råmunddal (2011), they represent the theological-spiritual and human-sociological dimensions.

Davis' (1998) view, to some extent, ignores the difference between the theological-spiritual and human-sociological dimensions. A church with a fully organic structure may, in the long run, be at risk of breaking into small pieces due to a lack of leadership. One way to approach the challenge of applying leadership in the local church is as Davis (1998) tries to do: to formulate theological premises that should influence how leadership theory is applied in the context of the local church. As will be discussed later, the idea of the church as the body of Christ with limbs and gifts has theological implications in terms of how gifts are

integrated into the church organization and how they are bound together as a coherent unit (a “body”).

The church development literature referred to seems to argue that its theological dimensions and organic nature should be given priority when the church is developed and led. By this, I mean that if in the process of leading churches, we do not start thinking about the specific context of what the congregation is and what its divine mission is, we are at risk of organizing and developing something other than a Christian congregation. Therefore, one can say that the organism in its ecclesiological meaning takes priority.

Based on this reasoning, it is reasonable to suggest the thesis that (1) *it is legitimate to apply leadership theories and tools to improve leadership in the local church. When doing so, the leadership should facilitate the church’s organic side (theological-spiritual dimension) and its overall purpose (cf. Matt 28: 16-20).*

Two clarifications must be made. First, I do not assume that there is a one-to-one relationship between theology and leadership. A wide variety of leadership practices and organizational forms exists for local churches (e.g., McGavran, 1973; Stafford, 1986). The organic and God-given life probably expresses itself in different organizational forms. This is also a presumption in the thoughts of Christian leadership as trans-disciplinary and applicable in different organizational contexts (see, e.g., Kessler & Kretzschmar, 2015).

Second, the term organism is a metaphor for a particular type of organization in the leadership literature. (Burns & Stalker, 1961; Morgan, 1998; Zanzi, 1987). Organic organizations have, for instance, decentralized decision-making, low vertical and horizontal differentiation (few levels from top to bottom and a low level of division of labor) and low formalization (quick decisions without a formal decision process), and coordination within the organization occurs through informal processes. Some of these elements may also commonly be thought of when we discuss the church as an organism: The church is straightforward and flexible, allowing for natural development processes. The term ‘mechanical’ is used in the leadership field as opposed to ‘organic’. A mechanical organization has a centralized decision-making process and a high degree of differentiation.

As I pointed out earlier, the church's biblical-organic character should be emphasized. However, this does not mean that the church should only have an organic organizational design. When a congregation grows, the degree of structuration naturally increases, for example, related to departmentalization and decision-making processes. Otherwise, growth probably stops (George & Bird, 2017; Greiner, 1998; Lester, Parnell, & Carraher, 2003).

In this article, the term *organization* is used to describe the *visible* organizational or leadership form (which is a part of the sociological-human dimension), and the term ‘organism’ is used to describe the church’s theological-spiritual dimension. The church understood as an organism, is conditioned by the presence and gifts of the Spirit. In the process of structuring churches, we may use the concept pair organically and mechanically to describe their organizations. It will be apparent from the context whether we are discussing the organic (theological-spiritual dimension) or the leadership aspects of the church.

## Body, limbs, and gifts

According to Pauline theology, the church is the body of Christ with different limbs and spiritual gifts that work together (cf. 1. Cor. 12-14; Rom. 12:3-8; Eph. 4:7-16; 1 Peter 4:10-12). As Paul asserts, the limb functions are the spiritual and natural gifts of the church. The idea of the body of Christ and gifts are central in the church development literature and older church growth literature (DeVries, 2016; Råmunddal, 2018; Wagner, 1979, 1988). According to Packer (2005, p. 145), spiritual gifts may be defined as “*the capacities of believers to express and communicate the knowledge and power of Christ for the purpose of edifying the church*”.

In church growth literature, Wagner (1979, 1988) argues that gifts bring growth opportunities. They empower individuals to minister in various ways and, according to DeVries (2016), make them effective ministers for the edification of the church. He encourages paying more attention to how gifts are intentionally developed and used for church growth. As Tangen (2018a) argues, the Spirit operates through gifts and practices and spontaneous events (see, e.g., Acts 4, 23-31; 13,1-3).

Based on these arguments it is reasonable to suggest the following thesis: (2) *Leaders in the church should show that all coworkers/members are necessary limbs of the body of Christ, the church. Therefore, they should stimulate the development and practice of the full range of gifts and services mentioned in Scripture and remain sensitive to the spontaneous agency of the Spirit.*

When discussing gifts, it is necessary to point to some spiritual gifts that I refer to as roles because they include several tasks that are vital to the church. One can argue that the roles (basic gifts) mentioned in Eph. 4:11 (apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, teacher) should be implemented as leadership positions by applying the biblical terms. The individual with the role should then perform the tasks or ministries described in Scripture for each role. Glimpses of this thinking are found in church growth literature (Wagner, 1979, 2006, 2014). Clarke (2008) argues that Paul as an apostle initiated new ministries, was a visionary, an apologist, etc. However, the challenge is that Scripture does not provide enough material to fully define the roles (Clarke, 2008).

Alternatively, it may be meaningful to think that these roles include *a set of tasks* that a local church should have or by which it should at least be influenced. The roles need not be the formal leaders and it is not crucial that, for instance, the apostle be represented by all the tasks/ministries in the same person. However, the roles of an apostle, prophet, evangelist, shepherd, or teacher are important for the church’s development. For example, an apostle’s entrepreneurial role should be represented for the creation of change and the direction of the local church. I will add that the use of the names of the basic gifts described in Ephesians 4 may have a symbolic function in the church; it may illustrate and provide legitimacy for the tasks of the roles. There are also other roles named in the New Testament, such as deacon, elder, and overseer, and these are also described as vital for the church (Clarke, 2008).

From this discussion, it is reasonable to conclude with the thesis that leadership in churches should consider (3) *how biblical roles (named in the pastoral texts of Paul) are developed, implemented, and performed in the local church.*

Goals and choice of means influence the realization of the church's character as the body of Christ and its growth purpose (Matt. 28:16-18). Gifts are to be developed, but the church as a body is also a unity. The different limbs must work together. To ensure that a church is moving forward in a direction that fulfills its calling, the church organization requires a leadership behavior and structure that makes it possible to coordinate and make decisions that are intended to commit the entire congregation (Hadaway, 1991; Rainer, 1993; Wagner, 1990).

Keeping the church on track and together and keeping individuals from exercising gifts in a manner that hardly promotes the church's overall purpose requires several influencing strategies. As will be discussed below, vision, goals, guidelines, structure, and application of power are necessary. In the New Testament, leaders apply power (e.g., Luke 19:45, Acts 5:1-10, Acts 8:20, Titus 1:5, 2. Tess. 3:6, 1., Tess 5:21). This duty follows from the concept of the church as a body.

Based on these arguments it is reasonable to suggest the following thesis: *(4) Leaders in the church should develop strategies to bind the members (limbs) together, to maintain a direction that fulfills its calling and contributes to the congregation's growth.*

### **Ecclesiological practices**

Scripture mentions several practices in the life of congregations, such as services, evangelism, baptism, and communion. Such ecclesiological practices derive from and are linked to the life of the church. The practices are found in the New Testament and are a part of what defines the church. They are not only habits or traditions but have important functions, and the Spirit works through them (Tangen, 2018b). This is not trivial, but it lies outside the scope of this article to decide which practices are a part of the churches' identity and should be classified as a part of the core normativity of Råmunddal & Barbosa da Silva (2016).

How churches develop ecclesiological practices and implement them will influence leadership practice and church organization. How often should the church have services and communion, and how and what kind of evangelism should the church promote and/or organize may have strong implications for leadership and structure in the local church. In the early church growth literature, the practice of Sunday service (celebration), Sunday school (congregation), small groups (cell), and evangelism (e.g., Wagner, 1976, 1989) were regarded as theologically important and – if carried out properly – a stimulus for church growth. In later church development research, these three elements are still regarded as vital (see, e.g., qualities 5, 6, and 7 in Schwarz, 1998).

Often leaders develop ecclesiological practices, and these practices influence the formation of church organizations. Leadership is also exercised through practices (Tangen, 2018a, 2018b) (Luke 22:14-20) and these may be implemented by applying different forms (Bass, 2004; Tangen, 2018b). Based on this, I suggest the thesis that *(5) leadership should facilitate key ecclesiological practices – such as regular services, baptism, and communion – in a form that reflects their scriptural importance.*

## Christian values

In popular discourse, we often hear that the leadership of churches should be different from that of businesses. This is, in several senses, true. However, this viewpoint is often based on an argument of differences in values applied in the private sector (e.g., greed) versus the values that should be applied in churches (e.g., love). This is not necessarily the case in the private sector or in the church; in addition, Christian values are the same across different types of organizations in different sectors of society – and they are important.

Clarke's (2008) research about how Paul thought and facilitated ecclesiastical leadership shows that unless the New Testament texts influence and govern how leadership and church development are applied today, we are in danger of doing exactly what Paul fought against. According to Clarke, this was about the fact that the church uncritically adopts the leadership values of their own time without a sufficient understanding of the ecclesiological context. It is essential to turn to the New Testament, examine what is written about Christian values in leadership, and be willing to be guided by its normative teaching.

In Scripture (e.g., Joh. 15,17 and Rom. 12,10) and in the literature on church leadership, it is presumed that Christian values should guide behavior (e.g., Kessler & Kretzschmar, 2015). One question is which values are Christian and what kind of implications they should have for church leadership. The first part of that question is a large theological one and the answer to it lies beyond the scope of this article. Here, I only provide *some examples* that are believed to be important and should be reflected in church leadership.

The literature on leadership ethics has followed different paths, such as destructive leadership (Thoroughgood et al., 2018), establishing a climate regarding ethics in organizations (Grojean et al., 2004), etc. Examples of Christian values are love (Nass, 2015), which must motivate and guide the practice of other fundamental values such as honesty, authenticity, truth, sincerity, respect, righteousness, justice, healing, generosity, hospitality, moral integrity (e.g., consistency between what is said and done) and thanksgiving (see, e.g., Chi & Chi, 2014; Nass, 2015; Tangen, 2018b). These are for most people important values; however, to practice them is challenging, partly because of our human nature and partly because some of them cannot be maximized at the same time.

In addition, ethics that looks at virtues (moral character/integrity) alone is lacking the complexity of ethics in leadership. For instance, leadership is confronted by a two-sided responsibility to the individual and to efficiency in reaching the goals. Leadership ethics is indeed a matter of virtue, but it also includes institutional ethics such as organizational principles and rules, organizational charts, hierarchies, decision-making allocation of resources and competencies, communication, and culture (Nass, 2015).

Ignoring goal efficiency is self-destructive. Nass (2015, p. 6) argues from a theological standpoint that, *“Ultimately, ethical management requires motivated and well-qualified employees who are not concerned with self-realization at the expense of the firm”*. This argument probably also holds for churches. In addition, in a situation of competition between the individual being and goal efficiency, the human cannot be abandoned but must always be considered when goal-reaching efforts are discussed. According to Nass (2015, p. 8), *“It must*



*always be included in the economic calculation because efficiency is not an end in itself but serves human development as its end.*"

Leadership concerns more than those in a leadership position. It is a dynamic and cocreational process for leaders, followers, and the environment. In other words, ethical leadership involves more than either a good or bad leader (Thoroughgood et al., 2018).

The relationship between leadership and Christian values is not simple, but the reasoning above makes this suggested thesis reasonable (6): *Church leadership should practice Christian values, which include a two-sided responsibility to the individual being inside and outside the church and to the goal efficiency of the church.*

One important value in Christian leadership is servanthood. Paul underscores the need for being a servant leader (see, e.g., Phil. 2:3-4, Eph. 6:6, Cor. 1:23-25). In addition, servanthood is a central issue in the servant leadership theory of Greenleaf (1977). Servant leadership is further developed through numerous research projects and related topics and is integrated into theories such as resource-based and institutional theory (Heyler & Martin, 2018).

In a recent review of servant leadership theory, Eva, et al. (2018, p. 4) define servant leadership as "a (1) other-oriented approach to leadership (2) manifested through one-on-one prioritizing of follower's individual needs and interests, (3) and outward reorienting of their concern for self towards concern for others within the organization and the larger community".

This definition implies that the motive of servant leadership stems from outside the leader, not the inside; as Greenleaf (1977) pointed out, "servant first". The focus is on individual followers as unique, with different interests, desires, limitations, etc. Second, servant leaders are stewards in the sense that they are "treating followers as individuals entrusted to them to be elevated to their better selves. Followers, in turn, consider them to be trustworthy as leaders" (Eva et al., 2018, p. 4). Lastly, the servant leader's focus on the followers is "maintained within a concern towards the larger community".

The servant leader has, as trustee, a responsibility to all followers and to other resources within the organization. According to Eva et al. (2018, p. 4), they also have a responsibility to "move followers from a self-serving towards other-serving orientation, empowering them to be productive and prosocial catalysts who are able to make a positive difference in others' lives and alter broken structures of the social world within which they operate". This final characterization implies that a servant leader is still a leader (for a discussion of this topic, see Clarke, 2008).

It falls outside the scope of this article to discuss in detail what a servant leader is, but such a leader is concerned with ethically correct behavior and servant leadership appears to have a positive effect on the performance (results) of the organization (e.g., Jaramillo, Bande, & Varela, 2015). These arguments lead to the following thesis (7): *Leaders in the local church should develop and practice a servant leadership approach in all their doings.*

## Implications for the application of leadership theories to church development

### Introduction

The focus of this section is the last part of the article's aim: to explore the implications of the theses described above for the application of leadership theories. Although this will in no way be a complete discussion, some examples are given.

Yukl (2013) claims that most leadership definitions assume that leadership involves a process whereby the intentional influence of others is exercised to guide, structure, and facilitate activities and relationships in a group or organization. Some distinguish between leadership and management. When such a distinction is drawn, it is often to show that leadership is about the overall direction of the organization, while management is about the more practical aspects of implementing various measures. Mintzberg (2009) emphasizes that the two areas overlap, that overall issues related to implementation also require leadership and that leadership requires management.

In leadership, there are many theories: transformational, servant, strategic, spiritual leadership, contingency theory, different motivational theories, institutional theory, etc. In addition, leadership is situation-dependent, which implies, among other things, that one should be critical of new theories presented as universal (Røvik, 1992). However, the church development literature discussed in this article implies that there are elements that should be considered by all churches, and some of them must also be met in other organizations wishing to be guided by Christian leadership.

Above I presented seven theses based on seven biblical teachings that are important in the church development literature and can illustrate how theology has implications for leadership and how leadership theories can help to realize underlying theological intents for church development. The numbers in the text refer to the theses.

The logic and my thinking about how the biblical idea of the church as Christ's body may influence leadership and how leadership may impact the realization of the body are illustrated in the first table below. The arguments on the left side of the table are substantiated by scriptural references (for a discussion, see Råmunddal, 2018; Volf, 1998). The thesis of the church as Christ's body (2) has many implications. The arrows in Table 1 go in both directions to indicate the two-directional relationships between theology and leadership. Black arrows indicate directional priority, which means that when there is a conflict between the theological and the sociological dimensions of the church, the theological one should be prioritized.

Ex. of theological implications of the church as Christ's body		Ex. of leadership implications of the biblical idea of the church as Christ's body
The importance of different limbs (gifts) and their tasks (Rom. 12:4-6)		Development of arenas/departments to develop and practice gifts. A leadership style that motivates and regulates the practice.
The mutual dependency and unity of the different limbs and their tasks (Rom. 5:12)		Development of coordination mechanisms such as vision, instruction, planning, rules, norms, leadership style, etc., to bind the church together.
Everybody has the same value and the same right to serve in the church (Gal. 3:28)		Development of a leadership style and motivational approach that inspire and provide opportunities/arenas for everybody to find and develop their gifts.
Governed by Christ through its leaders and through every believer in the church (1. Chor. 12:28)		Development of (collective?) arenas for listening to God and for leadership to listen to revelations from coworkers to increase the chance of leading in a God-given direction.
The body as sent to the world (Eph. 2:13-16 and 3:5-6; 1. Chor. 6:15-17 and 3:16-17)		Development of a leadership style, motivational approach, organizational culture, arenas, structure, etc., that stimulate evangelization and growth.

*Table 1: How biblical theses may influence leadership and how leadership may influence the realization of these theological theses.*

There is also an overlapping area between the two sides of the table. For instance, the idea of differences in gifts represents in itself a thought for a division of labor, and the unity among gifts must, among other things, include relationships among people with different gifts to provide any meaning. This overlap is marked by the gray square in the table.

In the next subsection, I will discuss further examples of the relationship between ecclesiology as suggested above and leadership theories and tools. As argued in relation to the first thesis, (1) it is legitimate to apply leadership theories and tools when it facilitates the church's organic inner side and the realization of its overall purpose presuming the application of Christian values (6) including servanthood (7).

### **The influence of the theses on leadership and strategy**

Church development literature often points to leadership for developing gifts. DeVries (2016) argues that leaders should promote, preach, and teach, create space for every-member ministry, and an orderly decentralization and diversification of spiritually gifted ministries (see also Packer, 2005). The leadership literature on motivation (see, e.g., Robbins & Judge, 2017, ch. 8; Tschirhart & Bielefeld, 2012, ch. 12) provides a variety of methods that may help in the process of developing gifts, such as exposing people to different tasks and challenges,

praise in the right situations, inspirational visions, and goals, etc. As will be shown in the next section, the literature on organizational structure can support the effort of *orderly decentralizing*.

The task of stimulating everybody's gifts (2) within the church requires a structure and a leadership style that are flexible. The aim is to create a climate or culture that encourages people to discover their gifts and create spaces or arenas for developing and practicing a variety of gifts, including the development of leadership skills. In leadership terms, this probably requires a change-oriented leadership style and elements of organic organizational forms. This is often viewed as supporting *readiness for change* (Benzer, et al., 2017) and actually *change* (e.g., Engdahl, 2005). In the organizational sense of the word, a church should possess some organic features.

A change-oriented leadership style shows followers why change is required, encourages experimentation, help followers to get started in learning processes, try out new ways of doing things, stimulates new ideas, acknowledges changes, and sees challenges from new perspectives, etc. (Ekvall & Arvonen, 1991; Yukl, 1999, 2013). Such a style and structure are open to changes in and the adoption of new activities or ministries, etc., because they are flexible and do not only focus on maintaining existing ministries but also engage in the experimentation and the development of new activities.

The fourth thesis accentuates the need for binding the church together and creating direction. Leadership to create and implement a direction may bind the church together and help to fulfill its goals (4) (see, e.g., Grønhaug, Hellesøy, & Kaufmann, 2001; Northhouse, 2001). Leadership theories and tools described in the literature on strategy, structure, and culture may help create and maintain direction.

Many ways exist to influence people to reach organizational goals, such as charismatic radiance, the use of vision and goals, influence through a serving attitude, ethical correctness, developing of a strategy, team development, building structure, reward, and punishment, etc. (see textbooks such as Gray & Larson, 2018; Jacobsen & Thorsvik, 2013). In the discussion of the theological theses (4, 6, 7), it is pointed out that leaders cannot exercise power in all ways, while the use of some types of power is both ethically correct and necessary. Christian values and servanthood are necessary when power is exercised. How to use power in a church is an important issue that must be thoroughly discussed. Although such a discussion lies outside the aim of this article, it concerns how the various influencing strategies and methods in the leadership literature correspond to Christian values (6, 7). Some very preliminary thoughts on this issue are provided by Jenssen (2018).

When increased change is necessary to reach goals, the need to influence also increases (Kotter, 1995; Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008). Often change initiatives meet with resistance from members of the organization (Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio, 2008). This increases the challenges of leading the organization and it becomes more necessary to apply power to maintain direction (4), yet it might also be more tempting to use power in a way that is *not* consistent with Christian values (4, 6, 7).

Research on change leadership might provide methods for an analysis of the situation, overcoming resistance without using primitive influencing methods (e.g., Ford & Ford, 1995, 2009; Kotter, 1995; Kotter & Schlesinger, 2008) inconsistent with Christian values (4, 6, 7),

and for implementing change. Examples of methods to reduce resistance are building trust (Bruckman, 2008), developing relationships with opinion leaders (Schaller, 1993), and providing good reasons for change initiatives (Ford, 1999; Russ, 2008). Leaders create trust through virtues such as moral integrity, love, servanthood, authenticity, consistency in behavior, etc. (6, 7).

According to the need for creating direction for the body of Christ to fulfill its purpose (Matt 28:19-20) (4) and to be faithful to virtues (6, 7) such as stewardship and honesty, the leadership of local churches has a responsibility to make church organization efficient. This implies the necessity of developing and implementing strategies with the means to reach one's goals, build procedures for planning and allocating resources, etc. The literature on leadership, with various theories and methods in all these areas, may be very helpful in efforts to achieve efficiency.

Leadership theories such as transformational leadership can also help the church adhere to the theses of servanthood (7) and Christian values (6). The literature on leadership describes transactional and transformational leadership as complementary theories. A transactional approach views leadership as an exchange process whereby an organization gives something (salary, praise, etc.) and, in return, obtains efforts from its followers. According to transformational leadership, the followers' values should be developed in such a way that the individual has an internal drive to perform in accordance with organizational goals.

Nass (2015, p. 12) argues that ethical leadership must be transformational, that "*it should involve the leader's interaction with followers and an appeal to higher values...*" so that it "*converts the employees to autonomous jointly responsible persons*". Transformational leadership provides a helpful means for local church leadership to change and develop values in its coworkers. Examples include the development of (a) inspirational motivation through vision, goals, and good values, (b) idealized influence through role modeling, using symbols, etc., and awakening strong emotions, (c) intellectual stimulation by asking questions and challenging followers, and (d) individual care through encouragement, support, guidance, etc. (see e.g., Northouse, 2012).

Such a leadership approach may also create direction (4). However, the transactional element may not be entirely excluded. To ask parents with children of Sunday school age to serve might appeal to their self-interest but also be good for the Sunday school program. However, sensitivity when applying incentives is essential, and in the long run, the focus must be on developing values that support the church's goals. In other words, a transformative leadership approach should be applied.

The relationship between leadership and the realization of the theological dimension as exemplified in this article is not simple or unambiguous. For instance, leadership research focuses on the consequences of leading coworkers with differences in competence and motivation (e.g., Boyatzis, 1982; Khurana & Joshi, 2017; McClelland, 1961; McClelland & Liberman, 1949; McGlelland, 1973; Sandberg, 2000). Followers looking for safety, and stability in tasks and surroundings have different expectations than followers looking for challenges. This fact requires an adaption of the methods used in leadership for different

motivations and calls for differences in leadership style that depend on the individual to realize Christian values (6 and 7).

A strategy may support the aim of creating and realizing unity and long-term direction within a church (4). Strategy as an area of research has expanded and there is now a range of approaches (Mintzberg, Ahlstrand, & Lampel, 2009). It can be an intellectual analytical process of positioning the organization in a competitive situation (Porter, 1980), or it may be a more dynamic, unstructured, and iterative process occurring over time, where strategies emerge gradually through informal processes (Mintzberg, 2000). A strategy can be approached in a classic rational way whereby strategic plans are developed and implemented, or it can comprise dynamic organizational processes that lead to emerging strategies (Mintzberg, 2000). Developing a strategy always means blending an organization's independent choices with adaptations to the environment's requirements. As part of strategy work, visions and overall goals for the organization are developed.

All these aspects are a part of a strategy: developing a vision, finding roads or means, analyzing and defining positions, creating and allowing dynamic interactive processes of strategizing to develop, adjust, and discover strategies over time. A strategy process may be helpful in the search for means to help everybody in the church find ways to serve (7) and to integrate the roles/gifts in the church organization (2, 3).

Finding ways to achieve goals will obviously be important for churches (4). Positioning concerns how one will compete in a market. For churches, positioning is probably of particular interest when establishing a new congregation because one does not have the resources to be good at everything. For instance, one can choose to focus in particular on care, children, and/or youth ministry during the early phase of the church's life. Church development and change will often be about increasing the ministry to more groups and applying new methods. Positioning in neighboring churches may influence how one's church positions its ministries.

Whether one wants them to or not, strategies develop. This can occur unconsciously, or leadership can influence the strategy. Increased awareness of strategic choices increases the likelihood that necessary changes will occur, and that theological intentions are realized. When a church decides to invest resources in a child and youth ministry, one reduces the chance of an increasingly aging congregational membership.

### **The influence of the theses on organizational structure and culture**

Organizational structure concerns the division of work. More precisely, it concerns issues such as levels and departmentalization, who makes decisions, formalizing decision-making processes, etc., and methods of coordinating the organization. The structure is partly the result of contingencies in the environment, as e.g., explained in institutional theory (Scott, 1995, 2004), but intentional strategies may also influence the structuring and restructuring of organizations.

The literature on organizational structure may provide insights into the effects of applying different vertical and horizontal differentiation strategies, coordination methods, centralization, and formalization. These factors may influence the breadth of opportunities (2,

3) for individuals and groups (children, youth, families, etc.) to participate, serve, and train leaders and coworkers.

In general, an organic structure as described above is regarded as creating flexibility and facilitating change (Jacobsen & Thorsvik, 2013; Kotter, 1995; Mintzberg, 2009). This capacity to change is important because it affects how quickly changes will and can be implemented and, for instance, how able the church is to integrate new ministries in areas where gifts are discovered (3). The same is probably true for the spontaneous agency of the spirit (3). Moreover, the structure influences which roles are given formal authority (4). In addition, church structure influences which ecclesiological practices receive priority (5). An increase in the mechanization of the structure is probably necessary to “carry” a growing church (Draft & Willmott Murphy, 2010; George & Bird, 2017; Lester et al., 2003).

The degree of organic elements in a church’s structure, and hence flexibility, depends on a church’s size. Leading a large church requires considerable financial and human resources. Coworkers at lower levels will not always see the consequences of their decisions on the whole organization. This calls for clearer and more formalized structures and processes (mechanization). This is consistent with the way the early church’s increasing structure accompanied growth (Clarke, 2008), e.g., the inclusion of elders, deacons, and overseers. However, in large congregations, space should also be made for the development and practices of spiritual gifts (2). For instance, gifts can develop within a more organic, small-group context.

As a structure is developed, so is the centralization of decision-making, the formalization of decision processes, and the establishment of coordination mechanisms. In this way, structure influences the possibility for leadership to create and maintain direction (4).

The link between structural properties and the development of organizations is neither simple nor unambiguous. For example, different structures facilitate different aims, and structures that carry growth may slow change processes. In terms of change, formalization may delay change processes but increase decision quality. In very large congregations, a high degree of centralization may delay change capacity because of the large distance between those who see the daily challenges and those who make decisions. In smaller churches, however, a strong visionary and entrepreneurial leader may increase the ability to change. When leaders in such a setting see the need for change, they can quickly affect the necessary changes without discussing them with so many others. This implies that research on organizational structure can help churches find an appropriate or balanced structure. Finding a structure that is consistent with the suggested theological theses is far from trivial and includes a thoughtful strategy.

Organizational culture is the informal part of an organization and concerns collective values, beliefs, and principles held by members (Needle, 2010) and characterizing the entire organization (majority culture) or parts of the organization (subculture). Schein (2004) explains culture using three concepts: artifacts, value/norms, and basic assumptions.

Whether one wants it or not, a culture always develops within an organization. Culture is a stable element and does not change quickly. Nevertheless, having some insights into how

culture can change is essential for organizational behavior and for the norms and values practiced in, e.g., churches (Nass, 2015).

Perhaps the best way to illustrate the relevance of cultural knowledge within a church setting is to provide some examples (adapted from Gray & Larson, 2018). To what extent do members feel attached to the church? Are leaders focused on working methods vs. vision/goals? Are new people invited to join the community? Is servanthood among leaders and coworkers practiced? Are leaders honest? Is hospitality an important value? Are gifts valued? Is the leadership style legitimate? etc. (2,3, 6, and 7).

These examples show that the suggested theological theses, such as 2, 3, 4, 6, and 7, should influence the development of church culture. The literature on how culture is developed might help us understand the factors that influence an organization's culture and how to influence the development of culture. For instance, recruitment of leadership, vision, leadership behavior, rituals, and material symbols are methods that can change the culture.

### **Discussion, conclusion, and future research**

Leadership in churches is in some ways different from leadership in other types of organizations. Churches are theological-spiritual entities. The Bible includes issues and values that are normative for Christians both in church and in life in general. The church's organic life as the body of Christ must be safeguarded and developed. To illustrate how the theological dimension of churches should be a priority for church leadership, I suggest some theological theses based on the literature on church development and growth, and I try to pinpoint some areas where the leadership literature can help churches fulfill their inner organic side, its theological dimension.

In areas where the Bible does not speak and in areas where the literature can provide the means to realize the church as the organic body of Christ, leadership research should be applied in the church for the same reason that, e.g., modern *mass media* is applied in evangelization.

The table below illustrates this article's main viewpoints and arguments. The first column shows the seven theses formulated above; the second exemplifies how these theses are linked to leadership, and the third column gives examples of how the theses influence leadership and how leadership theories and tools may provide support for the development of the organic theological-spiritual dimension of the church.



SJLT 5 (2018): Leadership and church identity.

A discussion of how leadership in the local church can help to realize the true nature of the church

<b>Theological theses from church development literature.</b>	<b>Examples of how the theological theses concern leadership.</b>	<b>Examples of research areas in leadership that can provide insights into how the theological theses can be stimulated and how leadership can influence their development.</b>
<p>It is legitimate to apply leadership concepts and theories to improve leadership in the local church. When doing so, the leadership should facilitate the church's organic side (inner theological dimension) and its overall purpose.</p>	<p>Paul uses leadership concepts from his contemporary context. Applying, reinterpreting, and omitting some concepts for the purpose of leading churches.</p>	<p>All areas of leadership theories and means may be applied if this facilitates the growth of the organic theological-spiritual dimension and if it is in accordance with Christian values, including servanthood.</p>
<p>Leaders should show that all coworkers/members are necessary limbs of the body of Christ, the church, stimulate the development and practice of the full range of gifts and services mentioned in Scripture and remain sensitive to the spontaneous agency of the Spirit.</p>	<p>The church as the body of Christ concerns the development of individuals to serve with their competencies/gifts (the limbs), building groups of people in departments with similar or complementary gifts and binding them together (as a body).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To develop gifts and apply them in church ministries requires some sort of change-oriented leadership style that shows why change is required; one must also encourage experimentation, help followers get started in learning processes, try out new methods, stimulate new ideas, acknowledge changes, help coworkers see challenges from new perspectives, etc.</li> <li>- Change initiation may be met by resistance. Leadership studies provide the means to reduce resistance, such as methods for building trust, developing relationships with opinion leaders, and providing effective arguments for change initiatives.</li> <li>- Applying motivation theories and methods, such as exposing people to different tasks and challenges, praise in the right situation, inspirational visions and goals, etc. This requires an adaptation of leadership style and various tools for different individual competencies and motivations.</li> <li>- A conscious leadership through methods described in the literature on strategy may increase the chances of developing competencies/gifts.</li> <li>- Organizational structure influences the breadth of opportunities to participate, serve, and train leaders and coworkers, and it may also help orderly decentralization and the diversification of spiritual-gifted ministries.</li> <li>- Organizational culture may provide the means to stimulate experimentation, develop new gifts, define, and practice norms, etc.</li> </ul>
<p>Leadership should ensure that the roles (basic gifts and other gifts named in the pastoral texts of Paul) are developed and implemented – not necessarily by appointing certain persons to each of the roles, but by ensuring that the tasks of each role/gift are represented in the church.</p>	<p>The development of the church organization to include gifts/tasks at the appropriate level and place in the hierarchy.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Leadership style, motivation, strategy development, implementation, and organizational structure summarized in the above column are also important to realize the third thesis in this row.</li> <li>- Knowledge of the organizational structure may help to implement the basic gifts (or their tasks) in a way prescribed by church theology.</li> <li>- Organizational culture may provide the means to help legitimize and strengthen the valuing and positioning of basic gifts.</li> </ul>

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Leaders in the church should develop strategies to bind the church or body together, to maintain a direction that fulfills its calling and contributes to the congregation’s growth.	Binding the church together and developing a direction for the church is related to the application of leadership influence strategies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Through an organizational structure involving the centralization of decision-making and the formalization of decision processes, the coordination mechanisms influence the possibility for leadership to create and maintain direction.</li> <li>- Strategy and vision goals influencing direction: finding roads or means, analyzing and defining positions, creating and allowing dynamic interactive processes of strategizing to develop, and adjusting and discovering strategies over time.</li> <li>- Theories of power might provide knowledge of influence sources, how to maintain direction and what kind of power use is <i>not</i> consistent with Christian values.</li> <li>- Organizational culture may provide the means to help legitimize leadership influence, identify with the church and its purpose, and hence keep the church together on a firm path.</li> </ul>
Leadership should facilitate key ecclesiological practices—such as regular services, baptism, and communion – in a form that reflects their scriptural importance.	Developing and valuing ecclesiological practices is related to how they are reflected in the structure, the cultural appreciation, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The development of an organizational structure may help create focus, arenas, and an appropriate place within the church organization for certain practices.</li> <li>- Using one’s knowledge of organizational culture may help the church develop artifacts, language, norms, etc., and a basic understanding of the importance of ecclesiological practices.</li> </ul>
Church leadership should practice Christian values, which include a two-sided responsibility to the individual being inside and outside the church and to the goal-efficiency of the church.	Christian values concern leadership concepts such as leadership style, planning, organizing, and organizational culture.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Theories of leadership explaining how values may influence and change organizational behavior may help to instill Christian values in the individual and in organizational behavior. Examples here include authentic, servant, and transformational leadership theories.</li> <li>- Applying methods from strategy and planning may provide the means to stimulate responsible behavior of the individual in the church and to work steadily and efficiently towards the church’s goals.</li> </ul>
Leaders in the local church should develop and practice a servant-leadership approach in all their activities.	Servanthood concerns leadership style.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Theories of leadership such as servant leadership theory provide the knowledge and means to create servanthood in a church.</li> <li>- Transformational means add to this by showing how values are transformed and internalized in individuals and in organizational behavior.</li> </ul>

*Table 2: Summary of the main viewpoints and arguments in the paper*

There are many articles and even academic journals focusing on the theology of leadership. This is, of course, important because Scripture emphasizes the necessity of building churches, and it provides important ideas and values relevant to leadership. One problem with this approach, however, is in squeezing the texts to provide advice for all areas of church leadership. In addition, one risk in using this approach is that theories and concepts that may assist one in the leadership of churches from a leadership standpoint are not considered relevant.

Another approach is to unilaterally base church leadership on leadership theory. Such an approach risks treating the church only as an organization and not as a theological-spiritual

entity. A third approach makes a sharp distinction between the contribution of the leadership profession and theology. Askeland (2003, p. 57) argues that concepts from organization science are useful as “*an analytical approach to describe and evaluate how the church appears and works as an organization.*” I will go one step further and argue for another approach. Askeland (1999, p. 56) in another article seems to touch upon this when he calls for a discussion between theology and organizational theory on such themes as “*the church’s basic characteristics.*”

I believe it is important to let the theological-spiritual dimension of churches interact with and complement the application of leadership theories and methods. Leadership can, for example, as shown above, help the church build leadership styles and structures that facilitate the development of the theological-spiritual dimension. As shown in Table 1, the idea of differentiating between limbs and the relationships between them in the concept of church is organizational, and leadership thinking can help develop a better and stronger body or church. This will, thus, become a transitional or overlapping area, where theology and leadership cooperate. I believe this also implies that it is necessary to develop leadership concepts and theories that are adapted to the context of the church.

This article provides a mere glimpse into the relationship in church development between theology and leadership, which is a relatively recent area of research. To advance the research, a series of topics, exemplified in the tables above, should be the focus of both literature and empirical research.

(Artikkelen er skrevet med støtte fra Norsk faglitterær forfatter- og oversetterforening.)

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**Jan Inge Jenssen** is Dr. Oecon from the Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration. He is a professor at the School of Business and Law, University of Agder, and Professor II at the Norwegian School of Leadership and Theology (HLT). His research areas are entrepreneurship, innovation, change management, and church leadership. Jenssen has written several books and articles in these areas. His doctoral thesis was about how social networks contribute to the success of business entrepreneurs and church planters. E-post: [jan.i.jenssen@uia.no](mailto:jan.i.jenssen@uia.no)