

Session 2

Perspectives on Pentecostal Leadership: Contextuality, Complexity, and Constructiveness (Truls Åkerlund)

Abstract

Leadership is a complex phenomenon difficult to define as a single concept; rather it is often understood as social processes that influence people towards common goals, an approach I will follow in this study. Based on general leadership theory and research on Pentecostal leadership, I emphasize the interaction between leaders, followers, and the spiritual dimension, leading to a constructivist perspective on the leader-follower relationships. The article first addresses leadership in various settings, emphasizing the need to contextualize leadership in different cultures but also keep an analytical distance to avoid dominating discourses that break with Christian perspectives. Second, I discuss the complexity in Pentecostal leadership, especially the collaboration between divine and human interventions, the dialectic connection between agency and structure, and the ambivalence and tension between leaders and followers in ecclesial settings. Finally, I highlight humility and the constructive relations between leaders and followers. While leaders hold a formal position, leadership is also a social phenomenon effective only if it makes sense to church members, implying that the leader's task is not to create everything from scratch but to build relationships and draw from the resources and spirituality present within the congregation.

Key Words: Pentecostal leadership, context, discourse, relational leadership, humility

Introduction

According to Grant Wacker, the Pentecostal history shows that “strong, determined, clear-eyed leaders orchestrated the revival from first to last.”¹ Enterprising and innovative leaders have been important to Pentecostalism's growth and expansion since its inception,² and

¹ Grant Wacker, *Heaven below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Harvard University Press, 2001), 141.

² Allan Anderson, *To the Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity*, Oxford Studies in World Christianity (Oxford University Press, 2013), 224; Reed E. Nelson, “Authority, Organization, and Societal Context in Multinational Churches,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (1993): 672, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2393340>.

many Pentecostal leaders have gained cultural influence also in public and political spheres.³ In general, Pentecostalism can be grounded in a pneumatological centre where the emphasis is on the use of spiritual gifts;⁴ still, Pentecostal *leadership* can be seen as perplexing and paradoxical in the tension between primitivism and pragmatism, leadership theory and pneumatology, power to the anointed few, and empowerment of marginalized groups.⁵

Leadership is in general a complex phenomenon that can be challenging to define as a single concept,⁶ often understood as social processes that influence others towards common goals, an approach I follow in this study.⁷ Leaders and leadership in religious organizations have been a central theme in social scientific studies of religion since the beginning of the twentieth century, and findings show that complexity and ambivalence characterize leadership in religious groups across congregations and contexts.⁸ Different religious organizations exhibit significant variations in how leadership is connected to roles and structures,⁹ and this is an argument for specifically addressing leadership in *Pentecostal* settings—supported by the explosive growth of

³ E.g., Hans Geir Aasmundsen, “Pentecostals and Politics in Argentina: A Question of Compatibility?” *Iberoamericana. Nordic Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* XLII, no. 1–2 (2012): 85–107; J. F. McCauley, “Africa’s New Big Man Rule? Pentecostalism and Patronage in Ghana,” *African Affairs* 112, no. 446 (2013): 1–21; Martin Lindhardt, “Introduction: Presence and Impact of Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity in Africa,” in *Pentecostalism in Africa: Presence and Impact of Pneumatic Christianity in Postcolonial Societies*, ed. Martin Lindhardt (Brill, 2015), 1–53.

⁴ Allan Anderson, *Spreading Fires: The Missionary Nature of Early Pentecostalism* (SCM Press, 2007), 4.

⁵ Truls Åkerlund, *A Phenomenology of Pentecostal Leadership* (Wipf & Stock, 2018), 4.

⁶ See for instance Mats Alvesson and Martin Blom, “The Hegemonic Ambiguity of Big Concepts in Organization Studies,” *Human Relations* 75, no. 1 (2022): 58–86; Keith Grint, Owain Smolovic Jones, and Clare Holt, “What Is Leadership: Person, Result, Position, Purpose or Process, or All or None of These?” in *The Routledge Companion to Leadership*, ed. John Storey et al. (Routledge, 2016), 3–20.

⁷ E.g., Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 8th ed (Sage, 2019); Gary A. Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations*, Global Edition (Pearson Education, 2013); Richard Bolden et al., *Exploring Leadership: Individual, Organizational & Societal Perspectives* (Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁸ Mark Chaves, Joseph Roso, and Anna Holleman, “The National Survey of Religious Leaders: Background, Methods, and Lessons Learned in the Research Process,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 61, no. 3–4 (2022): 737–749.

⁹ Dean R. Hoge, “The Sociology of the Clergy,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Peter B. Clarke (Oxford University Press, 2009), 581–96.

the movement, the role leadership has had in its development, and the lack of research in this area.¹⁰

In this article I both use leadership theory and draw on my previous studies on Pentecostal leadership. Based on former research, I emphasize the interaction between leaders, followers, and the spiritual dimension, leading to a beneficial perspective on the leader-follower relationship. While leaders hold a formal position, leadership is also a social phenomenon effective only if it makes sense to the followers, implying that the leader's task is not to create everything from scratch but to draw from the resources and spirituality present within the congregation.¹¹ Due to the nuances in Pentecostal leadership, I therefore emphasize contextuality, complexity and constructiveness throughout the paper, starting by highlighting how cultures and circumstances frame the understanding of leadership.

Contextuality

Pentecostalism is a “religion made to travel”¹² with the world as its parish,¹³ and it has been the fastest growing religious movement in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, estimating more than a billion Pentecostal believers around 2050.¹⁴ Pentecostalism has demonstrated a remarkable capacity to adapt to diverse cultural contexts, leading both to achieve global influence and a capacity to localized expressions of its universal message. The Pentecostal Movement is thus not a uniform phenomenon, and it has many different variations—also in leadership. As summarized by Allan Heaton Anderson, “Pentecostalism has an ability to

¹⁰ See a brief overview in Åkerlund, *Phenomenology of Pentecostal Leadership*, 1–7.

¹¹ Truls Åkerlund, “Taking Ownership of Our Spirituality: Pentecostal Leaders as Liturgical Directors,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 31 (2022): 114–32.

¹² Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the 21st Century* (Da Capo Press, 1995), 102.

¹³ David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Blackwell, 2002).

¹⁴ Gina A. Zurlo et al., “World Christianity and Mission 2020: Ongoing Shift to the Global South,” *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 44, no. 1 (2020): 8–19.

transpose itself into local cultures and religions effortlessly, because of its primary emphases on the experience of the Spirit and the spiritual calling of leaders who do not have to be formally educated in theology.”¹⁵ This flexibility includes both benefits and burdens, as contexts and cultures implicitly influence religious organizations.

From a leadership perspective, it is natural that leaders adapt to different settings, for instance based on Implicit Leadership Theories (ILT). This relates to follower attributions formed by cultural locations and cognitive schemas, shaping individuals’ understandings, interpretations, and evaluations of leadership behaviours.¹⁶ Leadership is from this perspective in the eye of the beholder and defined as “the process of being perceived by others as a leader,”¹⁷ making it a result of the socio-cognitive procedures individuals use to label others. Cultural values do not predict leadership behaviours directly, but the culture is an antecedent which influences leadership expectations and predicts culturally endorsed leadership theories and behaviours.¹⁸ Consequently, individuals perceived as leaders will have greater influence and be more transformational compared to those who do not meet the implicit expectations of

¹⁵ Allan Heaton Anderson, *Spirit-Filled World: Religious Dis/Continuity in African Pentecostalism*, Christianity and Renewal - Interdisciplinary Studies (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 256.

¹⁶ Robert G. Lord et al., “Implicit Leadership Theories, Implicit Followership Theories, and Dynamic Processing of Leadership Information,” *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior* 7, no. 1 (2020): 49–74.

¹⁷ Robert G. Lord and Karen J. Maher, *Leadership and Information Processing: Linking Perceptions and Performance* (Routledge, 1993), 9.

¹⁸ Peter Dorfman et al., “GLOBE: A Twenty Year Journey into the Intriguing World of Culture and Leadership,” *Journal of World Business* 47, no. 4 (2012): 504–18.

organizational members.¹⁹ In sum, leaders recognized by their followers tend to be more effective. The stronger the alignment, the greater the acceptance of the leader.²⁰

This implies that there are differences in leadership styles in various contexts, showed for instance in the extensive GLOBE study.²¹ As an example, the study shows that differences exist in leadership styles in Confucian Asia and Nordic Europe, as the first is being self-protective, team oriented, and humane oriented, while the Nordic paradigm is visionary, participative, diplomatic, and less humane oriented and self-protective.²² Compared with Norway, Singapore places greater emphasis on power distance and collectivism, implying that a Norwegian leadership style characterized by free rein, involvement, and consideration would likely be ineffective in Singapore.²³ Another study shows that Americans describe leaders standing in front of groups, while Asians depict leaders standing behind groups, prioritizing interpersonal and group responsibilities over individual assertion.²⁴ Culture hence “colors the pictures we see when we imagine following the leader,” both spatially and socially.²⁵

The point here is not to elevate one cultural style over another but to emphasize that the process of being and becoming a Pentecostal leader is stimulated by cultural and contextual expectations. Leadership is socially constructed and embedded in a context, and various

¹⁹ E.g., Bernard M. Bass and Bruce J. Avolio, “Potential Biases in Leadership Measures: How Prototypes, Leniency, and General Satisfaction Relate to Ratings and Rankings of Transformational and Transactional Leadership Constructs,” *Educational and Psychological Measurement* 49, no. 3 (1989): 509–27; Robert G. Lord, Christy L. De Vader, and George M. Alliger, “A Meta-Analysis of the Relation between Personality Traits and Leadership Perceptions: An Application of Validity Generalization Procedures,” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 71, no. 3 (1986): 402–10.

²⁰ Edwin P. Hollander, “Further Ethical Challenges in the Leader-Follower Relationship,” in *Ethics, the Heart of Leadership*, ed. Joanne B. Ciulla, 3rd ed. (Praeger, 2014), 57–61.

²¹ Robert J. House et al., eds., *Culture, Leadership, and Organizations: The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies* (SAGE Publications, Inc, 2004).

²² The GLOBE-study summarized in Northouse, *Leadership*, 448–9.

²³ Berit Sund, *Typisk norsk å være (selv)god: En liten bok om den norske lederstilen* (Cappelen Damm akademisk, 2019), 82.

²⁴ Tanya Menon et al., “Blazing the Trail versus Trailing the Group: Culture and Perceptions of the Leader’s Position,” *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 113, no. 1 (2010): 51–61.

²⁵ Menon et al., “Blazing the Trail,” 60.

leadership dimensions thus vary by different settings.²⁶ As such, Pentecostalism has flexibility and efficiency to meet different contexts, but its complexity can also be stained with “signs and blunders,”²⁷ and leadership can be seen as both diverse and contextual.²⁸ Since leadership is a complex and multi-dimensional phenomenon that cannot be reduced to simple formulas,²⁹ contexts will unavoidably shape the understanding of leadership as “culture is the fabric of meaning in terms of which human beings interpret their experience and guide their action.”³⁰ This means that we need to contextualize leadership to meet the culture we lead in, but also should keep an analytical distance since “what we ‘think’ about leading is merely the tip of the iceberg while the bulk lies beneath the surface in implicit knowledge.”³¹ One perspective on contextual adaptation of leadership seldom takes into account the implications of how power shapes the setting out of which leadership appears: “Context therefore not only encompasses the situation within which leadership takes place but also the framework of assumptions, beliefs, and practices through which we come to know what leadership *is*.”³² Consequently, the models or paradigms that dominate a setting often become dominating for how persons are accepted by others as leaders, and cultural assumptions also shape how they recognize themselves and their understanding of what leadership entails.³³ Dominating discourses in particular settings may influence forms of leadership paradigms as an “operating theatre in terms of their relationship

²⁶ Richard N. Osborn et al., “Toward a Contextual Theory of Leadership,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 13, no. 6 (2002): 797–837.

²⁷ Allan Anderson, “Signs and Blunders: Pentecostal Mission Issues at ‘Home and Abroad’ in the Twentieth Century,” *Journal of Asian Mission* 2, no. 2 (2000): 193–210.

²⁸ Åkerlund, *Phenomenology of Pentecostal Leadership*, 32–36.

²⁹ E.g., Mats Alvesson and André Spicer, “Metaphors for Leadership,” in *Metaphors We Lead by: Understanding Leadership in the Real World*, ed. Mats Alvesson and André Spicer (Routledge, 2011), 31–50.

³⁰ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic Books, 1973), 145.

³¹ Alan Johnson, *Leadership in a Slum: A Bangkok Case Study* (Regnum Books International, 2009), 199.

³² Bolden et al., *Exploring Leadership*, 99.

³³ Truls Åkerlund and Åse-Miriam Smidsrød, “When Dominant Models Become Dominating: A Narrative Identity Approach to Female Leadership in Pentecostal Organizations,” *Journal of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity* (2024): 3–4. This article also contributes to research on Pentecostal female leadership by approaching the topic from an organizational perspective and emphasizing the Pentecostal pneumatological narrative of spiritual empowerment.

with the discourses of Christianity in its various shapes and forms”³⁴—implying that we should distil the discourses for analysis and embrace a healthy critical reflection on various aspects of (Pentecostal) leadership. The lens through which we perceive ourselves and the world is frequently polished by discursive hands as a “vehicle for thought, communication and action,”³⁵ indicating that discursive regimes (specific ways of understanding and ordering human activity) often set the standard for leadership ideals to match current values and concerns.³⁶ This perspective means that the way we practice and talk about leadership often is influenced by the paradigmatic and cultural language we are linked to,³⁷ and mental models hence constrict, inhibit, and facilitate our understanding of leadership.³⁸ This also means that there frequently is a normative pressure to adopt and demonstrate leadership in specific yet hegemonic ways, driven by various discourses also within organizational settings.³⁹

Subjects and objects often become constituted by dominating paradigms, and sources of Pentecostal authority could thus be connected to denominations’ discourses and rhetorical devices, which could lead to both appropriation and manipulation.⁴⁰ On one side, possible strength is that Pentecostalism generally does not require formal training, hence “turning the

³⁴ Martin D. Stringer, *A Sociological History of Christian Worship* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 15.

³⁵ Trevor Purvis and Alan Hunt, “Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology....” *The British Journal of Sociology* 44, no. 3 (1993): 485.

³⁶ Suze Wilson, *Thinking Differently about Leadership: A Critical History of Leadership Studies* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016), 8–11.

³⁷ Doris Schedlitzki and Gareth Edwards, *Studying Leadership: Traditional & Critical Approaches* (Sage, 2014), 95–97, 233–40; Doris Jepson, “The Importance of National Language as a Level of Discourse within Individuals’ Theorising of Leadership—A Qualitative Study of German and English Employees,” *Leadership* 6, no. 4 (2010): 425–45.

³⁸ Sonia Ospina and Georgia J. Sorenson, “A Constructionist Lens on Leadership: Charting New Territory,” in *A Quest for a General Theory of Leadership*, ed. George R. Goethals and Georgia J. Sorenson (Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2006), 200.

³⁹ Mats Alvesson and Stefan Sveningsson, “Good Visions, Bad Micro-Management and Ugly Ambiguity: Contradictions of (Non-)Leadership in a Knowledge-Intensive Organization,” *Organization Studies* 24, no. 6 (2003): 961–88; Martin Blom and Mats Alvesson, “All-Inclusive and All Good: The Hegemonic Ambiguity of Leadership,” *Scandinavian Journal of Management* 31, no. 4 (2015): 480–92.

⁴⁰ Martin Lindhardt, *Power in Powerlessness: A Study of Pentecostal Life Worlds in Urban Chile*, Religion in the Americas Series (Leiden: BRILL, 2012), 21–25, 146–150.

losers of society into winners”⁴¹ by opening the space for people to take on leadership roles based on spiritual experiences. On the other side, this concept of sacred intervention and interference in human activities permeates their lifeworlds. It influences their daily experiences and interpretations of events, and empowers them to develop a distinct sense of agency—one shaped by cultural contexts and that leads to “learning a particular religious language and using it in the interpretation and narration of events and individual biographies.”⁴² This complexity implicates that Pentecostals are both determined and determining through interaction between subjective experiences and dominating paradigms, and the impact of culture and contextuality hence underscore the need for reflexivity and self-analysis.

Complexity

The last segment showed some of the nuances in contextual leadership, and in this section, I draw on Pentecostal leadership research to show some of the complexity of this model. The summary of a phenomenological study on Pentecostal leadership in Norway showed that leaders were motivated by a sense of divine purpose to serve God’s plan for the congregation and the world.⁴³ This implied that leadership was seen as derived from God; still, it was crucial for leaders to discern what God was doing without reducing leadership to merely listening and obeying. The belief that God was active in every aspect of life released these leaders to combine spirituality and rationality in leading the churches. This concept was confirmed in another empirical study drawing on data from Singapore, the USA, and Norway, showing an interaction

⁴¹ Lindhardt, *Power in Powerlessness*, 6.

⁴² Lindhardt, *Power in Powerlessness*, 9.

⁴³ Åkerlund, *Phenomenology of Pentecostal Leadership*. The eight constituents in the phenomenological study were described as (1) motivated by a sense of higher, divine purpose, (2) derived leadership, (3) human and divine agency in a seamless interaction between rationality and spirituality, (4) pragmatic and eclectic stance toward the Pentecostal tradition, (5) persuasive communication, (6) dialectic relationship between structure and agency, (7) adaptive to context, and (8) involving the leader’s entire life. These elements are drawn from Åkerlund’s book, *Phenomenology of Pentecostal Leadership*, chapters 5–6.

between divine and human agency: “The participants were neither monarchs nor mouthpieces: They sensed that they led on behalf of God and were thus not entirely free to pursue their own agenda, yet they could not resign to apathy since the outworking of the divine initiative involved human agency.”⁴⁴ This leadership process involved both “praying and planning” with no divide between the spiritual and material domains, placing the leaders between an invisible spiritual realm and the tangible realities of organizational tasks: “God’s leading was subtle and open-ended, taking the shape of a mandate to act innovatively and exploit opportunities, thus leaving more room for organizational leaders to work out the implications of the divine initiative.”⁴⁵ Spirituality was still the core of their leadership, and the leaders related to the Pentecostal tradition in diverse and unsystematic ways, making the consideration of God’s guidance to a pragmatic and eclectic stance toward the Pentecostal tradition.⁴⁶

In one sense, then, the plasticity of Pentecostalism opened doors for leaders to be innovative and pioneering. As one saw the tradition more as a *resource* than a *source*, a lot of opportunities opened for Pentecostal leaders and congregations. A value in this perspective was *participation*, in which the church was “a fluid, co-participating organism ... [where] Pentecostals have a certain knack of improvisation.”⁴⁷ God was working diversely in various settings, and Pentecostalism should not be brought to a well-ordered sense of closure, meaning that spirituality and theology was “not spoon-fed to people or crammed down their throats but is constantly being rearticulated at the local level in ways that ring true to people’s life experiences

⁴⁴ Franklin Markow and Truls Åkerlund, “Pentecostal Leadership: Exploring a Global Phenomenon,” *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion* 20, no. 5 (2023): 533, <https://doi.org/10.51327/JHKQ5569>.

⁴⁵ Markow and Åkerlund, “Pentecostal Leadership,” 533.

⁴⁶ Åkerlund, *Phenomenology of Pentecostal Leadership*, 80–85, 103–10.

⁴⁷ Daniel E. Albrecht and Evan B. Howard, “Pentecostal Spirituality,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism*, ed. Cecil M. Robeck Jr. and Amos Yong (Cambridge University Press, 2014), 243.

and the experiences of their communities.”⁴⁸ From another perspective, there is a risk that Pentecostal leaders end up being seamless and borderless, leaning towards a pragmatic tendency that can make their leadership a two-edged sword: “On one side, it fosters innovation by freeing leaders to actively choose the forms and methods that are best suited to serve the overall purpose of church in the time and place they exists. On the other side, the freedom from binding traditions may end up as a slippery slope of uncritical utilitarian emphasis on visible success.”⁴⁹ Based on the latter sentence, leaders can be highly subjective and function as gatekeepers who delimit the spirituality in the congregation based on their own will and understanding.

Pentecostal leadership can be autocratic rather than democratic, implying that pastors are heavy-handed and grant few others influence in the organization.⁵⁰ In contrast, the Pentecostal tradition is a communal affair, and leaders should therefore be attuned to the community when defining and expressing the congregation’s direction and spirituality.⁵¹ This highlights the relational and reciprocal nature of Pentecostal leadership, which I discuss in the section on constructiveness. Still, it is a complex process where the “experience of leadership happens in a dialectic relationship between agency and structure, in which [the leader’s] ability to influence the organization hinges on [one’s] ability to adapt to the organization,”⁵² indicating an important interplay between the individual and the collective in Pentecostal organizations. In most settings, a leader’s break with the congregants’ support and submission will weaken his or her leadership as one gains influence by meeting the organization's expectations. Generally, there are no self-

⁴⁸ Douglas G. Jacobsen, *Thinking in the Spirit: Theologies of the Early Pentecostal Movement* (Indiana University Press, 2003), 363.

⁴⁹ Åkerlund, *Phenomenology of Pentecostal Leadership*, 83.

⁵⁰ Markow and Åkerlund, “Pentecostal Leadership,” 535. Cf. Shane Clifton, *Pentecostal Churches in Transition: Analysing the Developing Ecclesiology of the Assemblies of God in Australia* (Brill, 2009), 176–88, 208–12.

⁵¹ Simon Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition* (Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 17–18.

⁵² Åkerlund, *Phenomenology of Pentecostal Leadership*, 72. See also the discussion on structure and agency on pp. 85–89, 115–21.

made leaders since leadership depends on their ability to define and convey reality and purpose in a way that resonates with the organization. Structure and agency are mostly interconnected, and a leader must therefore adhere to the often-implicit expectations set by the organization as highlighted in implicit leadership theories and social identity theories of leadership.⁵³

The mentioned cross-cultural study in Singapore, USA, and Norway showed an *ambivalence and tension* between leaders and others in Pentecostal churches (see Figure 1).



Figure 1: Pentecostal Leadership⁵⁴

⁵³ E.g., Nina Mareen Junker and Rolf van Dick, "Implicit Theories in Organizational Settings: A Systematic Review and Research Agenda of Implicit Leadership and Followership Theories," *The Leadership Quarterly* 25, no. 6 (2014): 1154–73; S. Alexander Haslam, Stephen D. Reicher, and Michael J. Platow, *The New Psychology of Leadership: Identity, Influence, and Power* (Psychology Press, 2011).

⁵⁴ Markow and Åkerlund, "Pentecostal Leadership," 537.

While many of the leaders acknowledged the significant role of followers as co-constructors of leadership, some were more monocratic and represented a perplexing tension in Pentecostal leadership: “Spirituality was core for the leaders—but also for their followers; hence there was a constant potential for conflict in issues like differing views on God’s will, the shape of church gatherings, or more pragmatic organizational decisions.”⁵⁵ Leadership roles in Pentecostal settings can thus be seen as enigmatic and powerful with a latent tension between an open egalitarianism (as all members have access to the Holy Spirit), and the ideas of authoritarian impulses based on hierarchy and submission (since the Spirit has empowered some to lead).⁵⁶ God pours out the Spirit “on all people” (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17)⁵⁷ and gives gifts to all believers for the advantage of the church, and leadership in congregations may thus “arise at any moment as any sister or brother becomes the vehicle for the authoritative word or touch of God in the midst of the gathering.”⁵⁸ This democratic perspective does not undermine leadership: leaders have an influential role in shaping the lives of people in churches, but this should include ethical reflection more than merely enforced submission. To merely “trust and obey,” Christian leaders can undermine the means for learning virtue and shaping character; they should thus function as ethical guides and create space for congregants to reflect and take responsibility for their moral lives.⁵⁹ Since “critical self-reflection is essential when a movement matures,”⁶⁰ all participants in their relations with leaders share the responsibility for preventing destructive charismatic cultures and fostering ethical agency within the organization.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Markow and Åkerlund, “Pentecostal Leadership,” 535.

⁵⁶ Åkerlund, *Phenomenology of Pentecostal Leadership*, 37–44.

⁵⁷ All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the NIV.

⁵⁸ Albrecht and Howard, “Pentecostal Spirituality,” 243.

⁵⁹ Wyndy Corbin Reuschling, “‘Trust and Obey’: The Danger of Obedience as Duty in Evangelical Ethics,” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 25, no. 2 (2005): 59–77.

⁶⁰ Chan, *Pentecostal Theology*, 20.

⁶¹ Truls Åkerlund and Karl Inge Tangen, “Charismatic Cultures: Another Shadow Side Confessed,” *Pneuma* 40, no. 1–2 (2018): 109–29.

Without room for this to happen, leadership might be destructive. If one merely thinks that Pentecostal leadership is elected by God, divine attribution can lead to severe abuse of power since “the religious leader becomes representative of a divine being whose will is that of God and whose actions are above reproach.”⁶² An empirical study from Pentecostal fellowships in Norway showed that loyalty to God implied loyalty to the leaders, and exposing vulnerability or expressing personal views were seen as threats to the primary mission of the church. The gospel always took precedence over sharing personal experiences, thoughts, and feelings, and the informants felt powerless and borderless when leaders claimed to have received messages from God. They thus felt God’s will as destructive and forced upon them through the communication of leaders.⁶³ “‘Touch not God’s anointed’ and ‘Thus saith the Lord’ all too often become the desperate pleas of leaders,”⁶⁴ and frequently turn out to be a problem when they are seen in direct contact with the divine will more than other church members. This might involve a heroic and romanticized view of leadership, where leaders get the ability to dominate the destinies of the organization through their charges and cause members to systematically overestimate the importance of leadership on groups and organizations.⁶⁵ The romancing of leaders may similarly involve a stronger commitment to obey a leader’s unethical request⁶⁶ and make followers mainly

⁶² Janet L. Jacobs, “Charisma, Male Entitlement, and the Abuse of Power,” in *Bad Pastors: Clergy Misconduct in Modern America*, ed. Anson D. Shupe et al. (New York University Press, 2000), 114.

⁶³ Hans Eskil Vigdel, Marianne Rodriguez Nygaard, and Tormod Kleiven, “Cultures Shaped by Elements of Ideological Totalism—Experiences of Misuse of Power in Some Pentecostal Christian Fellowships,” *Diaconia* 13, no. 1 (2022): 70–94; Hans Eskil Vigdel, Marianne Rodriguez Nygaard, and Tormod Kleiven, “Longing for Humanity: The Process of Leaving a Context of Perceived Spiritual Abuse,” *Pastoral Psychology* (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-024-01137-8>.

⁶⁴ Roger Heuser and Byron D. Klaus, “Charismatic Leadership Theory: A Shadow Side Confessed,” *Pneuma* 20, no. 2 (1998): 170.

⁶⁵ James R. Meindl, Sanford B. Ehrlich, and Janet M. Dukerich, “The Romance of Leadership,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (1985): 78–102; James R. Meindl, “The Romance of Leadership as a Follower-Centric Theory: A Social Constructionist Approach,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 6, no. 3 (1995): 330.

⁶⁶ Mary Uhl-Bien et al., “Followership Theory: A Review and Research Agenda,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 25, no. 1, Leadership Quarterly 25th Anniversary Issue (2014): 93.

ineffectual.⁶⁷ If such relations are dominated by involuntariness, the idea of followership also tends to lose its meaning.⁶⁸

To fully grasp the transformational aspects of leadership, then, leader-centred approaches must be complemented with follower-centred approaches.⁶⁹ From a more positive view, leadership can be seen as co-constructed between leaders and followers through interaction and sensemaking. Each member of the congregation has personal and equal access to the spiritual reality, still it transcends the individual, connecting the entire community with the divine and making it a collective experience as well. Related to Figure 1 above, leadership can thus be seen as a collective phenomenon involving interaction between the leader, others, and the spiritual reality. Consequently, Pentecostal leadership should be granted more than grabbed through attribution and co-construction, relying on the leader's ability to discern God's will and make it meaningful and attainable for the congregation.⁷⁰ This involves the management of meaning,⁷¹ and leadership can be seen a social process where the leader's ability to lead is proportional to how well their definition and interpretation of reality resonate with others.⁷² In sum, Pentecostal leadership should be co-constructed through an iterative process of sensemaking between leaders and followers within their shared ecclesial context,⁷³ "in which both leaders and followers attempt to understand their situation, and a leader is successful only to the extent that his or her

⁶⁷ Melissa K. Carsten et al., "Exploring Social Constructions of Followership: A Qualitative Study," *The Leadership Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (2010): 546.

⁶⁸ Martin Blom and Mikael Lundgren, "The (In)Voluntary Follower," *Leadership* 16, no. 2 (2020): 163–79.

⁶⁹ James R. Meindl, "On Leadership: An Alternative to the Conventional Wisdom," in *Research in Organizational Behavior: An Annual Series of Analytical Essays and Critical Reviews*, ed. Barry M. Staw and L. L. Cummings, vol. 12 (JAI Press, 1990), 198.

⁷⁰ Åkerlund, "Taking Ownership of Our Spirituality," 127–9.

⁷¹ Linda Smircich and Gareth Morgan, "Leadership: The Management of Meaning," *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 18, no. 3 (1982): 257–73.

⁷² Åkerlund, *Phenomenology of Pentecostal Leadership*, 120–2.

⁷³ Markow and Åkerlund, "Pentecostal Leadership," 540.

interpretation of reality makes sense to followers.”⁷⁴ Subsequently, in the following section, I emphasize the constructive relationship between leaders and followers in Pentecostal and ecclesial settings.

Constructiveness

The complexity discussed in the last section does not undermine the need for leadership; leaders are important in ecclesial organizations, also in Pentecostal settings due to its expansion and entrepreneurship: “Given the explosive energies unleashed by the Pentecostal spirit, only resourceful and decisive leadership can prevent fragmentation and a loss of a sense of direction.”⁷⁵ Through the history of the church, however, leaders have played both heartfelt and hurtful roles, and the intricacy of leadership should therefore be constructive in the *relationship* between leaders and followers.⁷⁶ This emphasis on followership thus involves a “reversal of the lenses”⁷⁷ as it sees followers as agents who highlight the role they play in creating and sustaining effective followership and leadership outcomes. Until recently, little attention was given to followership in leadership research, and this underemphasized how leadership is a process co-created in relational and social interaction between leaders and followers.⁷⁸ “Central to leader-follower relations is the mutual need of followers to perceive and respond to the leader, and for

⁷⁴ Åkerlund, “Taking Ownership of Our Spirituality,” 126.

⁷⁵ David Martin, *The Future of Christianity: Reflections on Violence and Democracy, Religion and Secularization* (Routledge, 2016), 71, eBook.

⁷⁶ E.g., Ospina and Sorenson, “A Constructionist Lens;” Mary Uhl-Bien, “Relational Leadership Theory: Exploring the Social Processes of Leadership and Organizing,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 17, no. 6, *The Leadership Quarterly Yearly Review of Leadership* (2006): 654–76.

⁷⁷ Boas Shamir, “From Passive Recipients to Active Co-Producers: Follower’s Roles in the Leadership Process,” in *Follower-Centered Perspectives on Leadership: A Tribute to the Memory of James R. Meindl*, ed. Boas Shamir et al. (Information Age Publishing, 2007), ix–xxxix.

⁷⁸ Uhl-Bien et al., “Followership Theory;” Gail T. Fairhurst and Mary Uhl-Bien, “Organizational Discourse Analysis (ODA): Examining Leadership as a Relational Process,” *The Leadership Quarterly* 23, no. 6, *Leadership Quarterly Yearly Review: Theoretical and Methodological Advances in Leadership* (2012): 1043–62.

the leader to them,”⁷⁹ and this relationship involves both leaders’ and followers’ characteristics and behaviours contributing to the co-production of leadership (see Figure 2).

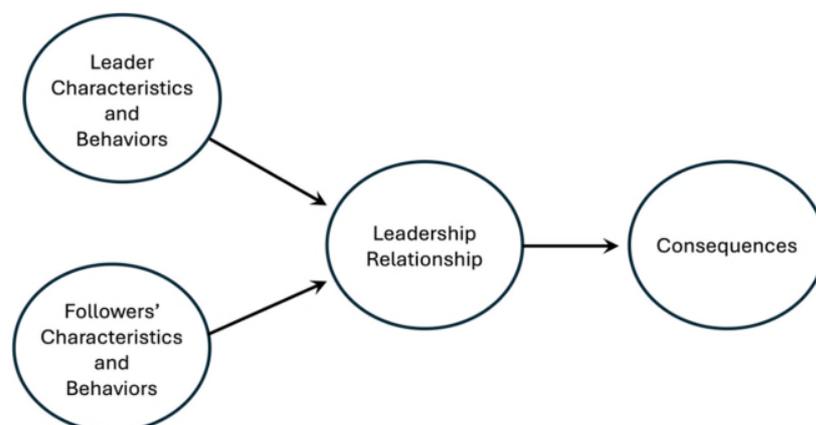


Figure 2: A Leadership Co-Production Model⁸⁰

This model is of course a general outline of relationships more than a theory, but it underscores the need for emphasizing both leaders and followers in the development and impact of leadership roles—even more in Christian settings where both leaders and followers are joined to the spiritual dimension and connected to God. As indicated by Simon Chan, popular notions of leadership centring around the leader with a vision for the Pentecostal congregation may often reduce the rest of the community to passive followers and subvert the biblical concept of the church.⁸¹ Instead, the leader should make explicit what is implicit among its members and “theologize *from* and *for* the community of faith.”⁸² Pentecostal theology emphasizes the importance of a gifted congregation rather than focusing solely on an anointed individual.⁸³ Still, the interplay between ideals of equality inspired by the Spirit and cultural conventions shaped by the wider context might complicate the picture. The egalitarian ideal of Pentecostalism might

⁷⁹ Hollander, “Further Ethical Challenges in the Leader-Follower Relationship,” 67.

⁸⁰ Shamir, “From Passive Recipients to Active Co-Producers,” xx.

⁸¹ Chan, *Pentecostal Theology*, 18.

⁸² Chan, *Pentecostal Theology*, 18.

⁸³ Frank D. Macchia, “Theology, Pentecostal,” ed. Stanley M. Burgess and Ed M. Van der Maas, *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Zondervan, 2002), 1137.

contrast with the privilege of leadership and realities in many Pentecostal organizations,⁸⁴ and relations are thus especially important from a Pentecostal view due to the empowering of the Spirit on all people. The significant metaphors of the Christian community in the New Testament includes all Christians,⁸⁵ and a comprehensive understanding of the leadership process should thus include simultaneous attention to the domains of leaders, followers, and relationships.⁸⁶ As Mary Uhl-Bien shows, leaders and followers should work together to enable adaptability in complex social systems, indicating that leadership can be both top-down and centralized but also relational, collective, or distributed: “Without effective followership, leadership and adaptive responses fail.”⁸⁷ The engagement and connection between people in churches can thereby be understood through a relational lens where leadership is seen as “relational, takes place in networks of relationships, and demonstrates the nature of God’s love through the way that these relationships actually work.”⁸⁸ In sum, I argue that relationships are crucial for the development of Pentecostal leadership.

Connected to the co-constructive relationship between leaders and followers, expressed *humility* is another vital aspect of effective leadership in contemporary organizations because it has significant interpersonal implications that indicate that leaders can achieve self-awareness

⁸⁴ Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostalism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2013), chap. 6.

⁸⁵ E.g., Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Historical, Global, and Interreligious Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (InterVarsity Press, 2021), 9–11.

⁸⁶ G. B. Graen and Mary Uhl-Bien, “Relationship-Based Approach to Leadership: Development of Leader-Member Ex-Change (LMX) Theory of Leadership over 25 Years: Applying a Multi-Level Multi-Domain Perspective,” *Leadership Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (1995): 219–47.

⁸⁷ Mary Uhl-Bien, “Complexity Leadership and Followership: Changed Leadership in a Changed World,” *Journal of Change Management* 21, no. 2 (2021): 156.

⁸⁸ Darrell L. Guder, “Walking Worthily: Missional Leadership after Christendom,” *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 28, no. 3 (2007): 282; cf. Jacob J. Breedt and Cornelius J.P. Niemandt, “Relational Leadership and the Missional Church,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 34, no. 1 (2013). This perspective is not shared by any scholar—see Truls Åkerlund, “Missional Leadership: A Critical Review of the Research Literature,” *Australasian Pentecostal Studies* 18 (2016), <https://aps-journal.com/index.php/APS/article/view/9493>.

and learn through others. Humility has a rich background in theology and philosophy,⁸⁹ and from an organizational perspective, it is seen as an interpersonal trait that signifies (a) a willingness to view oneself accurately, (b) an appreciation of others' strengths and contributions, and (c) teachability and openness to new ideas and feedback.⁹⁰ This aspect avoids excessive self-focus and enables leaders to gain self-awareness and build perspectives in their relationships with followers since leaders' "self-views are focused on their interdependence with others rather than their independence from others."⁹¹ Members can greatly benefit from compassionate leaders willing to work behind the scenes, and leaders' humility can put followers and their needs at the foreground and contribute to their gratification with interpersonal features of the leader's performance.⁹² Humility has positive associations with followers, leaders, teams, and organizations,⁹³ and it provides significant implications for the development of leader-follower relationships as it proceeds along a steady, upward trajectory, characterized by loyalty, growing trust, and mutual respect.⁹⁴ Humble leaders are thus rooted in the understanding that there is something greater than themselves, and they are expressed through self-awareness, openness to feedback, appreciation of others, low self-focus, and the pursuit of self-transcendent goals.⁹⁵

⁸⁹ E.g., June Price Tangney, "Humility," in *Handbook of Positive Psychology*, ed. C. R. Snyder and Shane J. Lopez (Oxford University Press, 2002), 411–9; John Templeton, *Worldwide Laws of Life: Two Hundred Eternal Spiritual Principles* (Templeton Foundation Press, 1997).

⁹⁰ Bradley P. Owens, Michael D. Johnson, and Terence R. Mitchell, "Expressed Humility in Organizations: Implications for Performance, Teams, and Leadership," *Organization Science* 24, no. 5 (2013): 1517–38.

⁹¹ Rob Nielsen et al., "A New Look at Humility: Exploring the Humility Concept and Its Role in Socialized Charismatic Leadership," *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies* 17, no. 1 (2010): 35, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1548051809350892>.

⁹² Elizabeth J. Krumrei-Mancuso and Wade C. Rowatt, "Humility in Novice Leaders: Links to Servant Leadership and Followers' Satisfaction with Leadership," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 18, no. 1 (2023): 154–66.

⁹³ Jeffrey A. Chandler et al., "A Meta-Analysis of Humble Leadership: Reviewing Individual, Team, and Organizational Outcomes of Leader Humility," *The Leadership Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (2023): 101660, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2022.101660>.

⁹⁴ Bradley P. Owens and David R. Hekman, "Modeling How to Grow: An Inductive Examination of Humble Leader Behaviors, Contingencies, and Outcomes," *Academy of Management Journal* 55, no. 4 (2012): 787–818.

⁹⁵ Amy Y. Ou et al., "Humble Chief Executive Officers' Connections to Top Management Team Integration and Middle Managers' Responses," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (2014): 34–72, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839213520131>.

Leaders who act humble in their social exchange with followers develop positive relationships where members have emotional trust in their leader,⁹⁶ which connects with relational leadership in ecclesial settings.

The relationship between pastors and congregational members can be explained as *friendship*, where members highlight trust, loyalty, and the friendship-like relationship with the leader as an ideal.⁹⁷ Friendship can still encompass aspects of submission to authority and obedient service, but submission arises from relationship, where obedience is freely chosen and rooted in knowledge and love (cf. John 15:12-17).⁹⁸ “The pastor is called to embody the friendship of God in relationships with members of a congregation,”⁹⁹ and congregational leadership hence necessitates a reflection on the profound and enduring memories of the Christian tradition where the goal goes beyond mere submission to the leader and involves a relational practice. A leader in a large church cannot necessarily have close relationships with everyone but can embrace humility and make hierarchies dynamic, in which power is exercised to encourage the sharing of information and responsibility and enable the entire community to collectively discern truth and direction.¹⁰⁰

Looking back at the concept of contextuality, “culture is both our palace and prison.”¹⁰¹ As such, the setting we live in frequently shapes our understanding of biblical leadership,¹⁰² and

⁹⁶ Patrick Liborius and Christian Kiewitz, “When Leader Humility Meets Follower Competitiveness: Relationships with Follower Affective Trust, Intended and Voluntary Turnover,” *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 135 (2022): 103719, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2022.103719>.

⁹⁷ Robert Lilleaasen, “Friendship, Followership, and Leadership,” *Scandinavian Journal for Leadership and Theology* 11 (2024): 104–105, <https://doi.org/10.53311/sjlt.v11.124>.

⁹⁸ Chloe Lynch, *Ecclesial Leadership as Friendship* (Routledge, 2019), 130–4.

⁹⁹ Craig L. Nesson, *Beyond Maintenance to Mission: A Theology of the Congregation*, 2nd ed. (Fortress Press, 2010), 89.

¹⁰⁰ Anita Koeshall referred to in Lynch, *Ecclesial Leadership as Friendship*, 193.

¹⁰¹ Sherwood G. Lingenfelter, *Leading Cross-Culturally: Covenant Relationships for Effective Christian Leadership* (Baker Academic, 2008), 59.

¹⁰² Volker Kessler, “Pitfalls in ‘Biblical’ Leadership,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 34, no. 1 (2013): 1–7.

we might read the Bible anachronistically through the lens of contemporary and dominating leadership perspectives.¹⁰³ Cultural and sociological discourses can shape churches' priorities and strategies in, for instance, working for growth and marketization,¹⁰⁴ and in ecclesial locations we hence need to renew our minds and keep a distance to dominant discourses in our time. A central aspect of Pauline leadership dealt with peoples' relationship to Christ; the apostle broke with the prevailing culture and showed that Christian management regularly came into conflict with ideologies of leadership in the wider society.¹⁰⁵ According to Lynch, "managerialism must not be permitted to become default *teloi* of ecclesial leadership. The telos of incarnational ecclesial leadership is, rather, the deepening participation by believers in Christ's life and ministry of love towards the Father that overflows to humanity."¹⁰⁶ This does not mean that congregational leadership should dismiss general leadership theories, but the overarching biblical narrative should set direction for the church. Followers should thus connect to the central goal of the organization and support the leader yet challenge him or her if the purpose is threatened; they should take a moral position unlike the leader if it is necessary to prevent ethical abuse.¹⁰⁷ It is hence important in Christian settings to involve followers in an active role and open the space for reflection. Power can be seen as relationships between people with mutual intentions or purposes,¹⁰⁸ and the most ethically and morally uplifting leadership implies a process of

¹⁰³ E.g., Truls Åkerlund, "Son, Sent, and Servant: Johannine Perspectives on Servant Leadership Theory," *Scandinavian Journal of Leadership and Theology* 2 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.53311/sjlt.v2i1.9>.

¹⁰⁴ Marcus Moberg, *Religion, Discourse, and Society: Towards a Discursive Sociology of Religion* (Routledge, 2022), chap. 6.

¹⁰⁵ Truls Åkerlund, "Leadership in Corinth: Reciprocity and Leader-Member Exchange in 2 Corinthians 6:11-13," *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* 6, no. 1 (2014): 162–75.

¹⁰⁶ Lynch, *Ecclesial Leadership as Friendship*, 208.

¹⁰⁷ Northouse, *Leadership*, 299.

¹⁰⁸ James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (Harper & Row, 1978), 11–13, Kindle.

inclusive and participatory relationship (rather than coercive and manipulative) between leaders and followers.¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

From an overall perspective, the Christian congregation is in different ways both a sociological and religious entity,¹¹⁰ and it should therefore draw on both mainstream leadership research and theological perspectives. Research on ecclesial leadership can thus be integrated into various existing disciplines, making it unnecessary to establish it as one distinct or separate field. It should not be studied in isolation but rather as a transdisciplinary field that combines insights from multiple academic and practical contexts.¹¹¹

From a Pentecostal perspective, then, leadership can be seen as a complex phenomenon since it happens in “relationships between organizational members and positional leaders, structure and agency, words and deeds, and spirituality and pragmatism.”¹¹² In one sense, “Pentecostals promote indigenous leadership”¹¹³ and emphasize the Spirit’s work in and through all believers so that God’s people can be seen as potential leaders and minimize the division between clergy and laity.¹¹⁴ From another perspective, leaders can be celebrated and elevated to

¹⁰⁹ Tommi P. Auvinen et al., “Leadership Manipulation and Ethics in Storytelling,” *Journal of Business Ethics* 116, no. 2 (2013): 418, <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10551-012-1454-8>.

¹¹⁰ E.g., Harald Hegstad, *The Real Church: An Ecclesiology of the Visible*, vol. 7 of Church of Sweden Research Series (Wipf and Stock, 2013), chap. 3.

¹¹¹ Volker Kessler and Louise Kretzschmar, “Christian Leadership as a Trans-Disciplinary Field of Study,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 36, no. 1 (2015): 7.

¹¹² Åkerlund, *Phenomenology of Pentecostal Leadership*, 144.

¹¹³ Vinay Samuel, “Pentecostalism as a Global Culture: A Response,” in *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel*, ed. Murray W. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen (Regnum, 1999), 253.

¹¹⁴ Byron D. Klaus and Loren O. Triplett, “National Leadership in Pentecostal Missions,” in *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective*, ed. M. A. H. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen (Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 226, 234.

high levels of prestige and power, which might praise the leader more than Christ and replace the gospel through unusual exercises threatening to people's lives.¹¹⁵

As such, leaders can serve the organization altruistically or be self-centred for personal gain, possessing both positional and personal power, which they can wield for the benefit of the community or for their own ego.¹¹⁶ Since “the fire from heaven can burn and destroy as well as purify and inspire,”¹¹⁷ it is important that Pentecostal leaders address identity, reflexivity and the issue of power to avoid toxic and abusive leadership.¹¹⁸ Leadership is a process linked with influence, and from a general Christian and specific Pentecostal setting, it must be connected to the overarching telos of the ecclesial intension. Leaders should hence move from heroes to hosts, “receiving and welcoming others into the discursive and symbolic spaces for which they are responsible.”¹¹⁹ Pentecostal leaders can make room to listen to God and set direction for the congregation, but this guidance should not typically break with the followers. We argue for promoting reflexiveness, active followership, and moral accountability for a move toward healthier leadership processes in Pentecostal organizations, for when congregational members are involved in decision-making and empowered to take charge of their lives and ministries, growth can occur, and the risk of manipulative management will decrease.¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ Kelebogile Thomas Resane, “‘And They Shall Make You Eat Grass like Oxen’ (Daniel 4:24): Reflections on Recent Practices in Some New Charismatic Churches,” *Pharos Journal of Theology* 98 (2017), https://www.pharosjot.com/uploads/7/1/6/3/7163688/article_10__vol_98_2017.pdf; Kelebogile T. Resane, “Christ and the Neo-Pentecostal Preacher on the Platform: Catechists or Celebrities?,” in *Christological Paradigm Shifts in Prophetic Pentecostalism in South Africa*, ed. Mookgo Solomon Kgatle et al. (Routledge, 2022), 167.

¹¹⁶ E.g., Afolarin Olutunde Ojewole and Efe Monday Ehioghae, “Leadership and Power in the Pentecostal Movement: Selected Case Studies,” in *Pentecostalism and Politics in Africa*, ed. Adeshina Afolayan et al. (Springer International Publishing, 2018).

¹¹⁷ Cox, *Fire from Heaven*, 279.

¹¹⁸ Åkerlund, *Phenomenology of Pentecostal Leadership*, 133–138.

¹¹⁹ Bolden et al., *Exploring Leadership*, 126.

¹²⁰ Åkerlund and Tangen, “Charismatic Cultures: Another Shadow Side Confessed.”

In sum, Pentecostal leaders must listen to the Spirit, discern their time and context, and attend to the people they lead in the congregation. This implies that leadership is contextual and complex, but also constructive, as it sets direction for the church and helps the local members to “learn the script and understand how it should be performed in the present cultural scene.”¹²¹ Consequently, Pentecostal leaders are not completely free to act as they want; they serve as directors rather than authors. A leader may set the direction for a local congregation, yet this is most effective only if the congregants have trust in the pastor’s direction and discernment. For leadership to be sustainable, then, the influence of the congregation must be granted, not grabbed.

¹²¹ Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 449; cf. Åkerlund, “Taking Ownership of Our Spirituality.”

Bibliography

- Aasmundsen, Hans Geir. "Pentecostals and Politics in Argentina: A Question of Compatibility?" *Iberoamericana. Nordic Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies* XLII, no. 1–2 (2012): 85–107.
- Åkerlund, Truls. "Leadership in Corinth: Reciprocity and Leader-Member Exchange in 2 Corinthians 6:11-13." *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* 6, no. 1 (2014): 162–75.
- Åkerlund, Truls. "Missional Leadership: A Critical Review of the Research Literature." *Australasian Pentecostal Studies* 18 (2016). <https://aps-journal.com/index.php/APS/article/view/9493>.
- Åkerlund, Truls. *A Phenomenology of Pentecostal Leadership*. Wipf & Stock, 2018.
- Åkerlund, Truls. "Son, Sent, and Servant: Johannine Perspectives on Servant Leadership Theory." *Scandinavian Journal of Leadership and Theology* 2 (November 2015). <https://doi.org/10.53311/sjlt.v2i1.9>.
- Åkerlund, Truls. "Taking Ownership of Our Spirituality: Pentecostal Leaders as Liturgical Directors." *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 31, no. 1 (2022): 114–32.
- Åkerlund, Truls, and Åse-Miriam Smidsrød. "When Dominant Models Become Dominating: A Narrative Identity Approach to Female Leadership in Pentecostal Organizations." *Journal of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity* 44, issue 2 (2024): 110–30.
- Åkerlund, Truls, and Karl Inge Tangen. "Charismatic Cultures: Another Shadow Side Confessed." *Pneuma* 40, no. 1–2 (2018): 109–29.
- Albrecht, Daniel E., and Evan B. Howard. "Pentecostal Spirituality." In *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism*, edited by Cecil M. Robeck Jr. and Amos Yong. Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Alvesson, Mats, and André Spicer. "Metaphors for Leadership." In *Metaphors We Lead by: Understanding Leadership in the Real World*, edited by Mats Alvesson and André Spicer. Routledge, 2011.
- Alvesson, Mats, and Martin Blom. "The Hegemonic Ambiguity of Big Concepts in Organization Studies." *Human Relations* 75, no. 1 (2022): 58–86.
- Alvesson, Mats, and Stefan Sveningsson. "Good Visions, Bad Micro-Management and Ugly Ambiguity: Contradictions of (Non-)Leadership in a Knowledge-Intensive Organization." *Organization Studies* 24, no. 6 (2003): 961–88.
- Anderson, Allan. "Signs and Blunders: Pentecostal Mission Issues at 'Home and Abroad' in the Twentieth Century." *Journal of Asian Mission* 2, no. 2 (2000): 193–210.

- Anderson, Allan. *Spreading Fires: The Missionary Nature of Early Pentecostalism*. SCM Press, 2007.
- Anderson, Allan. *To the Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity*. Oxford Studies in World Christianity. Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Anderson, Allan Heaton. *Spirit-Filled World: Religious Dis/Continuity in African Pentecostalism*. Christianity and Renewal - Interdisciplinary Studies. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.
- Auvinen, Tommi P., Anna-Maija Lämsä, Teppo Sintonen, and Tuomo Takala. "Leadership Manipulation and Ethics in Storytelling." *Journal of Business Ethics* 116, no. 2 (2013): 415–31. <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10551-012-1454-8>.
- Bass, Bernard M., and Bruce J. Avolio. "Potential Biases in Leadership Measures: How Prototypes, Leniency, and General Satisfaction Relate to Ratings and Rankings of Transformational and Transactional Leadership Constructs." *Educational and Psychological Measurement* 49, no. 3 (1989): 509–27.
- Blom, Martin, and Mats Alvesson. "All-Inclusive and All Good: The Hegemonic Ambiguity of Leadership." *Scandinavian Journal of Management* 31, no. 4 (2015): 480–92.
- Blom, Martin, and Mikael Lundgren. "The (In)Voluntary Follower." *Leadership* 16, no. 2 (2020): 163–79.
- Bolden, Richard, Beverley Hawkins, Jonathan Gosling, and Scott Taylor. *Exploring Leadership: Individual, Organizational & Societal Perspectives*. Oxford University Press, 2011.
- Breedt, Jacob J., and Cornelius J. P. Niemandt. "Relational Leadership and the Missional Church." *Verbum et Ecclesia* 34, no. 1 (2013): 1–9.
- Carsten, Melissa K., Mary Uhl-Bien, Bradley J. West, Jaime L. Patera, and Rob McGregor. "Exploring Social Constructions of Followership: A Qualitative Study." *The Leadership Quarterly* 21, no. 3 (2010): 543–62.
- Chan, Simon. *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition*. Sheffield Academic Press, 2000.
- Chandler, Jeffrey A., Nicholas E. Johnson, Samantha J. Jordan, Darren K. B, and Jeremy C. Short. "A Meta-Analysis of Humble Leadership: Reviewing Individual, Team, and Organizational Outcomes of Leader Humility." *The Leadership Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (2023): 101660. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2022.101660>.
- Chaves, Mark, Joseph Roso, and Anna Holleman. "The National Survey of Religious Leaders: Background, Methods, and Lessons Learned in the Research Process." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 61, no. 3–4 (2022): 737–49.

- Clifton, Shane. *Pentecostal Churches in Transition: Analysing the Developing Ecclesiology of the Assemblies of God in Australia*. Brill, 2009.
- Corbin Reuschling, Wyndy. “‘Trust and Obey’: The Danger of Obedience as Duty in Evangelical Ethics.” *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 25, no. 2 (2005): 59–77.
- Cox, Harvey. *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the 21st Century*. Da Capo Press, 1995.
- Dorfman, Peter, Mansour Javidan, Paul Hanges, Ali Dastmalchian, and Robert House. “GLOBE: A Twenty Year Journey into the Intriguing World of Culture and Leadership.” *Journal of World Business* 47, no. 4 (2012): 504–18.
- Eskil Vigdel, Hans, Marianne Rodriguez Nygaard, and Tormod Kleiven. “Cultures Shaped by Elements of Ideological Totalism—Experiences of Misuse of Power in Some Pentecostal Christian Fellowships.” *Diaconia* 13, no. 1 (2022): 70–94.
- Eskil Vigdel, Hans, Marianne Rodriguez Nygaard, and Tormod Kleiven. “Longing for Humanity: The Process of Leaving a Context of Perceived Spiritual Abuse.” *Pastoral Psychology* 73 (2024): 283–303. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-024-01137-8>.
- Fairhurst, Gail T., and Mary Uhl-Bien. “Organizational Discourse Analysis (ODA): Examining Leadership as a Relational Process.” *The Leadership Quarterly* 23, no. 6, Leadership Quarterly Yearly Review: Theoretical and Methodological Advances in Leadership (2012): 1043–62.
- Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. Basic Books, 1973.
- Graen, G. B., and Mary Uhl-Bien. “Relationship-Based Approach to Leadership: Development of Leader-Member Ex-Change (LMX) Theory of Leadership over 25 Years: Applying a Multi-Level Multi-Domain Perspective.” *Leadership Quarterly* 6, no. 2 (1995): 219–47.
- Grint, Keith, Owain Smolovic Jones, and Clare Holt. “What Is Leadership: Person, Result, Position, Purpose or Process, or All or None of These?” In *The Routledge Companion to Leadership*, edited by John Storey, Jean Hartley, Jean-Louis Denis, Paul 't Hart, and Dave Ulrich. Routledge, 2016.
- Guder, Darrell L. “Walking Worthily: Missional Leadership after Christendom.” *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 28, no. 3 (2007): 251–91.
- Haslam, S. Alexander, Stephen D. Reicher, and Michael J. Platow. *The New Psychology of Leadership: Identity, Influence, and Power*. Psychology Press, 2011.
- Hegstad, Harald. *The Real Church: An Ecclesiology of the Visible*. Vol. 7 of Church of Sweden Research Series. Wipf and Stock, 2013.
- Heuser, Roger, and Byron D. Klaus. “Charismatic Leadership Theory: A Shadow Side Confessed.” *Pneuma* 20, no. 2 (1998): 161–74.

- Hoge, Dean R. "The Sociology of the Clergy." In *The Oxford Handbook of the Sociology of Religion*, edited by Peter B. Clarke. Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Hollander, Edwin P. "Further Ethical Challenges in the Leader-Follower Relationship." In *Ethics, the Heart of Leadership*, edited by Joanne B. Ciulla. 3rd ed. Praeger, 2014.
- House, Robert J., Paul J. Hanges, Mansour Javidan, Peter W. Dorfman, and Vipin Gupta, eds. *Culture, Leadership, and Organizations: The GLOBE Study of 62 Societies*. SAGE Publications, Inc, 2004.
- Jacobs, Janet L. "Charisma, Male Entitlement, and the Abuse of Power." In *Bad Pastors: Clergy Misconduct in Modern America*, edited by Anson D. Shupe, William A. Stacey, and Susan E. Darnell. New York University Press, 2000.
- Jacobsen, Douglas G. *Thinking in the Spirit: Theologies of the Early Pentecostal Movement*. Indiana University Press, 2003.
- Jepson, Doris. "The Importance of National Language as a Level of Discourse within Individuals' Theorising of Leadership—A Qualitative Study of German and English Employees." *Leadership* 6, no. 4 (2010): 425–45.
- Johnson, Alan. *Leadership in a Slum: A Bangkok Case Study*. Regnum Books International, 2009.
- Kärkkäinen, Veli-Matti. *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Historical, Global, and Interreligious Perspectives*, 2nd ed. InterVarsity Press, 2021.
- Kessler, Volker. "Pitfalls in 'Biblical' Leadership." *Verbum et Ecclesia* 34, no. 1 (2013): 1–7.
- Kessler, Volker, and Louise Kretzschmar. "Christian Leadership as a Trans-Disciplinary Field of Study." *Verbum et Ecclesia* 36, no. 1 (2015): 1–8.
- Klaus, Byron D., and Loren O. Triplett. "National Leadership in Pentecostal Missions." In *Called and Empowered: Global Mission in Pentecostal Perspective*, edited by M. A. H. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen. Hendrickson Publishers, 1991.
- Krumrei-Mancuso, Elizabeth J., and Wade C. Rowatt. "Humility in Novice Leaders: Links to Servant Leadership and Followers' Satisfaction with Leadership." *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 18, no. 1 (2023): 154–66.
- Liborius, Patrick, and Christian Kiewitz. "When Leader Humility Meets Follower Competitiveness: Relationships with Follower Affective Trust, Intended and Voluntary Turnover." *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 135 (2022): 103719. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2022.103719>.
- Lilleaasen, Robert. "Friendship, Followership, and Leadership." *Scandinavian Journal for Leadership and Theology* 11 (2024): 104–105. <https://doi.org/10.53311/sjlt.v11.124>.

- Lindhardt, Martin. "Introduction: Presence and Impact of Pentecostal/Charismatic Christianity in Africa." In *Pentecostalism in Africa: Presence and Impact of Pneumatic Christianity in Postcolonial Societies*, edited by Martin Lindhardt. Brill, 2015.
- Lindhardt, Martin. *Power in Powerlessness: A Study of Pentecostal Life Worlds in Urban Chile*. Religion in the Americas Series. Brill, 2012.
- Lingenfelter, Sherwood G. *Leading Cross-Culturally: Covenant Relationships for Effective Christian Leadership*. Baker Academic, 2008.
- Lord, Robert G., Christy L. De Vader, and George M. Alliger. "A Meta-Analysis of the Relation between Personality Traits and Leadership Perceptions: An Application of Validity Generalization Procedures." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 71, no. 3 (1986): 402–10.
- Lord, Robert G., and Karen J. Maher. *Leadership and Information Processing: Linking Perceptions and Performance*. Routledge, 1993.
- Lord, Robert G., Olga Epitropaki, Roseanne J. Foti, and Tiffany Keller Hansbrough. "Implicit Leadership Theories, Implicit Followership Theories, and Dynamic Processing of Leadership Information." *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior* 7, no. 1 (2020): 49–74.
- Lynch, Chloe. *Ecclesial Leadership as Friendship*. Routledge, 2019.
- Macchia, Frank D. "Theology, Pentecostal." In *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, edited by Stanley M. Burgess and Eduward M. van der Maas. Zondervan, 2002.
- MacGregor Burns, James. *Leadership*. Harper & Row, 1978. Kindle.
- Mareen Junker, Nina, and Rolf van Dick. "Implicit Theories in Organizational Settings: A Systematic Review and Research Agenda of Implicit Leadership and Followership Theories." *The Leadership Quarterly* 25, no. 6 (2014): 1154–73.
- Markow, Franklin, and Truls Åkerlund. "Pentecostal Leadership: Exploring a Global Phenomenon." *Journal of Management, Spirituality & Religion* 20, no. 5 (2023): 526–50. <https://doi.org/10.51327/JHKQ5569>.
- Martin, David. *The Future of Christianity: Reflections on Violence and Democracy, Religion and Secularization*. Routledge, 2016. eBook.
- Martin, David. *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish*. Blackwell, 2002.
- McCauley, J. F. "Africa's New Big Man Rule? Pentecostalism and Patronage in Ghana." *African Affairs* 112, no. 446 (2013): 1–21.

- Meindl, James R. "On Leadership: An Alternative to the Conventional Wisdom." In *Research in Organizational Behavior: An Annual Series of Analytical Essays and Critical Reviews*, edited by Barry M. Staw and L. L. Cummings. Vol. 12. JAI Press, 1990.
- Meindl, James R. "The Romance of Leadership as a Follower-Centric Theory: A Social Constructionist Approach." *The Leadership Quarterly* 6, no. 3 (1995): 329–41.
- Meindl, James R., Sanford B. Ehrlich, and Janet M. Dukerich. "The Romance of Leadership." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 30, no. 1 (1985): 78–102.
- Menon, Tanya, Jessica Sim, Jeanne Ho-Ying Fu, Chi-yue Chiu, and Ying-yi Hong. "Blazing the Trail versus Trailing the Group: Culture and Perceptions of the Leader's Position." *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 113, no. 1 (2010): 51–61.
- Moberg, Marcus. *Religion, Discourse, and Society: Towards a Discursive Sociology of Religion*. Routledge, 2022.
- Nelson, Reed E. "Authority, Organization, and Societal Context in Multinational Churches." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 38, no. 4 (1993): 653–82. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2393340>.
- Nessan, Craig L. *Beyond Maintenance to Mission: A Theology of the Congregation*, 2nd ed. Fortress Press, 2010.
- Nielsen, Rob, Jennifer A. Marrone, and Holly S. Slay. "A New Look at Humility: Exploring the Humility Concept and Its Role in Socialized Charismatic Leadership." *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies* 17, no. 1 (2010): 33–43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1548051809350892>.
- Northouse, Peter G. *Leadership: Theory and Practice*. 8th ed. Sage, 2019.
- Olutunde Ojewole, Afolarin, and Efe Monday Ehioghae. "Leadership and Power in the Pentecostal Movement: Selected Case Studies." In *Pentecostalism and Politics in Africa*, edited by Adeshina Afolayan, Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso, and Toyin Falola. Springer International Publishing, 2018.
- Osborn, Richard N., James G. Hunt, and Lawrence R. Jauch, "Toward a Contextual Theory of Leadership." *The Leadership Quarterly* 13, no. 6 (2002): 797–837.
- Ospina, Sonia, and Georgia J. Sorenson. "A Constructionist Lens on Leadership: Charting New Territory." In *A Quest for a General Theory of Leadership*, edited by George R. Goethals and Georgia J. Sorenson. Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 2006.
- Ou, Amy Y. et al. "Humble Chief Executive Officers' Connections to Top Management Team Integration and Middle Managers' Responses," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (2014): 34–72. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0001839213520131>.

- Owens, Bradley P., and David R. Hekman. "Modeling How to Grow: An Inductive Examination of Humble Leader Behaviors, Contingencies, and Outcomes." *Academy of Management Journal* 55, no. 4 (2012): 787–818.
- Owens, Bradley P., Michael D. Johnson, and Terence R. Mitchell. "Expressed Humility in Organizations: Implications for Performance, Teams, and Leadership." *Organization Science* 24, no. 5 (2013): 1517–38.
- Price Tangney, June. "Humility." In *Handbook of Positive Psychology*, edited by C. R. Snyder and Shane J. Lopez. Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Purvis, Trevor, and Alan Hunt. "Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology, Discourse, Ideology..." *The British Journal of Sociology* 44, no. 3 (1993): 473–99.
- Resane, Kelebogile Thomas. "'And They Shall Make You Eat Grass like Oxen' (Daniel 4:24): Reflections on Recent Practices in Some New Charismatic Churches." *Pharos Journal of Theology* 98 (2017): 1–17.
https://www.pharosjot.com/uploads/7/1/6/3/7163688/article_10__vol_98_2017.pdf.
- Resane, Kelebogile T. "Christ and the Neo-Pentecostal Preacher on the Platform: Catechists or Celebrities?" In *Christological Paradigm Shifts in Prophetic Pentecostalism in South Africa*, edited by Mookgo Solomon Kgatle, Marius Nel, and Collium Banda. Routledge, 2022.
- Samuel, Vinay. "Pentecostalism as a Global Culture: A Response." In *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel*, edited by Murray W. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, and Douglas Petersen. Regnum, 1999.
- Schedlitzki, Doris, and Gareth Edwards. *Studying Leadership: Traditional & Critical Approaches*. Sage, 2014.
- Shamir, Boas. "From Passive Recipients to Active Co-Producers: Follower's Roles in the Leadership Process." In *Follower-Centered Perspectives on Leadership: A Tribute to the Memory of James R. Meindl*, edited by Boas Shamir, Rajnandini Pillai, Michelle C. Bligh, and Mary Uhl-Bien. Leadership Horizons Series. Information Age Publishing, 2007.
- Smircich, Linda, and Gareth Morgan. "Leadership: The Management of Meaning." *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 18, no. 3 (1982): 257–73.
- Stringer, Martin D. *A Sociological History of Christian Worship*. Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Sund, Berit. *Typisk norsk å være (selv)god: En liten bok om den norske lederstilen*. Cappelen Damm akademisk, 2019.
- Templeton, John. *Worldwide Laws of Life: Two Hundred Eternal Spiritual Principles*. Templeton Foundation Press, 1997.

- Uhl-Bien, Mary. "Complexity Leadership and Followership: Changed Leadership in a Changed World." *Journal of Change Management* 21, no. 2 (2021): 144–62.
- Uhl-Bien, Mary. "Relational Leadership Theory: Exploring the Social Processes of Leadership and Organizing." *The Leadership Quarterly* 17, no. 6, *The Leadership Quarterly Yearly Review of Leadership* (2006): 654–76.
- Uhl-Bien, Mary, Ronald E. Riggio, Kevin B. Lowe, and Melissa K. Carsten. "Followership Theory: A Review and Research Agenda." *The Leadership Quarterly* 25, no. 1, *Leadership Quarterly 25th Anniversary Issue* (2014): 83–104.
- Vanhoozer, Kevin J. *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology*. Westminster John Knox Press, 2005.
- Vondey, Wolfgang. *Pentecostalism: A Guide for the Perplexed*. Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2013.
- Wacker, Grant. *Heaven below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture*. Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Wilson, Suze. *Thinking Differently about Leadership: A Critical History of Leadership Studies*. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016.
- Yukl, Gary A. *Leadership in Organizations*, Global Edition. Pearson Education, 2013.
- Zurlo, Gina A., Todd M. Johnson, and Peter F. Crossing. "World Christianity and Mission 2020: Ongoing Shift to the Global South." *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 44, no. 1 (2020): 8–19.

**Engaging with Truls Åkerlund’s “Perspectives on Pentecostal Leadership:
Contextuality, Complexity, and Constructiveness”
(Wonsuk Ma)**

Introduction

I begin with my confession: I am not a leadership theorist. My interest in the subject emerged through my biblical study on the Spirit of God, especially in the Old Testament, and observation of Pentecostal-charismatic leaders. For this reason, reading Truls Åkerlund’s study on Pentecostal leadership was a delight, as he brings a social scientific perspective to Pentecostal leadership. His succinct characterization of Pentecostal leadership in three C’s is equally helpful: contextuality, complexity, and constructiveness. The first two describe the multifaceted aspects of Pentecostal leadership, while the last, “constructiveness,” presents its ultimate outcome (or *telos*).

Notably, Åkerlund is correct about the critical role of a given socio-cultural context, as Pentecostalism has proven its ingenuity in adapting to local contexts. His earlier study on Norwegian Pentecostal leadership took the role of social context seriously in the shaping and exercising of leadership, for both leaders and followers. His jump into the Asian context must have challenged him to identify key contextual components in Asia, especially while aware that there is no one Asian context!

Contextual Challenges in Asia

One contextual issue in Asia is the overwhelming presence of religions, both organized and unorganized, such as animism and shamanism. This makes Christianity a minority religion, accounting for only 8.2 percent of the vast population in 2020.¹ This Asian reality therefore

¹ Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, *Introducing Spirit-Empowered Christianity* (ORU Press, 2023), 158.

requires recasting Åkerlund's Nordic assumptions into a radically different context. More is needed than simply replacing his native European context with an Asian one because non-Christian religion has so deeply shaped Asian communities and their social and ethical values. Due to the persistent presence of different religions, many Christians in Asia convert from another religion, often unknowingly bringing their former religious orientations to their Christian life.

Even for those born in Christian families, the influence of other religions remains significant. For example, how religious leadership is perceived may be a crossover element. Often considered to be intermediaries between divine and human worlds, religious leaders are traditionally set apart from ordinary humans. They command not only reverence but also fear, as they are seen to possess the power to bring misfortune as well as blessing. The power distance between religious leadership and adherents therefore tends to be large by default. The gap is further widened by hierarchical culture in Asia. (See below for further discussion). Pentecostal leadership may increase the power distance even more if the leader is perceived as "supernaturally empowered" and "anointed." As Åkerlund warns, a "super" leader can turn into an unaccountable figure, becoming a risk to the community he or she is to serve. The history of the modern Pentecostal Movement, unfortunately, is riddled with such failed but otherwise gifted leaders. The position can be, yes, the king's palace but also prison, if not handled properly.

Equally challenging in Asia are age-old social class systems, even though some of them are claimed to no longer legally be imposed. The caste system in India, for instance, has been an ongoing challenge as rights and privileges continue to be determined by caste. While the Indian national constitution technically illegalized discrimination, Christianity has not been successful

in breaking widespread dehumanizing practices as churches, including Pentecostals, congregate along caste lines. The extent of leaders' influence seldom crosses this social barrier.²

Another discriminating system is Chinese *hukou* (户口), literally meaning “household individual,” but more accurately, “household registration.” Presently enshrined in the legal system, one’s home location determines and restricts social services and employment opportunities, solidifying disparities especially between rural and urban populations. As the system also restricts people’s movement, millions of Chinese rural farmers now working as migrant laborers in urban centers (called *nongmin gong*, 农民工) are not eligible for medical services or children’s education. For this and other reasons, urban house churches in China are divided between congregations consisting of rural immigrant Christians and ones with urban “native” Christians. In such a social system, leaders from immigrant churches are not likely to lead urban believers. Thus, there are many settings in Asia where religious dynamics have profound implications for churches and Christian leadership, especially restrictive social systems. On the other hand, there are many settings in Asia where religious dynamics have benevolent implications for churches and Christian leadership.

Pentecostal Egalitarian Value and Cho’s Cell Group System

Åkerlund presents a conceptual dilemma of Pentecostal leadership: its inherent tendency to concentrate power in the leader, alongside the theological foundation that every believer is empowered. The process through which David Yonggi Cho created the celebrated Cell Group

² For this reason, I consider ministries that successfully overcome the caste system to be genuinely Spirit-empowered leadership. See Victor John with Dave Coles, *Bhojpuri Breakthrough: A Movement that Keeps Multiplying* (WIGTake Resources, 2019).

System has served as a successful case in negotiating this conflicting current. It also teaches several crucial lessons in Pentecostal leadership.

Cho's inspiration came during his health struggle in the middle of rapid growth in his second church in Seoul, Korea. In his weakness, the Holy Spirit drew his attention to the shared and delegated leadership model that Jethro advised to Moses in the wilderness (Exod 18). Through a series of biblical revelations, he "got the point." Then the Lord led him to discover the "church within the family," especially in the Early Church. This led to embracing women's leadership. All three elements were countercultural in Korea and the Korean Church.

When Cho finally announced his plan to radically reorganize his church, he expected a pushback from male lay leaders. To his surprise, though, it was women who raised strong objection, refusing to break the male-dominant cultural norm. He promised regular training to make them his closest co-workers, and Rev. Jashil Choi, his mother-in-law, led this new group of female lay leaders. Ultimately, Cho created thousands of "smallest churches" within his largest church in the world.³

This well-attested story illustrates several key leadership lessons: (1) A change in an organization begins with the leader; (2) challenges come from both the context and the church tradition; (3) the leader must direct the change with conviction, humility, and patience; and (4) a Pentecostal leader should empower followers.

This last point is what Åkerlund passionately argues. As traditional leadership studies focus on leaders, both in secular and Christian conversations, he attempts to level "the leadership playing field." He begins with a simple and no-nonsense axiom: there is no leader without followers. This is particularly true in a voluntary community like a local church. Åkerlund then

³ David Yonggi Cho, *Dr. David Yonggi Cho: Ministering Hope for 50 Years* (Bridge-Logos, 2008), 83–96.

contends that a healthy relationship between leaders and followers will mutually strengthen each other's call in the mission of the ecclesial community. The latter occurs because the egalitarian spirit of Pentecostalism places the leader among fellow Spirit-empowered and Spirit-called "leaders." Moses's prophetic statement rings loud and clear, "I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!" (Num 11:29, NIV). The typical polity of an Asian Pentecostal church, however, concentrates power in the pastor-leader, unlike the presbyterian system, which sets the pastor as one of elder-leaders. Furthermore, small non-ecclesial structures, such as mission organizations, ministries, and NGOs, may include fewer accountability measures.

Areas to Explore?

How this Pentecostal egalitarian ideal can be achieved, especially in more traditional contexts, is a continuing quest. While Asian Pentecostalism has broken ground in encouraging women in ministry, cultural glass ceilings still exist.⁴ To mitigate culturally rooted social hierarchy, Åkerlund suggests "friends" as a conceptual framework for mutual relationship between leaders and followers. However, while this may be a viable option in his context, it will meet a huge cultural challenge in Asia, where social ordering is based on hierarchy. Seniority and leadership position are two critical components of the Asian context, so the idea of "friendship" will immediately face this challenge. For example, a younger person will be reluctant or prohibited to call a senior person (either by age or position) "friend" as it is against the cultural norm.

One potential direction is to introduce leadership as also followership, by adding God into the leadership relationship. While most leadership theories recognize two parties in play—

⁴ Wonsuk Ma, "East Asian Pentecostalism Engaging with the World: A Theological and Practical Inquiry" (presentation at the East Asian Christianity Conference, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, April 2025).

the leaders and the followers—Christian leadership stands out for including God with the people the leader is to lead. The leader therefore models following to followers, by following God. Indeed, the leader effectively leads people by exemplifying his or her submission to God and dedication to his call. In this way, the leader now becomes a fellow follower as all are called, empowered, and commissioned. Putting self-interest at bay, when the interest of God and the interest of followers conflicts, the leader gives priority to God’s will over the followers’ will.⁵

Still another area to explore, to address the leader-follower binary, is the cycle of Spirit-empowerment. Åkerlund’s contention of “every believer’s Spirit-empowerment” must extend beyond his assumed context of an ecclesiastical community or local church and into the spheres of everyday life. In these areas, as much as a church leader is a follower of God, their followers are also empowered by the Holy Spirit and commissioned as leaders to influence their homes and workplaces. For instance, a nurse who is a church member exercises his or her God-given Spirit-empowered leadership of those they serve. During the COVID-19 pandemic, repeated testimonies emerged of Spirit-empowered nurses functioning as chaplains to dying patients who had no family present. Many prayed for salvation and provided spiritual and emotional support in addition to basic medical care. Likewise, Spirit-empowered teachers, who may be “followers” in church, perform their God-given leadership call in preparing the new generation through human formation and spiritual nurture.⁶ In this way, ecclesial leaders should treat and prepare “followers” as fellow leaders in God’s economy.

⁵ Wonsuk Ma, “Toward Spirit-Empowered Leadership: An Old Testament Foundation,” in *Voices Loud and Clear*, ed. Kong Hee et al. (Regnum Books, 2024), 33–44.

⁶ See, for example, Kim Boyd and Philida Rosalind Ignacio, “Holy Spirit Empowered Teaching: Stories of Teacher Survival during the Pandemic,” in *The Pandemic and the Holy Spirit: From Lament to Hope and Healing*, ed. Wonsuk Ma and Opoku Onyinah (ORU Press, 2024), 359–74.

Conclusion

So far, much discussion has focused on the contextuality and complexity of (Pentecostal) leadership in Asia. It is the “constructiveness” part that we all need, to journey together. As Åkerlund pleads, Spirit-empowered Pentecostal leadership is to bring about transformation to individual and communal life, while faithfully stewarding the gift of the Spirit’s empowerment by serving and empowering others. This will not only equip every believer to perform his or her God-given ministries (Eph 4:1–13) but also perpetuate the cycle of empowerment to the next generations until all flesh is filled with the Spirit (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17). Asia stands with Åkerlund in his prayer, “Maranatha!”

Bibliography

- Boyd, Kim, and Philida Rosalind Ignacio. "Holy Spirit Empowered Teaching: Stories of Teacher Survival during the Pandemic." In *The Pandemic and the Holy Spirit: From Lament to Hope and Healing*, edited by Wonsuk Ma and Opoku Onyinah. ORU Press, 2024.
- Cho, David Yonggi. *Dr. David Yonggi Cho: Ministering Hope for 50 Years*. Bridge-Logos, 2008.
- John, Victor, with Dave Coles. *Bhojpuri Breakthrough: A Movement that Keeps Multiplying*. WIGTake Resources, 2019.
- Johnson, Todd M., and Gina A. Zurlo. *Introducing Spirit-Empowered Christianity*. ORU Press, 2023.
- Ma, Wonsuk. "East Asian Pentecostalism Engaging with the World: A Theological and Practical Inquiry." Presentation at the East Asian Christianity Conference, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, April 2025.
- Ma, Wonsuk. "Toward Spirit-Empowered Leadership: An Old Testament Foundation." In *Voices Loud and Clear*, edited by Kong Hee et al. Regnum Books, 2024.

These essays are part of the **Global Pentecostal Voices Initiative** sponsored by **City Harvest Church in Singapore**. See www.chc.org.sg

These essays are the print version of a video presentation that can be viewed at www.GPVoices.org

These essays are published in **Pentecostal Voices Across Continents** edited by Kong Hee, Byron D Klaus, and Douglas Petersen published by Regnum Books UK.

It may be purchased at <https://www.regnumbooks.net/products/voices-loud-and-clear>. The ebook is available in open access format via this link.