The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others. 2 Timothy 2:2
AUTHENTIC LEADERSHIP THEORY: ENHANCEMENTS FROM 1 PETER 5:1-5

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ABSTRACT: This hermeneutical study of 1 Peter 5:1-5 examines the Apostle Peter’s insights into leadership and how they might add insight, critique, or refine Authentic Leadership Theory (ALT). After performing a genre analysis of the biblical text and uncovering its leadership implications, these implications are intersected with the four constructs of ALT: self-awareness, relational transparency, balanced processing, and internalized moral perspective. Although many areas of congruence surfaced between 1 Peter 5:1-5 and ALT, a number of qualitative differences and emphases also emerged in the areas of suffering, the nature of leadership, the role of community, and the value of an external orientation. ALT remains in the formative stages of development and could benefit from re-examining the concept of authenticity in ancient virtue philosophy while retaining the insights of modern psychology. Leadership insights from 1 Peter 5:1-5, as well as from additional scripture passages, show promise for further gains toward a more robust theory of authentic leadership.

KEYWORDS: Genre Analysis, Positive Psychology, Virtue Philosophy

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Authentic Leadership Theory: Enhancements from 1 Peter 5:1-5

The Apostle Peter served the Church of Jesus Christ as one of its most prominent Apostles. His close personal relationship with Jesus Christ has been well attested in the gospel accounts (e.g., Mt 14:28-31; 16:18; Mk 1:16-18; 9:5; Lk 5:1-11; Jn 13:4-11; 18:10-11; 21:1-23), and his service has been further recorded in Acts 2-5 and Acts 10-12. The New Testament contains two of his epistles, both filled with doctrinal teaching, theological reflections, exhortations to Christians, and instructions on leadership. Because of Peter’s intense personal development as a leader occasioned by his relationship with Jesus Christ, exploring his leadership instructions in 1 Peter 5:1-5 holds promising potential for new insights into leadership.

Although the concept of authenticity in leadership could be traced back to at least the ancient Greeks (Harter, 2002) and including the time of the writing of 1 Peter, modern interest in authentic leadership as a theory of leadership surfaced about 2003-2005 (Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing & Peterson, 2008). Since then, research into Authentic Leadership Theory (ALT) and its development has grown. Recently, Sendjaya, Pekerti, Härtel, Hirst, and Butarbutar (2016) studied the relationship between moral reasoning and moral action among 70 managers using ALT. Their analysis revealed the “absence of a direct relationship between moral reasoning and authentic leadership, and an absence of a direct relationship between authentic leadership and moral action” (Sendjaya et al., p. 135). They examined the role of Machiavellianism as a moderating variable, which influenced the strength and direction of the relationships between moral reasoning, authentic leadership, and moral action. Their findings have suggested that additional moral components interact with moral antecedents, moral outcomes, and even self-concepts of authentic leadership.

ALT has not fully explored or explained how moral components, capacities, motivation, and courage function within the constructs of authentic leadership (Northouse, 2016; Sendjaya et al., 2016). Peter, as an Apostle and “fellow elder” (5:1), addressed awareness of motivation, transparency though “being examples” (5:3), and the guiding practical morality underlying authenticity in leadership in 1 Peter 5:1-5 with the purpose of improving leadership in the Church. How might Peter’s instructions be illustrative of authentic leadership? How might such a biblical passage and ALT be integrated? How might this passage of scripture improve and inform the future development of ALT?

This investigation pursues the following research question: How does Peter describe leadership in 1 Peter 5:1-5 such that it could enhance ALT? This hermeneutical study begins with an exegetical analysis of the Apostle Peter’s leadership instructions to the churches of Asia Minor in the early AD 60s contained in 1 Peter 5:1-5 (Carson, Moo, & Morris, 1994). Then, Peter’s approach to leadership is compared with the constructs of ALT, in order to explore the detailed relationship between 1 Peter 5:1-5 and modern ALT.

GENRE ANALYSIS

In this exegetical study of 1 Peter 5:1-5, general hermeneutics and epistolary genre analysis (Fee & Stuart, 2014; Osborne, 2007; Ryken, 1984) has been used in order to draw out implications for authentic leadership. General hermeneutics involves examining the context of the text, the grammar and syntax, and the historical-cultural background to determine the original author’s intention for the original recipients, as well as, legitimate application for later readers (Fee & Stuart;
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Osborne; Vanhoozer, 2009). More specifically, general hermeneutical principles of interpretation are further used in actual analysis of literary genre. Regarding form, Biblical epistles contain the five standard structural elements of salutation, thanksgiving, body, paraenesis, and closing that were used in ancient letter and treatise writing, but with uniquely Christian transformations of the elements and extended discussion of theology and practice (Fee & Stuart; Osborne; Ryken). Epistles by their very nature address specific situational matters, and as such form occasional and unified examples of prose; however, they often incorporate additional literary genres and employ rhetorical devices (Ryken). Osborne offered three principles for interpreting the epistolary genre: (a) follow the logical argument of the text, (b) understand underlying situations, and (c) take note of sub-genres, if any. In addition, Fee and Stuart described how the logical argument of an epistolary text can be discovered at the paragraph level of analysis. While attending to the structure of ideas, the interpreter must also be prepared to encounter figurative language and subgenres, and be able to exegete on two levels, the level of the subgenre and original reference (intertextual analysis) and the level of the argument in the epistle itself and its use of other material (Osborne; Robbins, 1996; Wilhoit & Ryken, 1998). After describing the historical-cultural background of 1 Peter, the context of its text, and its form and structure, this exegetical analysis follows the logical argument of the text at the paragraph level (Fee & Stuart; Osborne).

BACKGROUND

The earliest view, which also carries a “virtually unanimous agreement among modern interpreters” (Jobes, 2005, p. 322), has held that Peter, an Apostle of Jesus Christ, and “fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ,” (5:1) wrote this letter from “Babylon” (5:13), a cryptic designation for Rome (Carson et al.). He likely wrote it prior to the outbreak of the Neronian persecution; however, the persecutions he described in the letter regarding the recipients were more along the lines of social persecution, which were permitted by the empire and varied by location (Carson et al.; Jobes). Peter addressed his epistle to the “elect exiles” (1:1)—that is, Christians (Jews and Gentiles) in various local churches in the five regions, located in modern-day northern Turkey, of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia (1:1). Schnabel (2004) noted the possibility that Peter was in the area, having travelled widely in mission work since AD 41. Jobes argued that many of these Christians were exiles in a real sense, possibly part of the colonization program under Claudius (41-54 AD) which included these five regions. Some took advantage of the colonization program and relocated from Rome voluntarily, while others were involuntarily relocated for the purposes of the Roman government (Jobes). Fulfilling his leadership and teaching responsibility given to him by Jesus (Mt 16:18) and later reaffirmed by Jesus (Jn 21:15-17), Peter wrote his first epistle to encourage Christians in the churches throughout this region to persevere in their Christ-centered hope in the midst of their current situation of suffering.

The salutation, thanksgiving, and extended introduction comprise 1:1-9; and the theological body of the epistle extends from 1:10-2:10 and focuses upon Christians’ identity as the people of God. The instructional section extends from 2:11 to 4:11 and focuses upon living as God’s people in this hostile world; and finally, the closing encouragement, final instructions, and greetings make up 4:12-5:14. Peter wrote 5:1-5 as part of his closing argument to strengthen and persuade the church leaders (5:1-4) and congregants (5:5) regarding their proper motivations and behaviors as they carry out their respective responsibilities and relationships within their churches.
EXEGESIS

In 5:1-4, Peter addressed the elders and encouraged them to shepherd well. He presented himself as a fellow elder in 5:1, provided three motivations for the task in 5:2-3, and reminded them of the eternal reward in 5:4. In 5:5, Peter addressed the whole congregation, encouraging followers to follow well, and encouraging both followers and leaders to practice humility.

Verse 1

Although Peter served as a “fellow elder” (5:1), he also served chief among the twelve Apostles (Mt 16:18; Acts 1:15; 2:14; 5:2-3). In this expression of solidarity with all Church leaders, Peter has asked of them only that to which he himself would be held accountable. Since Christ has suffered, and his Apostles have suffered, including Peter, then church leaders will suffer, as well. They will need to lead in hard times, and not draw back, for the sake of the Church and their individual congregations (4:12-19). Peter witnessed Jesus Christ’s public life and ministry up to the end, including the brutal events culminating in his crucifixion (Acts 1:21-22). Peter’s most regretted personal experience of denying Christ three times in the courtyard during Jesus’ night trial at this point in his ministry and writing of this epistle, perhaps serves as a constant source of encouragement to himself and other leaders. If he could be restored from failure, then other leaders could be restored—his restoration followed an immediate and thorough repentance, and not a safe, self-administered repentance to preserve his pride. As a leader, Peter had learned not to draw back, but move forward while under trial, and to become a “partaker in the glory that is to be revealed” (5:1), the future glory he has discussed so much in this letter (1:4, 7; 4:13; 5:10). This focus upon receiving glory has served as a primary motivation in the letter for Christians, and especially for leaders (5:4). Such confidence for reward has offered great encouragement and comfort for leaders in light of the discussion in the preceding paragraph (4:12-19)—a discussion about purification beginning with, and being concentrated upon, the Church and its leadership. Peter referenced God’s judgment upon the leaders of his people in the history of the exile in 4:17 by alluding to Ezekiel 9:6 and reminding church leaders of the seriousness of their calling and their higher level of accountability, according to Saint Augustine (Letters 231). Of course, this refiner’s fire will bring about growth in holiness and strengthen the churches to finish God’s will faithfully.

Verses 2-4

Peter provided three motivations for the task of “shepherd[ing] the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight” (5:2). God has given church leaders (elders) authority in their churches coupled with a great responsibility that would involve many spiritual matters under the term shepherd. The basic meanings would involve overseeing, protecting, teaching, and caring (Laniak, 2006). Carson (2015) argued that oversight involved much more than preaching and teaching, as is popularly understood, but also key aspects of leadership, including casting vision, crafting strategy, developing people and teams, and establishing structure in order to accomplish organizational goals. Peter described the first motivation as “not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you” (5:2). At that time, some leaders might have been appointed without their consent or pressured into the leadership role (Davids, 1990). Some leaders might have performed as leaders primarily out of obligation alone, or even simply because someone needed to lead. Consequently, leaders might be tempted to do a slothful or superficial job because they never embraced God’s calling, gifting, and the responsibilities of leadership in the first place.
Peter described the second motivation as “not for shameful gain, but eagerly” (5:2). Shameful gain refers to being in it for the money; it is about dishonest or unfair use, or misuse of funds, for personal gain. In the first-century Mediterranean world, some leaders might have abused their position to gain extra income from special teaching or doing favors of honor or patronage (Malina, 2001). Jesus and his Apostles taught that gaining income from spiritual work is acceptable and scriptural (Mt 10:10; Lk 10:7; 1 Co 9:6-14; and 1 Ti 5:18); however, it is shameful to be in it primarily for the money. Serving as a church leader should be done eagerly, loving to serve, and willing to spend oneself (2 Co 12:15).

Peter described the third motivation as “not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock” (5:3). In the first-century Mediterranean world, domineering leadership would have been common and involved a strong lust for power, flaunting it, and gaining more and more of it (Malina; Mk 10:42-45). Domineering would also refer to the use of excessive force, harshness, arbitrariness, arrogance, intimidation, and other worldly ways (Jobes). Instead, Peter indicated serving as a church leader should be done with exemplary character and seeking the edification of the church. Effective leadership power would show itself by personal example and in the call to imitation, first; and then, by way of leading the church.

In referring to the Lord Jesus Christ as the “chief shepherd” (5:4), Peter has brought to his readers’ minds Jesus’ self-designation as the “good shepherd” (Jn 10), and he has reminded both church leaders and congregations that Christ continues to shepherd his people through the human shepherds he has appointed to this task. When he returns in his visible glory and brings the consummation of all things, his church leaders who have done well in leading will be rewarded. Peter provided this uplifting encouragement as an additional motivation for church leaders, who carry a heavy responsibility, although it is a responsibility that is often filled with great joys and privileges. Nevertheless, church leaders likewise endure suffering, misery, and abuse; and so, they must keep looking to the life and reward to come.

Verse 5

The opening word “likewise” (5:5) indicates that Peter is continuing the discussion of church governance. The meaning of the terms “younger” (5:5) and “elders” (5:1) depends on the context because they are not simply used for designating age but also position or status. Achtemeier (1996) reviewed three possible relationships between the persons designated by Peter (younger in the faith, younger in age, and younger as referencing the congregation) and concluded that while these are not mutually exclusive categories, most likely Peter was using younger to refer to the rest of the congregation. Elliott’s (2001) scholarly opinion is that in 5:5, “younger” refers to the relationship to the “elders” in the sense of church leadership. Those who are younger are those who do not have authority in the church; they are to be subject to the elders and should be supportive of them and their decisions (Heb 13:7, 17). Peter’s reference to “all of you” (5:5) covers both groups in the congregations, leaders and followers. Regardless of position, humility is a required character quality and attitude to be put into practice by all. Peter added support from the conclusion of the fourth introductory lecture in Proverbs 3:34 about the abundant life of the wise, indicating that God is continually opposing the proud and empowering the humble (Waltke, 2004). This truthful perspective operates as a great consolation to Christians in many difficult situations—to know how Christ actively operates in his Church. The Lord has committed to perform this work in the lives of his people, and to uphold his leadership in his churches. He will support his leaders, and he will address those who abuse their authority. Congregations should submit to their leaders for the sake of Christ and his Church.
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Authentic leaders possess a high degree of self-awareness and self-acceptance, and are guided by strong personal positive core values; because of their integrity and transparency, followers readily identify with them and perceive them to be optimistic, confident, and worthy of trust (Yukl, 2013). Various definitions of authentic leadership have been proposed, but Walumbwa et al. (2008) have provided the most widely accepted definition:

A pattern of leader behavior that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self-development. (p. 94)

In their research and development of the Authentic Leadership Questionnaire to measure authentic leadership, Walumbwa et al. defined authentic leadership’s four constructs: (a) self-awareness, (b) relational transparency, (c) balanced processing, and (d) internalized moral perspective. Self-awareness (SA) refers to an awareness of how one makes sense of the world and attributes meaning, and how this process impacts one’s view of self (Walumbwa et al.). Self-aware individuals grow in their understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses through exposure to, and experience with, others and observing their impact upon them. Relational transparency (RT) refers to the presentation of one’s true self to others, building trust through open disclosure. Those who exhibit RT can also control their emotions and measure them appropriately depending on the situation (Walumbwa et al.). Balanced processing (BP) refers to the ability to gather relevant information from a variety of sources, analyze the data objectively, and then make a decision (Walumbwa et al.). This processing includes intentionally seeking out alternate viewpoints from one’s own. Internalized moral perspective (IMP) refers to the consistency of decision making based upon internal moral standards and values. Those possessing deep personal self-regulation will guide themselves based upon moral convictions even in the face of pressures from colleagues, other leaders, society, and even organizational culture (Walumbra et al.).

Ilies, Morgeson, and Nahrgang (2005) reviewed the positive outcomes of authentic leadership upon follower empowerment, relational improvement, and organizational citizenship behavior. Berkovich (2014) later offered practical improvements to ALT and the training of leaders that would move the theory away from pure functionalism of being true-to-self and toward greater attendance to others, attitudes, and relationships. O’Connell (2014) described how authentic leadership combined with intercultural competencies could shape global leaders who will be more effective with vision because of their integrity.

Harter indicated that the concept of authenticity originated at least as far back as the ancient virtue philosophy of the Greeks. However, Walumbwa et al. noted that in the development of ALT, authenticity has been conceptualized more so by modern psychology. As a result of these two source streams (virtue philosophy and positive psychology), ALT ended up blending the concepts of self-awareness, self-acceptance, and self-development with modern moral notions of authenticity. This mixture of ancient virtue philosophies from the Mediterranean world makes ALT of even greater interest to the biblical interpreter because of the shared historical and cultural proximity of the biblical text (including 1 Peter) to ancient virtue philosophy.
ALT and Peter’s instructions in 1 Peter 5:1-5 share many common elements regarding good quality leadership, such as valuing personal growth, building trust, staying true to internal standards, leading responsibly, serving willingly, sacrificing for others, and being an example. However, this passage of scripture written by Peter provides additional insights that could be valuable for the development of a more robust ALT. Overall two critiques should be noted: (a) ALT focuses upon leaders and their authentic seeking of personal and social identification from their group members, but Peter focused upon leaders in much deeper personal relationships and commitment to shared community with their followers; and (b) ALT demonstrates an almost exclusive internal orientation of leadership, but Peter incorporated both external and internal orientations for leadership.

In 5:1, Peter discussed suffering as part of leadership because leaders often experience failure. Admission of failure for the purpose of personal leadership growth and building trust through disclosure fit well with ALT’s constructs of SA and RT. When suffering results from remaining true to internal moral standards, Peter’s words seem to fit well with IMP in his exhorting leaders to remain firm in their convictions all the way through to becoming “a partaker in the glory that is to be revealed” (5:1). However, the emphasis in ALT rests upon leaders’ authentic self-expression and self-development in the midst of suffering, whereas in Peter the emphasis rests upon leaders’ identity and union with Christ while being committed to the community entrusted to their oversight.

In 5:2-3, all three descriptions of high quality leadership appear to integrate well with ALT. Peter’s initial description of accepting the full responsibility and scope of leadership relates to the construct of BP in its promotion of rational assessment in decision-making. However, Peter referred to an embracing of leadership responsibility that extended beyond human relationships to a leadership responsibility before God. Peter’s second description of an eager self-sacrificing leadership that avoids shameful self-promotion and gain dovetails neatly with RT’s incorporation of self-control and building trust through honest disclosure and accountability. As part of authenticity, transparency builds trust and dependability, and it establishes credibility and legitimacy (Ilies et al., 2005; Walumbwa et al., 2008). Peter’s third description of leadership by being an example rather than dominating and demanding also fits well with ALT and all four of its constructs because ALT is not about the use of coercive power but rather leaders enacting their values and beliefs along with the hope that others in their organizations will model themselves after their authenticity (Berkovich, 2014; Ilies et al.). And yet, there remains a contrast between a higher calling of leadership in Peter and the calling of leadership in ALT.

In 5:4, Peter articulated the mediating role and responsibility of leadership on behalf of Christ. This higher purpose behind leadership remains largely absent from ALT, especially in its current dependency upon positive psychology more than upon the notions of authentic leadership in ancient virtue philosophy (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, May & Walumbwa, 2005). Nonetheless, by adopting some notion of a higher accountability, authentic leaders could transform the concepts of growth within SA, motivation for BP, and morality underlying IMP. In 5:5, Peter concluded his instructions on leadership (and followership) with the ever-needed exercise of, and growth in, humility. Of course, humility suits ALT very well with its emphasis upon exercising emotional intelligence (O’Connell, 2014); however, ALT’s orientation is limited to the human orientation only, whereas Peter also included the need for humility before God as what truly empowers and takes to new levels the humility before people.
The preceding analysis offered additional insights and refinements of ALT based upon the exegesis of 1 Peter 5:1-5, most notably by adding and extending the concept of suffering in leadership, and by elevating and transforming the four constructs by means of a higher accountability and orientation toward God. Related to this analysis, Northouse critiqued ALT for not fully explaining the how moral values function in leadership and how they relate to the four constructs of ALT. Even outside of a Christian framework, insights from 1 Peter 5:1-5 could serve to point ALT toward notions of accountability and orientation that reference higher leadership standards of authenticity than self and others. ALT could benefit from further research into ancient virtue philosophy, possibly leading to a re-assessment and re-incorporation of external standards and higher-order morality into the theory to balance out the over-emphasis upon modern psychology for defining the constructs of ALT (Gardner et al., 2005).

An example of the differentiation between contemporary ALT in common practice and that with the enhancements drawn from 1 Peter 5:1-5 might be helpful. An organizational leader knows that authenticity in leadership is highly valued today by those in his or her organization; and so, the leader seeks to build trust by providing more personal revelation of self in private and group meetings, and publicly. This leader also understands that effective leadership involves a growing knowledge of one’s own strengths and weaknesses, as well as, an expanding appreciation of others within the organization; and so, the leader moves in these directions. Since perception of authenticity requires avoiding even the appearance of hypocrisy, the leader meticulously reviews his or her own standards of behavior in order to manage consistency with self and with others’ expectations. By adding the enhancements drawn from 1 Peter 5:1-5, this same leader would look far beyond leadership effectiveness that results from maintaining a consistent yet growing self, respecting others, and offering personal transparency. This leader would acutely feel and hold deeply to an accountability to an authority outside of and higher than self, which would build a stronger moral core and foster a deeper humility. This primary differentiation between contemporary common ALT implementation and that of including Peter’s insights, would create a sense of calling in the leader that would lead to substantially larger impacts upon self-awareness, personal development, transparency, and inclusion of others. This story of a hypothetical authentic leader illustrates how the enhancements to ALT from 1 Peter 5:1-5 might help those desiring to be more authentic leaders, as well as, contribute toward a more robust theory of authentic leadership.

REFERENCES


