

2017

A Theological Perspective on Heroic Leadership in the Context of Followership and Servant Leadership

Deborah Robertson

Catholic Mission, Australia, deborahmrobertson@bigpond.com.au

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarship.richmond.edu/heroism-science>



Part of the [Psychology Commons](#), and the [Religion Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Robertson, Deborah (2017) "A Theological Perspective on Heroic Leadership in the Context of Followership and Servant Leadership," *Heroism Science*: Vol. 2 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.

DOI: 10.26736/hs.2017.01.03

Available at: <https://scholarship.richmond.edu/heroism-science/vol2/iss1/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Heroism Science by an authorized editor of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshipprepository@richmond.edu.

Heroism Science, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2017

A Theological Perspective on Heroic Leadership in the Context of Followership and Servant Leadership

Deborah Robertson¹

Catholic Mission, Australia

ABSTRACT: This article aims to bring a theological perspective to the concept of heroic leadership, specifically from a theology of leadership grounded in Christian social teaching, and with a focus on leadership in the workplace. A rationale for bringing a theological perspective to the exploration of heroic leadership within heroism science is provided, and there is discussion on the importance of followership in any dialogue about leadership, as well as the significance of servant leadership. It is argued that a Christian theology of leadership aligns closely with much of what is portrayed by a renewed heroic leadership in the areas of Purpose, People and Praxis, particularly in the areas of working for the transformation of self and others.

KEYWORDS: leadership, heroic leadership, theology of leadership, followership, servant leadership, Christian social teaching

This article aims to bring a theological perspective to the concept of heroic leadership, specifically from a theology of leadership grounded in Christian social teaching, and with a focus on leadership in the workplace. It acknowledges that it is not possible to discuss leadership without also discussing followership, and also addresses the relationship between heroic leadership and the prevailing image in Christian leadership literature of servant leadership.

The aim of the theology of leadership presented in this article is to provide a dynamic framework for Christian leaders for the living out of their faith at work, without compromising the principles and values of the Christian worker, while at the same time providing a language and practice that is applicable in a workplace comprising of people of many faiths, or none. The practical intent of this theology of leadership is to provide content and process that can be used by individual leaders in secular workplaces, or within a faith-based organisation, as a basis for reflective action in the enactment of their practice. The outcome of this is hoped to be the faith and professional development of the leader for the improvement of organisational life.

¹ deborahmrobertson@bigpond.com.au

From a theological perspective, it is argued that the components of a theology of leadership align well with what is required of heroic leadership. This article is concerned with theology within the Christian tradition, which includes a variety of Old Testament heroes and leaders, New Testament heroes who mostly bear witness to servant leadership, and Christian heroes and saints of the last 2,000 years who range from victorious warrior saints, to martyrs, to self-sacrificing reformers.

Rationale for a Theological Perspective

The modern legacy of the Reformation and the Enlightenment in the Western world is the relegation of religion, and therefore theological discussion, to the private sphere with the aim of allowing for social cohesion in the public sphere (Bezuidenhout & Naude, 2002, p. 6). This article is a response to the call for a public theology which addresses “the central problems of the age rather than perennial, abstract theological issues, and reconstruct[s] the tradition in the light of contemporary insight” (Cady, as cited in Bezuidenhout & Naude, 2002, p. 110).

The author of this article is based in Australia, where affiliation with Christian churches has declined significantly since Federation in 1901 and, yet, over 50% of the Australian population still identify themselves as Christian (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006), and 40% of the population claim that Christianity is the most important influence in their philosophy of life (NCLS Research, 2009). In the international context, 31% of the world population identifies with Christianity, while more than 70% of the population of the US, and over 60% of the UK population, is Christian (Pew Research Center, 2015).

The proportion of Christians in various workplaces differs, but it can still be asserted that there are significant numbers of Christians in most workplaces in the Western world, many of whom are leaders, and for whom their Christian faith influences their way of being and acting. Therefore, it is reasonable for theology to engage with issues of the workplace, including leadership, to reflect on and inform discussion in a way that enables Christians to embrace, or reject, ideas and practices in the light of their faith and its principles and values.

There is considerable literature on spirituality in the workplace which has been developing over at least the last thirty years, and has received a great deal of attention in secular management and organisational literature. The reasons for this have been cited as: negative changes in the workplace leading to neglect for the well-being of the individual; workplace practices driven by a market mentality; and, the human need for interconnectedness and fulfilment (Benefiel, Fry & Geigle, 2014; Nullens, 2013). These factors also contributed to the motivation for developing a theology of leadership.

The term “spirituality” is often used in the literature rather than “religion” or “faith,” because these words are considered to be potentially divisive, causing people to identify with particular denominations and beliefs that may not be compatible with both the beliefs of other individuals and the values of the organisation (Fry, 2005, p. 47). Although others maintain that you cannot separate spirituality and religion (Nullens, 2013; Koester, 2002), most writers in the area of management and organisations agree that spirituality is a term that is acceptable in a secular environment, and has the potential to focus organisations on relationships and values that are beneficial to employees and the company.

Management literature in the area of spirituality in the workplace closely overlaps with the elements of a theology of leadership in a number of areas including values, vision, relationships and authenticity. It is therefore helpful in providing a secular language for a Christian leader in the workplace to support the enactment of a theology of leadership. However, it is argued in this article that a theological perspective includes, but goes beyond spirituality to provide guidance and support, as well as considerable challenge, to the many Christians in the workplace who wish to live out their faith in a secular environment.

Methodology

There are a variety of methodologies used in theological research depending on the sub-discipline within which the research is being undertaken. The theological method for this study is best placed within the theological sub-discipline of practical theology and uses an approach from Veling (2005, p. 3) who argues that, rather than being an applied theology and separate from the other sub-disciplines of theology such as systematic, historical or moral theology, practical theology should be understood as “an attempt to heal this fragmentation of theology.” Veling (2005, p. 4) argues that the theory of practical theology “indwells practice,” in the sense that it is only in the practice or doing of theology that we begin to realise and understand its meanings and its workings more deeply.

Veling (2005, p. 236) reminds us that the word “method” comes from the Greek word *methodos* “which means the way ... of knowledge or the pursuit of knowledge.” He also warns that method can become a restrictive set of procedures rather than a path to understanding, and that the ultimate goal is not simply knowledge but “the practice of a way of life” (Veling, 2005, p. 237). This fits well with a theology of leadership that aims to support and guide Christian leaders in the practice of leadership as a way of life which is aligned with their faith.

Veling (2005, pp. 23-53) claims that there are two fundamental interpretive acts in practical theology – “searching the scriptures” and “reading the signs of the times.” The reading and searching that has been undertaken for this article has not been focused directly on the scriptures, but on literature expressing the message of the scriptures as articulated in current writing on the theology of leadership and in Christian social teaching. Reading and searching the signs of the times has been undertaken through exploration of secular social justice, leadership and organisational literature. Content analysis was used to make clear the key words and ideas leading to themes and categories that informed the developing understanding.

Content analysis can be understood in a number of ways in both quantitative and qualitative research, ranging from statistical analysis based on word counts, to interpretive methods “narratively describing the meaning of communications” (Drisko & Maschi, 2015, Introduction). In line with an interpretive method, it is at the latter end of the continuum that this method belongs. Drisko and Maschi (2015, p. 130) describe an interpretive content analysis as a constructivist epistemological position in which “texts do not simply contain meaning but are instead rendered meaningful by the perspective and understanding of the reader for specific purposes.” The texts studied were purposefully chosen for their relevance to the topic, and the reading and searching process allowed themes to emerge and be further synthesised leading to conceptual elements. Such an approach is in line with an interpretive content analysis method (Drisko & Maschi, 2015).

Christian Social Teaching

In this article, Christian social teaching is understood as Christian teaching or doctrine which addresses social issues such as poverty, wealth, economics, the role of the state, social structures and property. As defined in this article, Christian social teaching includes Catholic Social Teaching (CST) from the (Roman) Catholic tradition, and the Social Gospel from the Protestant tradition (see Appendix A for the main sources).

In the Catholic tradition, social teaching is usually considered as part of the theological sub-disciplines of moral, pastoral or practical theology. CST contributed the term “social justice” to the English lexicon, with the first use of the term credited to the Jesuit priest Luigi Taparelli who was working in Europe in the 1840s; the phrase is now commonly used both in secular literature and in Christian teaching (Burke, 2010). A concise definition of CST can be found in the statement: “At its core, Catholic Social Teaching is simply the attempt to spell out the ethical consequences of the confession, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ for the way in which we live” (Esdaille, 2015). The fundamental principles of CST have been summarised from Church documents in different ways, but the following are indicative of most summaries: human dignity, solidarity, common good, participation, subsidiarity, stewardship, preferential option for the poor.

The Social Gospel is defined in this article as a theological and social movement within the Protestant tradition that was most influential in the US in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The focus of the Social Gospel was the bringing about of the kingdom of God on earth through addressing social structures and processes, including work and leadership. If the Social Gospel is understood as a movement, it could be claimed, as some writers do (Sanks, 1980), that it faded away after World War I. However, if it is understood as a particular interpretation of the Gospel and as Christian teaching, the Social Gospel can be seen to have continued to influence various individuals and groups throughout the 20th century and into the present.

Heroic Leadership and Leadership Literature

The concept of heroic leadership has a long history with varied interpretations of what it means, including being equated with the male, charismatic and all-powerful problem-solving leader, sometimes described as the “Great Man” theory (Carlyle, 1841; Cohen, 2013; Allison, Goethals & Kramer, 2017). While always subject to discussion and modification, in recent years the Great Man theory has particularly fallen out of favour as a leadership model, with a move to models where power is intended to be shared and distributed (Grint, 2010).

“Servant leadership,” the antithesis of the Great Man model of leadership, was introduced into secular leadership literature by Robert Greenleaf in the 1970s (Greenleaf, 1977) and since then has developed into a significant concept in leadership literature. In Christianity, servant leadership is exemplified in the actions of Jesus at the Last Supper when he washed the feet of his disciples and told them to also serve others in this way (John 13:1-7). The concept of servant leadership is prominent in leadership literature as an ethics, values and caring model for leadership. Despite the fact that its origins in the work of Greenleaf (1977) was not derived from the servant model offered in scripture, it is often referred to by Christian writers in the area of leadership. Cameron (2015, pp. 40-46) describes the 10 characteristics of the servant leader as usually identified in the leadership literature:

- *Listening*: this requires active listening and an attunement to the other, as well as listening to one's inner voice.
- *Empathy*: the basis of empathy is trust and acceptance, enabling the servant leader to address the needs of others as well as empower them to use their gifts for the benefit of the organisation.
- *Healing* is about recognising suffering and vulnerability in the self and others, and nurturing self and others to wholeness.
- *Awareness* includes spiritual awakening as well as awareness of the context and the people within it.
- *Persuasion*: the power of influence towards the achievement of a common goal underlies this characteristic and requires dialogue informed by wisdom.
- *Conceptualisation* is related to visionary leadership and the ability to promote and enact the mission of the organisation for those within it.
- *Foresight* is related to conceptualisation, and also to the idea of prophetic leadership where the leader uses knowledge from the past to anticipate and address difficulties.
- *Stewardship*: Cameron (2015) relates this notion to an ecology of leadership which recognises all life and creation as interdependent, therefore requiring care within a global vision now and for the future.
- *Commitment to the growth of people*: this firstly requires the acceptance of the diversity of people and the various levels of ability within an organisation. Through inclusive and ethical practice, human and spiritual growth is facilitated, and people are motivated to engage in the service of their shared vision.
- *Building community*: leaders and followers working collaboratively as a team to build community within their own organisation but, also, to contribute to the human community and the good of all.

These aspects of servant leadership contributed significantly to the theology of leadership, as did the concept of “transforming leadership”; James Burns, considered by some to be the founder of modern leadership studies, introduced the concept of transforming leadership into business literature in 1978 with the book *Leadership*. Such leadership calls for a focus on values-based outcomes that go beyond the immediate organisation and strives to transform “the lives of followers and their cultures” (Fryer, 2011, p. 230). Transforming leaders were described as ethical, respectful, making sacrifices for followers and empowering others. Becoming better known as “transformational leadership,” Bass and Avolio (as cited in Fryer, 2011, p. 231) identified that such leadership is characterised by the following:

- *Idealised influence*: Transformational leaders become role models for followers who admire, respect and trust them. They put followers' needs above their own, and their behaviour is consistent with the values and principles of the group.

- *Inspirational motivation*: Transformational leaders motivate by providing meaning and challenge to the tasks of followers. They arouse team spirit, are enthusiastic and optimistic, and help followers develop desirable visions for the future.
- *Intellectual stimulation*: Transformational leaders stimulate innovation and creativity. They do so by encouraging followers to question assumptions, reframe situations and approach old problems from new perspectives. Transformational leaders do not criticise mistakes but instead solicit solutions from followers.
- *Individualised consideration*: Transformational leaders act as coaches or mentors who foster personal development. They provide learning opportunities and a supportive climate for growth. Their coaching and mentoring is tailored to the individual needs and desire of each follower.

The renewed vision of heroic leadership within heroism science shares many features with servant and transformational leadership, as this renewed heroic leadership is grounded in the hero journey to transformation for self, others and community (Allison & Cecilione, 2016). Most importantly, within heroism science, being a hero is not solely the province of the elite, but can be achieved by anyone with the motivation to do the heroic thing. Franco, Blau and Zimbardo (2011, p. 111) have argued that “the perpetuation of the myth of the ‘heroic elect’ does society a disservice because it prevents the ‘average citizen’ from considering their own heroic potential.”

Before turning to a specific discussion of the theology of leadership, it is important to acknowledge other theological aspects relevant to heroism science. Heroism science is exploring numerous aspects of what leads to heroic behaviour and what contributes to individuals being perceived as heroes (Allison et al., 2017). Christian theology maintains that all people are created in the image of God and are therefore fundamentally “good.” The Christian message is a call to transformation through living a life focused on loving others and doing what is best for them. Therefore, every individual is believed to be capable of being a hero.

The field of heroism science reflects the growing trend in psychology to understand what contributes to the human flourishing of individuals and groups, rather than how to identify and treat the pathological aspects of human behaviour (Allison & Cecilione, 2016, p. 3). Such a move in psychology parallels the return of theology in the late 20th century from a focus on “original sin” to a focus on “original blessing.” According to Rohr (2015), Pelagius (354-418), one of the early Christian Celtic writers, saw that beginning with the negative – original sin – would damage rather than aid spiritual development. He

stressed not only the essential goodness of creation – and our capacity to glimpse what he called ‘the shafts of divine light’ that penetrate the thin veil dividing heaven and earth – but, very specifically, the essential goodness of humanity. Pelagius maintained that the image of God can be seen in every newborn child and that, although obscured by sin, it exists at the heart of every person, waiting to be released through the grace of God. (Newell, as cited in Rohr, 2015).

The theologian Matthew Fox (1983) was foundational in the original blessing movement and wrote about the four paths to transformation through a focus on original blessing:

- *Via Positiva*: befriending creation.
- *Via Negativa*: befriending darkness and letting go.
- *Via Creativa*: befriending creativity and our divinity.
- *Via Transformativa*: befriending New Creation.

It is important to acknowledge Fox’s (1983) work because it has been very influential in spirituality practice, and relates closely to the hero’s journey as identified by Campbell (1949) and the idea of transformation. There are also other influential Christian writers who discuss the heroic in the context of the Christian life journey, such as Richard Rohr, a Franciscan, who has written widely about heroes and their journey (Rohr, 2011), Chris Lowney, from the Ignation or Jesuit spiritual discipline (Lowney, 2003), and Joan Chittister, a Benedictine nun (Chittister, 2015). These writers bring to a renewed heroic leadership centuries of spiritual practice that contains frameworks for reflection, contemplation and discernment – all of which have a place in the personal development and actions of a heroic leader.

Having set the background from CST and leadership literature, the next section moves to a specific discussion of the model of a theology of leadership and the relationship with heroic leadership as expressed in heroism science.

Discussion

There are three core concepts of this theology of leadership within which are embedded a number of essences, as represented in the model in Figure 1:

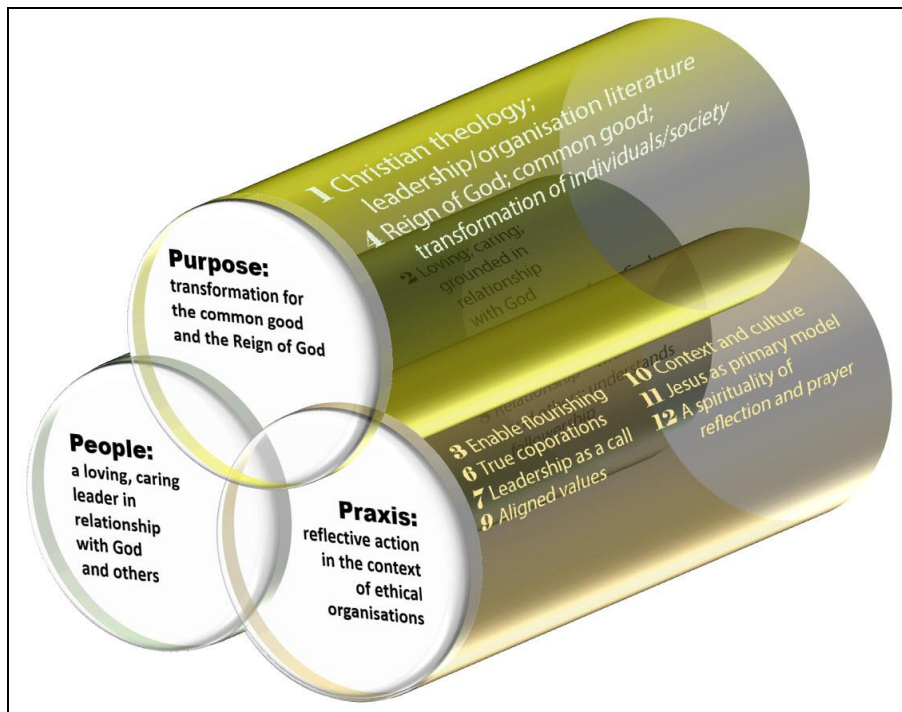


Figure 1. Model of a Theology of Leadership

Due to limitations of space, it is not possible to discuss the essences that emerged from the analysis of the literature here; as such, the resulting three core concepts will be the focus of discussion. They are:

- *Purpose*: transformation for the common good and the “Reign of God.”
- *People*: a loving, caring leader in relationship with God and others.
- *Praxis* (understood as reflective action): enabling flourishing within an ethical organisation.

In addressing in greater detail the first core concept of Purpose, it is necessary to differentiate between *the greater good* and *the common good*. An example which is familiar to most Australians can be found in the great Australian movie *The Castle* (Choate & Sitch, 1997), a classic story about the underdog hero with whom we identify and who we find inspiring (Allison & Cecilione, 2016, p. 9). The movie tells the story of the Kerrigan family whose land is to be compulsorily acquired to expand the Melbourne airport. The argument from the greater good would be that the Kerrigans’ land should be: able to be acquired to enable a better airport making life easier for the wider population; that the Kerrigans should make a sacrifice for the greater good and move out; and that society through its agencies has the right to force this to happen. In contrast, the common good is based on the principle of the dignity and rights of each and every human person, and, therefore, in this situation the Kerrigans’ rights cannot be overridden for the greater good. To stand up for the dignity and rights of every individual means being a hero and a servant in a theology of leadership, and to work for the common good provides a guiding principle for leadership practice. In this core concept the term common good is used as secular alternative language for the Reign of God.

In Christian theology the connection between the common good and the Reign of God is found in Jesus’ commandment to “Love your neighbour as you love yourself.” Wallis (2014, p. xiii) calls this “the most transformational social ethic the world has ever seen,” and cites the teaching of Early Church Father John Chrysostom (349-407) as an indication of the development of the teaching of the common good in Christian Church history:

This is the rule of most perfect Christianity its most exact definition, its highest point, namely, the seeking of the common good ... for nothing can so make a person an imitator of Christ as caring for his neighbors.

In relating the common good to the kingdom of God, Wallis (2014, p. 29) speaks of Jesus’ call to a different way of life in the kingdom of God:

it’s a call to a relationship that changes all our other relationships. Jesus told us a new relationship with God also brings us into a new relationship with our neighbour, especially with the most vulnerable of this world, and even with our enemies. ... This call to love our neighbor is the foundation for reestablishing and reclaiming the common good.

According to Shauf (2007, p. 15), the kingdom teaching of the Sermon on the Mount² emphasises that “The kingdom involves putting Jesus’ teaching into practice.”

There are numerous instances in Jesus’ teaching which relate to the common good: Matthew (25:31-46), where “all the nations” are judged according to their treatment of the “least of these”; the greatest commandment (Matt 22:34-40; Mark 12:28-31); and the parable of the Good Samaritan (10:29-37) (Shauf, 2007, p. 7). In addition, the apostle Paul teaches that followers need to “always seek the good for one another and for all people” (1 Thess 5:15; Gal 6:10) and that they must “Consider what is good before all people; to the extent that you can, live peacefully with all people” (Romans 12:17b-18) (Shauf, 2007, p. 16). Rowland is another theologian who describes the connection between the kingdom and the common good by interpreting the kingdom of God as the “coming common good” (Gorringe & Rowland, 2016, p. 108). The intention of relating the Reign of God with the common good in this model is, therefore, that it provides the Christian leader with theological guidance, but also with secular language with which to enact their leadership.

The other aspect of Purpose in this theology of leadership is transformation – a word which is common in the language of hero literature. Becoming a hero entails being personally transformed, but there also must be a benefit for other people and the community (Allison et al., 2017, p. 7). This fits perfectly within a theology of leadership which calls for a purpose of transformation of the individual and society.

The second core concept of the theology of leadership is People, which calls for a loving, caring leader in relationship with others, epitomised by authentic leadership and authentic followership, where power is used for service and to empower others. Growth and development is an essential part of the hero’s journey which also requires the growth and development of followers (Allison & Goethals, 2014, p. 175).

It is not only a theology of leadership that recognises that all leaders are at times, and in some way, also followers. Unfortunately, the term “followers” has traditionally had a negative connotation, especially within the workplace, as indicated in the research of Berg (1998). Participants in his Leadership and Followership workshops used words like “sheep,” “passive,” “obedient,” “lemming,” and “serf” to describe followers; Berg (1998) attributed these negative associations to the organisational and psychological demeaning of the follower role. However, in the Christian tradition all leaders are followers, or disciples, of Jesus (Huizing, 2011, p. 73).

Secular leadership literature also acknowledges that, particularly in modern organisational structures, leaders will be followers of others further up the hierarchy, as well as taking on a follower role within, for example, project teams. There have been influential writers promoting a positive view of the follower role. Chaleff (1995), in particular, has already named heroic followership by another name – “The Courageous Follower.” Chaleff (1995) suggests a relationship where the leader and follower have equal power but different roles that orbit around support and fulfillment of the organisation’s purpose.

² The Sermon on the Mount is a collection of the teachings of Jesus found in the Gospel of Matthew, chapters five to seven.

Heroic leadership within heroism science acknowledges the importance of followers, beginning with the fact that heroic leaders help followers discover the hero's own strengths and be transformed (Allison et al., 2017). In addition, heroism science identifies that, in accordance with the hero's journey described by Campbell (1949) and identified by Burns (1978), heroes journey from followership to heroic leadership through the guidance of mentors (Allison et al., 2017). Heroism science also recognises that the relationship between leaders and followers must be defined by humility and the humble service of the leaders to others, remembering that this service "is not the means to an end but is the end itself" (Allison & Cecilione, 2016, p. 13). This reinforces the connection between servant leadership and heroic leadership.

Based on the authentic leader and follower development model developed by Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May and Walumbwa (2005, p. 346), a theology of leadership calls for authentic leadership and authentic followership in which relationships are developed based on mutual influence through positive modelling. Authentic leadership allows for the mutuality of the leader-follower relationship and the importance of shared values from which arises a shared vision. Authentic leaders and followers seek personal growth and ongoing learning; organisations which provide environments promoting this can be expected to be typified by trust, engagement and well-being.

The processes and practices of self-awareness and self-regulation that epitomise authentic leaders and followers mean that decisions and actions are guided by values. This ideally ensures that they have the courage, for example, to speak out against practices that are unethical and damaging. These are acts of heroism that may not bring widespread attention – although in the case of some whistle-blowers it does – but certainly contribute to the common good and the dignity of the human person. In heroism science these unnoticed heroes are referred to as "transparent heroes" (Allison & Cecilione, 2016, p. 11).

Power is an issue in any discussion of leadership. A theology of leadership requires a sharing of power that would not typically be attributed to heroes, particularly those who are designated as leaders. Authentic leadership insists on the empowering of others through the leader-follower relationship and is therefore promoted by a theology of leadership. Heroism science identifies that heroes are powerful; "good" heroes, however, use their power for others rather than to dominate (Allison & Cecilione, 2016).

The third core concept of a theology of leadership is that of Praxis, understood as reflective action that enables the flourishing of all and requires an organisation within which this can happen. Leaders and followers both contribute to an organisational environment epitomised by collaboration and ethical decision-making. However, it is always incumbent on leaders to put themselves on the line by ensuring that company policies and practices allow for the growth and transformation of those within the organisation, and therefore the organisation itself, as well as the wider community. Heroism science recognises that "leaders are held to a higher standard of ethical conduct than are non-leaders. Followers have a low tolerance for ... heroic leaders who behave immorally in the slightest degree" (Allison & Cecilione, 2016, p. 14). Praxis includes the identification of appropriate leadership and workplace practices and, while any number of good practices could be named, what is most important is that these practices arise from an authentic leader and follower relationship where personal values and organisational values are aligned.

Using the model of a theology of leadership an analysis was undertaken by the author of a variety of business organisations – it was concluded that the kind of heroic leadership and followership called for by a theology of leadership can be enacted in many businesses because of their commitment to people-centred and justice-oriented practices (Robertson, 2017). However, there will be many cases where the most heroic thing a leader, or follower, can do is to walk away from an organisation that is solely devoted to its own survival and profit, with no regard for the impact on individuals and society.

A theological perspective from Christian social teaching through the concepts of Purpose, People and Praxis rejects the enduring common idea of heroic/great man leadership, because such leadership continues to be dominated by the notion of powerful action driving others. However, a theology of leadership supports a new or renewed heroic leadership grounded within an authentic leader/follower relationship working for the common good and the transformation of all. We also need to remember that, while the values of heroism may appear similar to those of social teaching, the motivation for Christians is grounded in their faith. However, in terms of benefit to the community the outcomes are the same – a better world for everyone.

Conclusion

This article aimed to bring a theological perspective from a theology of leadership grounded in Christian social teaching to the concept of heroic leadership as it is being presented in heroism science. After discussing important influences on a theology of leadership and theological considerations regarding heroism science, a theology of leadership derived from Christian social teaching was used as a conceptual model to discuss the commonalities between a theological model of leadership and heroic leadership. It was argued that a Christian theology of leadership aligns closely with much of what is portrayed by a renewed heroic leadership in the areas of Purpose, People and Praxis, particularly in the domains of working for the transformation of self and others.

Despite the notion of heroic leadership within heroism science being life-affirming and productive, we must not forget that there are many who still negatively equate heroic leadership with the Great Man theory of leadership and promote the idea of moving to a “post-heroic” era of leadership (Fletcher, 2004; Klar, Huggins, Hammonds & Buskey, 2015). Within this context it is important to foster dialogue across disciplines, including theology, to engage others in a transformed understanding of the concept of “hero.” The challenges of ongoing commitment to the transformation of self, others and society, along with ethical decision-making in the light of working for the common good, may cause difficulties in workplace environments that are not compatible with a theology of leadership. This will require heroic leadership in either turning the situation around, or even walking away.

REFERENCES

- Allison, S. T., & Cecilione, J. L. (2016). Paradoxical truths in heroic leadership: Implications for leadership development and effectiveness. In R. Bolden, M. Witzel & N. Linacre (Eds.), *Leadership paradoxes: Rethinking leadership for an uncertain world* (pp. 73-92). London: Routledge.
- Allison, S. T., & Goethals, G. R. (2014). "Now he belongs to the ages": The heroic leadership dynamic and deep narratives of greatness. In G. R. Goethals, S. T. Allison, R. M. Kramer & D. M. Messick (Eds.), *Conceptions of leadership: Enduring ideas and emerging insights* (pp. 167-183). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Allison, S. T., Goethals, G. R., & Kramer, R. M. (2017). Setting the scene: The rise and coalescence of heroism science. In S. T. Allison, G. R. Goethals & R. M. Kramer (Eds.), *Handbook of heroism and heroic leadership* (pp. 1-16). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2006). *Australian year book, 2006*. Retrieved from <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/ProductsbyCatalogue/54C4B6E54C0C737DCA2570B000368DFD?OpenDocument>
- Benefiel, M., Fry, L., & Geigle, D. (2014). Spirituality and religion in the workplace: History, theory, and research. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality, 6*, 175-187.
- Berg, D. N. (1998). Resurrecting the muse: Followership in organizations. In E. B. Klein, F. Gabelnick & P. Herr (Eds.), *The psychodynamics of leadership* (pp. 27-52). US: Psychosocial Press.
- Bezuidenhout, R. & Naudé, P. (2002). Some thoughts on "public theology" and its relevance for the South African context. *Scriptura 79*(1), 3-13.
- Burke, T. P. (2010). The origins of social justice: Taparelli d'Azeglio. *Modern Age, 52*(2), 2010, 97.
- Burns, J. (1978). *Leadership*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Cameron, C. (2015). *Leadership as a call to service: the life and works of Hildegard of Bingen*. Ballarat, Victoria: Conor Court Publishing.
- Campbell, J. (1949). *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Carlyle, T. (1841). *Heroes, hero worship, and the heroic in history*. Philadelphia, PA: Henry Altemus.
- Chaleff, I. (1995). *The courageous follower: Standing up to and for our leaders*. Oakland, CA: Berrett Koehler.
- Chittister, J. (2015). A fire in their hearts. Retrieved from <http://www.joanchittister.org/word-from-joan/10-26-2015/fire-their-hearts>
- Choate, D. (Producer) & Sitch, R. (Director). (1997). *The Castle*. [Motion Picture]. Australia: Working Dog Productions

- Cohen, W. (2013). Peter Drucker wants you to be a heroic leader - now. *Organizational Dynamics*, 42, 70-80.
- Drisko, J., & Maschi, T. (2015). *Content analysis*. Oxford Scholarship Online. doi:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780190215491.001.0001
- Esdaille, R. (2015). The history of Catholic Social Teaching and its origins. Retrieved from <http://www.catholicsocialteaching.org.uk/principles/history/>
- Fletcher, J. (2004). The paradox of postheroic leadership: An essay on gender, power, and transformational change. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 15(5), 647-661.
- Fox, M. (1983). *Original blessing: A primer in creation spirituality*. Rochester NY: Bear & Company.
- Franco, Z.E., Blau K., & Zimbardo, P.G. (2011). Heroism: A conceptual analysis and differentiation between heroic action and altruism. *Review of General Psychology*, 15(2), 99-113. doi:10.1037/a0022672
- Fry, L. (2005). Toward a theory of ethical and spiritual well-being, and corporate social responsibility through spiritual leadership. In Robert A. Giacalone, Carole L. Jurkiewicz and Craig Dunn, (Eds.), *Positive Psychology in Business Ethics and Corporate Responsibility* (pp. 47-84). Connecticut: Information Age Publishing.
- Fryer, M. (2011). *Ethics and organizational leadership: Developing a normative model*. Oxford Scholarship Online.
- Gardner, W. L., Avolio, B., Luthans, F., May, D., & Walumbwa, F. (2005). Can you see the real me? A self-based model of authentic leader and follower development. *Leadership Quarterly*, 16, 343-72.
- Gorringer, T., & Rowland, C. (2016). Practical theology and the common good - why the Bible is essential. *Practical Theology*, 9(2), 101-114.
- Greenleaf, R. (1977). *Servant leadership: A journey into the nature of legitimate power and greatness*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press.
- Grint, K. (2010). The sacred in leadership: Separation, sacrifice and silence. *Organization Studies*, 31(01), 89-107.
- Huizing, R. L. (2011). Bringing Christ to the table of leadership: Towards a theology of leadership. *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership*, 5(2), 58-75.
- Klar, H., Huggins, K., Hammonds, H., & Buskey, F. (2015). Fostering the capacity for distributed leadership: A post-heroic approach to leading school improvement. *International Journal of Leadership in Education-Theory and Practice*, 19(2), 111-137.
- Koester, A. (2002). Under construction: A spirituality of work. *Spiritual Life*, 48, 3-15.
- Lowney, C. (2003). *Heroic Leadership*. Chicago: Loyola Press.

- Miller, D. (2006). *God at work: The history and promise of the faith at work movement*. Cary, NC, USA: Oxford University Press.
- NCLS Research. (2009). Social trends in Australia and implications for church life. Retrieved from <http://www.ncls.org.au/default.aspx?sitemapid=6384>
- Nullens, P. (2013). Towards a spirituality of public leadership: Engaging Dietrich Bonhoeffer. *International Journal of Public Theology*, 7(1), 91-113. doi:10.1163/15697320-12341268
- Pew Research Center. (2015). The future of world religions: Population growth projections, 2010-2050. Retrieved from <http://www.pewforum.org/2015/04/02/religious-projections-2010-2050/>
- Robertson, D. (2017). *A theology of leadership: from social justice for transformation*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Murdoch University, Perth, Western Australia.
- Rohr, R. (2011). *Falling upward: A spirituality for the two halves of life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Rohr, R. (2015). Original blessing. Retrieved from <https://cac.org/original-blessing-2015-07-08/>
- Sanks, T. H. (1980). Liberation theology and the social gospel: Variations on a theme. *Theological Studies*, 41(4), 668-82.
- Shauf, S. (2007). Is there a Biblical basis for the common good? Retrieved from http://www.georgetowncollege.edu/cdal/files/2011/06/scott_shauf.pdf
- Veling, T. (2005). *Practical theology: "On earth as it is in heaven"*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Wallis, J. (2014). *The (un)common good: How the gospel brings hope to a world divided*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press. xiii.

APPENDIX A

1. Catholic Social Teaching: Main Source Documents.

No	Latin Title	English Title	Year of Publication	Author
1	<i>Rerum Novarum</i>	The Conditions of Labor	1891	Pope Leo XIII
2	<i>Quadregesimo Anno</i>	After Forty Years, or The Reconstruction of the Social Order	1931	Pope Pius XI
3	<i>Mater et Magistra</i>	Christianity and Social Progress	1961	Pope John XXIII
4	<i>Pacem in Terris</i>	Peace on Earth	1963	Pope John XXIII
5	<i>Gaudium et Spes</i>	Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World	1965	Second Vatican Council
6	<i>Populorum Progressio</i>	The Development of Peoples	1967	Pope Paul VI
7	<i>Octogesima Adveniens</i>	A Call to Action on the 80 th Anniversary of Rerum Novarum	1971	Pope Paul VI
8	<i>Iustitia in Mundo</i>	Justice in the World	1971	Synod of Bishops
9	<i>Evangelii Nuntiandi</i>	Evangelization in the Modern World	1975	Pope Paul VI
10	<i>Laborem Exercens</i>	On Human Work	1981	Pope John Paul II
11	<i>Sollicitudo Rei Socialis</i>	On Social Concern	1987	Pope John Paul II
12	<i>Centesimus Annus</i>	On the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum	1991	Pope John Paul II
13	<i>Deus Caritas Est</i>	God is Love	2005	Pope Benedict XVI
14	<i>Caritas in Veritate</i>	Charity in Truth	2009	Pope Benedict XVI
15	<i>Lumen Fidei</i>	The Light of Faith	2013	Pope Francis
16	<i>Evangelii Gaudium</i>	Apostolic Exhortation on The Joy of the Gospel	2013	Pope Francis
17	<i>Laudato Si'</i>	On Care for Our Common Home	2015	Pope Francis

2. Social Gospel: Main Source Documents.

Brooking, N. (2001). Charles M. Sheldon and the social gospel. Retrieved from <https://spider.georgetowncollege.edu/htallant/courses/his338/students/nbrooking/cms.htm>

Burnidge, C. (2009). *Charles M. Sheldon and the heart of the social gospel Movement*. Masters Thesis, Florida State University. Retrieved from <http://diginole.lib.fsu.edu/islandora/object/fsu:180988/datastream/PDF/view>

Rauschenbusch, W. (1997). *A theology for the social gospel*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press.

Sheldon, C. M. (1896). *In His steps: What would Jesus do*. Public Domain: Digital Edition.

Deborah Robertson worked in Catholic schools in Western Australia (WA) for over 20 years having experience as a leader and follower in eight primary schools across the State. Moving to the tertiary sector, she worked for six years as a Senior Lecturer in Educational Leadership at the Australian Catholic University in Melbourne and online from her base in Bunbury, WA. Deborah is currently Diocesan Director for Catholic Mission in the Bunbury Catholic Diocese.

Suggested citation for this article:

Robertson, D. (2017). A theological perspective on heroic leadership in the context of followership and servant leadership. *Heroism Science*, 2(1), 1-16.