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PASTORAL AUTHENTICITY AND THE DUPLEX *COGNITIO DEI*

Christopher DiVietro.

Park Road Presbyterian Church
Eastern University & Alvernia University

ABSTRACT: Despite popular conceptions to the contrary, true authenticity - one's relationship with oneself - is impossible apart from knowledge of God, and knowledge of God is impossible apart from His self-disclosed revelation. The pinnacle of revelation is redemption and the pinnacle of redemption is Jesus Christ. True authenticity is therefore only possible through personal knowledge of God, or by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. While these truths are of great consequence for all people and all followers of Jesus, this paper will show they carry particular importance for pastors.

KEYWORDS: *John Calvin; Pastoral Health; Self-awareness; Personal Wellbeing*

Pastoral Authenticity and the Duplex Cognito Dei

Over the course of the last few years several high-profile pastors have resigned or been removed from leadership (Nieuwhof, 2019; Sauls, 2020). In addition to removal from leadership, research suggests approximately 250 pastors leave their vocation each month (Lifeway Research, 2015). Those pastors who remain, as caregivers, are at a high risk for burnout, defined as “a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment” (Jackson-Jordan, 2013; Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Confronted with such sobering realities, a sustainable approach to pastoral leadership is desired.

Puls, Ludden, and Freemyer (2014) identified a positive correlative relationship between ministerial effectiveness and a specific leadership construct, Authentic Leadership, concluding that ministers who are authentic in their leadership style are widely perceived as effective pastors. An exhaustive investigation of the relationship between Authentic Leadership and pastoral ministry is a worthy endeavor, yet is beyond the scope of the present paper due to the necessity of a more fundamental and preliminary understanding: What is authenticity, and what impact does it have on both the character and competency of a pastor?

The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the centrality of Jesus Christ to one’s authenticity using John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (1960) as a guide. This paper contends true authenticity is impossible apart from knowledge of God, and knowledge of God is impossible apart from revelation. The pinnacle of revelation is redemption, and the pinnacle of redemption is Jesus Christ. True authenticity is therefore only possible by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. While these truths are of great consequence for all Christians, this paper will show they carry particular importance for pastors.

AUTHENTICITY

Authenticity is a concept present in various academic and popular contexts, each with its own unique understanding or application, while the precise meaning of which remains somewhat elusive (Newman & Smith, 2006). Assumed as discoverable through books, articles, business ventures, and social networking opportunities, authenticity aims to help individuals live, work, and relate in ways that are consistent, conformed to prevailing social categories, and connectational (Kovacs, 2019). Despite its ubiquity, little consensus appears to exist concerning the precise nature of authenticity, how it is achieved, or how it is expressed.

Fundamentally, authenticity describes one’s relationship to oneself. Authenticity involves recognizing one’s personal experiences, thoughts, emotions, needs, wants, preferences, and beliefs, thereby reflecting the unobstructed operation of one’s true or core self in the course of daily interactions; this operation manifests itself through behavioral choices consistent with the core self. (Harter, 2002). One who is authentic has achieved coherence between the core self and the self who is known and experienced by others, and also has the requisite cognitive capabilities to maintain this coherence (Chan et al., 2005). The manifestation of this coherence - self-realization - is directly related to an individual’s well-being, personal growth, and expressiveness that is both consistent and contextually appropriate (Ilies et al., 2005). The authentic person is consistent, stable, cognizant of how past events have impacted present personal realities, and able to actualize that coherence through maintained relationships and enacted decisions.

Authenticity portrays the true self and one's relationship with the true self, and is therefore strictly understood as a measure of being true to oneself as an end rather than a means to an end (Erickson, 1995). Authenticity is a self-referential state of being and is self-contained, meaning the authentic self is the same whether alone or in a crowd. One's contentment in being oneself is not dictated by the results, reactions, and outcomes of interpersonal interaction, but solely in one's relationship with oneself. Authenticity is a state of full satisfaction – joy – derived from one's own existence (Chan et al., 2005).

SELF-AWARENESS

A critical implication of authenticity is self-awareness, or the ability to discern one's needs, motives, values, feelings, desires, personality aspects, and cognitions, as well as the motivation to increase one's awareness of those faculties and the role each plays in behavior (Kernis, 2003; Kernis & Goldman, 2006). Self-awareness accepts potentially contradictory self-aspects (i.e., being both introverted and extraverted) and comfortably integrates them into a cohesive structure. The self-aware individual will therefore have little anxiety over the appearance of multiple selves in multiple contexts because those selves are well-defined and enacted with confidence (Ilies et al., 2005; Kernis & Goldman, 2006).

Meta-cognitive abilities - broadly defined as thinking about thinking - play a central role in self-awareness by providing an individual with an increased awareness of his or her own self-concept, as well as enabling the leader to oversee the activation and implementation of that self-concept (Chan et al., 2005, p. 13). Individuals with heightened meta-cognitive ability: a) better assess and make meaning of self-relevant information; b) monitor and adjust their reasoning process; and c) control the selection and activation of the self in contextually appropriate ways while still remaining true to themselves (Chan et al., 2005, p. 14). Learning about the self provides a firm anchor for decisions and actions consistent with that self (Gardner et al., 2005). Self-awareness is therefore a key facilitator in personal growth and development. If an individual is not aware of areas that need reinforcement or strengthening, then little or no energy will be allocated to the task of development (Luthans & Avolio, 2003).

A TRUE PATH TO AUTHENTICITY

Popular and academic expressions of both authenticity and self-awareness presuppose that the primary referent for understanding authenticity - the self - is capable of withstanding such existential weight (Kristinsson, 2007). Authenticity and self-awareness, therefore, need a self-worthy referent (Taylor, 1991, pp. 28-29). The question of achieving authenticity - how might I better know and consistently relate to myself - is therefore largely concerned only with knowing the self. The self, however, is incapable of exhaustive and accurate self-knowledge.

The introductory words to Calvin's *Institutes* allow for a proper understanding of authenticity by grounding one's authenticity not in oneself, but in God. "Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves" (Calvin, 1.1.1). Calvin here has man's self-knowledge in view only to show that man's pathway to true knowledge and piety depends on knowledge of God (Van Der Kooi, 1994).

TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

According to Calvin, the question of knowing myself is intertwined with knowing God, such that knowing myself flows from knowing God. “Again, it is certain that man never achieves a clear knowledge of himself unless he has first looked upon God’s face, and then descends from contemplating him to scrutinize himself” (Calvin, 1.1.2). To know himself in any right and true sense, man must know God. Dowey (1994) called this intimate connection the correlative character of the knowledge of God and man. Within this interrelation neither pole is isolated from the other; insight into knowledge of God gives insight into the knowledge of self, and vice versa (Van Der Kooi, 1994).

The problem with the proposition of the correlative character of the knowledge of God and man is, as Calvin makes clear in Book II of the Institutes, man’s fallen nature; it is that inborn defect humanity bears from our mother’s womb. “[W]e are so vitiated and perverted in every part of our nature that by this great corruption we stand justly condemned and convicted before God...this perversity never ceases in us, but continually bears new fruits” (Calvin, 2.1.8). Accordingly, Warfield said:

Of course, Calvin does not teach that sinful man can of himself attain to the knowledge of God. The noetic effects of sin he takes very seriously, and he teaches without ambiguity that all men have grossly degenerated from the true knowledge of God (ch. iv). But this is not a doctrine of the unknowableness of God, but rather of the incapacitating effects of sin. (Warfield, 1909)

Calvin added that humanity is overwhelmed from head to foot, so that no part of their mind or heart are immune from sin. (Calvin, 2.1.9).

These are no minor considerations. Humanity, out of harmony with God and his creation, is incapable of rightly perceiving the knowledge of God due to their woundedness by sin (Parker, 2015, pp. 27-28). Further, the means of this knowledge is as important as the God known by it: if humanity aspires to a right and true knowledge of themselves, they must not settle for an abstract or incomplete knowledge of God. Calvin referenced Lactantius when affirming no religion is genuine unless it is joined with the truth of God (Calvin, 1.4.3). If humanity is incapacitated by sinful faculties such that they cannot obtain right and true knowledge of God, thereby limiting their ability to obtain right and true knowledge of themselves, they have but one recourse: revelation. To discuss knowledge of God is therefore to immediately and necessarily discuss revelation (Parker, 2015, p. 9).

REVELATION AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Calvin identified the Word of God as that revelation by which humanity gains insight into the truth of God. “[S]o Scripture, gathering up the otherwise confused knowledge of God in our minds, having dispersed our dullness, clearly shows us the true God” (Calvin, 1.6.1). The Word of God grants access to God for humanity who are otherwise unable to attain access given that the pervasive effects of sin have thoroughly and negatively affected their capabilities - corrupting nature and faculties alike (Calvin, 2.1.5-10). “[T]he human mind because of its feebleness can in no way attain to God unless it be aided and assisted by his Sacred Word” (Calvin, 1.6.4). Space prevents an extensive discussion of the obvious role the Holy Spirit plays in this process; suffice it to say humanity’s role is to behold revelation, for people cannot move to God and revelation can be no other than a movement from God to people (Parker, 2015, pp. 12-13).

Accordingly, Venema (1988) argued, “since God is his own witness, and since he witnesses to himself in a manner accommodated to our limited capability, our knowledge of him refers primarily not to his being-in-himself, but to his being-toward-us” (p. 158). Warfield asserted in parallel fashion that humanity must not seek God as He exists in Himself through vain and wandering speculation, but rather as He has revealed Himself to humanity through His works (Warfield, 1909). It is, “that knowledge which, content with empty speculation, merely flits in the brain...” that Calvin holds in contrast to true knowledge (Calvin, 1.5.9). Calvin’s fundamental concern was therefore not merely that humanity should know scripture, but that they should, through scripture, know God (Noble, 1982, p. 2).

To this end Calvin held that man should, “...contemplate him in his works whereby he renders himself near and familiar to us, and in some manner communicates himself” (Calvin, 1.5.9). Calvin had here in view Paul’s statement in Acts 17, but that argument can be taken to its logical end and teleological conclusion: If humanity must seek God as He has revealed Himself through His works and as He communicates Himself, His chief work of self-disclosure is in the person and work of Jesus Christ. “God in Himself, that is, in His naked majesty, is invisible...He is revealed to us in Christ alone” (Parker, 2015, p. 76). Vos agreed, asserting, “The Logos is, therefore, the outward Revealer of the inward mind of God” (Vos, 2007, p. 345).

Indeed, the center of Calvin’s thought is soteriological in nature - it is concerned with divine provision for and the divine accomplishment of salvation (Dowey, 1994, p. 246). While Stuermann (1952) held that God imparts knowledge, and in view of humanity’s receiving that knowledge, salvation is bestowed, Shepherd (1983, p. 229) held that epistemology proceeds from soteriology and is an implication therein. Venema (1988, p. 170) argued that this is a trajectory of Calvin’s thinking: to lead his readers step-by-step to the reality of and need for the redemptive work of God in Jesus Christ by the Holy Spirit. What then is revelation if not, as Vos (2007, p. 6) concluded, but the interpretation of redemption?

IMPLICATIONS OF A TRUE KNOWLEDGE OF GOD

Humanity’s ability to know God is therefore entirely dependent upon God’s revelation; both the pinnacle of knowing God and the pinnacle of that revelation are one in the same: Jesus Christ. Parker contended: “Apart from Christ no knowledge of God exists...Apart from Him we wander in a maze; if seeking God, ever seeking, never finding” (Parker, 2015, p. 73). True knowledge of God is dependent upon God and therefore necessarily requires submission to Jesus Christ.

Here, then, is what God’s truth requires us to seek in examining ourselves: it requires the kind of knowledge that will strip us of all confidence in our ability, deprive us of all occasion for boasting, and lead us to submission. (Calvin, 2.1.2)

Such submission forces the individual to grapple with the reality that knowledge of God is not merely an intellectual pursuit, but is far more comprehensive and complete (Van Der Kooi, 1994, p. 365).

This comprehensive and complete pursuit is existential in nature, existing at the intersection of God’s being-toward-us in revelation through Christ and man’s being-before-him, such that the one who beholds revelation is necessarily affected and transformed (Venema, 1988, p. 159). Humanity’s beholding is confronted with one’s own wretchedness, and their need for a Redeemer (Van der Kooi, 1994, p. 368). To this end, one’s personal knowledge of God is the foundation of one’s true knowledge of God, and that personal knowledge is intertwined with piety (Venema, 1988,

pp. 160-161). True knowledge of God is therefore necessarily self-involving, leading to a heartfelt and willing reverence of God (Venema, 1988, pp. 159-160). Dowey (1994) thus located the first echo of this knowledge in the expression of worship (p. 28). Parker (2015) agreed, arguing without worship there is no true knowledge of God (p. 56), and Calvin (2.6.1) clearly stated, “no worship has ever pleased God except that which looked to Christ.”

Accordingly, Noble (1982) argued only through Christ is humanity renewed, for only through Christ can people have knowledge of God (p. 9).

Only when a man knows himself to be a creature utterly dependent on the grace of God (i.e. self-knowledge) is he able in his knowledge of God so to live in a thankful fashion corresponding to the motion of grace that he reflects in the mirror of his intelligent life the glory of God. (Noble, 1982, p. 7).

If Jesus is the revelation of the grace of God (Parker, 2015, p. 82), and if in all humanity’s confession, worship, and prayer one must come to God through Christ (Parker, 2015, p. 89), then people have no knowledge of or relationship with God apart from Jesus Christ. Calvin (1.2.1) said as much: “...no one now experiences God either as Father or as Author of salvation, or favorable in any way, until Christ the Mediator comes forward to reconcile him to us.” Knowledge of God and piety both spring from the same source: Faith resting on Christ (Muller, 1979, p. 55).

People do not know themselves unless they know God, and humanity does not know God unless they know Jesus Christ. The search for authenticity - for humanity’s ability to be true to themselves - therefore necessarily depends on one’s relationship with Jesus Christ. Noble concluded:

Knowledge of God is thus for Calvin essential to human being and nature. Only as we know him are we true of our being in the image of God. And, as fallen men, our knowledge of God can only be restored through the renovation and renewing, the redemption, which is in Christ, the image of God. (Noble, 1982, p. 10)

Humanity’s search for authenticity is fundamentally limited by their fallen nature, and any hope for true authenticity necessarily depends on one’s personal piety cultivated through encounter with, reliance on, and worship of Jesus Christ.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PASTOR

The implications of the preceding discussion are important for all persons; one is unable to identify or articulate an accurate self-knowledge apart from knowing God through Jesus Christ, meaning authenticity is tied to one’s relationship with Jesus and one grows in understanding of their authenticity as one grows in faith. However, the consequences of this discussion are of special importance for pastors. Specifically, that one’s authenticity is connected to one’s relationship with Jesus Christ affects both the focus and the fuel of a pastor’s ministry.

Pastors are responsible for the spiritual oversight of others. The New Testament speaks to this oversight with the charge, “Shepherd the flock of God that is among you...” (1 Pet 5:2, ESV) and observing that leaders watch over the souls of those in their care, as ones who will have to give account (Heb 13:17). Jesus Himself charged Peter three times to feed and care for His flock (Jn 21:15-17; Laniak, 2006). That one’s authenticity is so tightly tied to one’s relationship with Jesus provides focus to pastoral ministry by ensuring shepherding, watching, and feeding do not take place

within an undefined vacuum. Instead pastors strive specifically to help congregants, “be conformed,” to the image of Jesus (Rom 8:28-30). Pastors must not settle for vague moralisms or sentimental reflections, but must labor to help congregants look to Jesus (Heb 12:12), set their minds on things above (Col 3:1-4), and renew their minds (Rom 12:1-2; Eph 4:23).

The apostle Paul added another dimension to this charge of oversight, instructing pastors not just to watch over the souls of others, but indeed their own souls. Paul exhorted the Ephesian elders, “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood,” (Acts 20:28). Indeed, the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul reflected just such authenticity, humility, and self-awareness. Paul was humble and self-aware, confessing his sinful past and recognizing only the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ saved him (Gal 1:15; 1 Tim 1:15; Tit 3:3; Wilson, 2018). Paul professed a clear moral conscience as he considered his interpersonal relationships (1 Cor. 4:4; Machinek, 2017). He intentionally evaluated his actions, motivations, and feelings (Rom 7:15-25; Stendahl, 1963). Such thorough self-awareness and self-care is why Paul could three times confidently urge others to “imitate me,” (1 Cor 4:16; 1 Cor 11:1; Php 3:17). If, therefore, authenticity is the submission to the discipline of whatever morality exists within (Duignan & Bhindi, 1997), and if a pastor’s focus is to help others achieve an authentic sense of self through a relationship with Jesus Christ, then that pastor’s fuel must be their own authentic sense of self through their own vibrant relationship with Jesus.

Laniak (2006) observed this interdependency multiple times in Scripture: Moses was so central in the Torah that its five books are considered his biography, yet the Torah is ultimately a revelation of the Lord; a pastor directs their congregation much as the Lord was present amidst and directed Israel in the wilderness; a pastor is first a member of God’s flock before being appointed shepherd over it. Such intertwining of the Lord and His undershepherd is reflective of humanity’s inability to achieve authenticity apart from Jesus, and critical to a pastor’s self-understanding.

Accordingly, the only way a pastor can properly point others toward authenticity in Christ is if they themselves are dwelling in authenticity in Christ. Before exhorting others, pastors must exhort themselves to know nothing except Christ and him crucified (1 Cor 2:2). A pastor must cherish the fact that they are created in Christ (Eph 2:10), crucified with Christ (Gal 2:20), buried with Christ (Col 2:12), baptized into Christ and his death (Rom 6:3), united with Christ in his resurrection (Rom 6:5), and seated with Christ in the heavenly places (Eph 2:6). Further, the pastor must know the truth that in Christ they are justified (Rom 8:1), glorified (8:30), sanctified (1 Cor 1:2), called (1:9); made alive (Eph 2:5), created anew (2 Cor 5:17), adopted (Gal 3:26), and elected (Eph 1:4–5; Davis, 2017; Johnson, 2013). In light of these realities, a pastor’s focus is fueled by their own authenticity in Christ.

Beyond pastoral ministry, such authenticity is beneficial for all who lead. Self-awareness, self-regulation, and conviction of identity - traits evidenced by the Apostle Paul and encouraged in all pastors - are shown to have favorable outcomes through positive modeling in the lives of followers and the organizations they form. Trust, engagement, and sustainability all result when the leader is self-aware (Gardner et al., 2005). While pastors say to their congregants, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ” (1 Cor 11:1), all leaders should be able to say to their followers, “Imitate me.”

PASTORAL SELF-AWARENESS

A key practical application of developing pastoral authenticity is therefore developing self-awareness. The Johari Window is a tool designed for this purpose, helping a subject compare how one thinks about oneself compared to how others perceive the subject (Luft & Ingham, 1955). The Johari Window details four quadrants: Public (known to self and known to others), Blind (unknown to self and known to others), Unknown (unknown to self and unknown to others), and Facade (unknown to self and unknown to others). Two processes accompany the Johari Window: Feedback, when others openly share how they perceive a subject, and Disclosure, the extent to which leaders are willing to share information about themselves with others (Kaplan, 2007).

When a subject solicits honest feedback and discloses in ways that are appropriate and truthful, a subject recognizes incongruities in their public display or relation to self and moves to rectify those incongruities. Trusted relationships with peers - other pastoral staff, congregational lay leaders, pastoral colleagues, denominational associates, and ministeriums - provide the ideal partners to engage in a Johari Window exercise. So-called colleague groups are critical to healthy pastoral leadership and healthy congregational life (Beck, 2018). In light of Paul's self-awareness detailed above, his statement, "So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us," (1 Thes 2:8) indicates the value he placed on trusted relationships.

CONCLUSION

Blaise Pascal noted,

Not only do we know God through Jesus Christ, but we only know ourselves through Jesus Christ; we only know life and death through Jesus Christ. Apart from Jesus Christ we cannot know the meaning of our life or our death, of God or of ourselves. (Pascal, 1966, p. 417)

True knowledge of the self is impossible apart from a true knowledge of God (Calvin, 1.1.2; Parker, 2015, p. 28), and a true knowledge of God is impossible apart from his gracious and accommodating self-disclosure by revelation (Dowey, 1994, pp. 3-6; Parker, 2015, 9-13). To know God by his revelation is to know his work of redemption (Dowey, 1994, pp. 3-6; Parker, 2015, pp. 9-13), the pinnacle of which is Jesus Christ. To know Jesus Christ is a self-involving act of faith and worship (Dowey, 1994, p. 28; Venema, 1988, p. 159), a relationship grounded in one's need for redemption (Parker, 2015, p. 56; Warfield, 1909, p. 45).

True authenticity is impossible apart from knowledge of God, and knowledge of God is impossible apart from revelation. The pinnacle of revelation is redemption, and the pinnacle of redemption is Jesus Christ. True authenticity, therefore, is only possible by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. The effective pastor knows this as their ministry fuel and lives this as their ministry focus.

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CONTRIBUTORS

Corné Bekker, Ph.D. - serves as the Dean of the Regent University School of Divinity. His research interests are centered on Biblical perspectives in Leadership and the organizational realities of the early Church communities.
clbekker@regent.edu

Julie Boccock - M.S. in Organizational Psychology, Azusa Pacific University, is interested in both engaging work and engaging ministry. She is a business operations specialist at Azusa Pacific University.
jbock@apu.edu

Preston Butler, Ph.D. - is an ordained minister and retired Army Lieutenant Colonel. He has served in church and secular leadership positions for over 40 years and currently serves as the Director for Procurement & Subcontracts for Vinnell Arabia LLC. While earning his Doctor of Philosophy in Leadership at Alliant International University, Dr. Butler developed an instrument called the Church Business Operations Tool that measures the business health of a church. Dr. Butler conducts workshops and seminars on leadership and business ethics. His passion to see healthy marriages led him to establish PK3 Ministries and publish a book called, *It's OK to Have an Affair (With your Spouse)*. Dr. Butler, along with his wife, conducts workshops for married couples.
prestonbutlerjr@yahoo.com

Barry Cushman - is a student in the research-based Ed.D. in Christian Leadership program at the Rawlings School of Divinity (Liberty University). He is a retired police detective who now serves as an accreditation program manager, pastor of a small church, and chaplain of a large, international, non-profit law enforcement organization. He lives in northern New England with his wife and their three daughters. He has a master's degree in public policy and management and a graduate certificate in applied research and evaluation methods and has a strong background in quantitative analyses.
bcushman@liberty.edu

Chris DiVietro, Ph.D. - is the Senior Pastor of Park Road Presbyterian Church, has a Ph.D. in Organizational Leadership, and is an adjunct professor at both Eastern University and Alvernia University. Chris is married to his best friend Liz and is Daddy to Aletheia, Judah, and Evangeline. In his spare time Chris likes to...wait...what's spare time?
Chris@parkroadchurch.com

David R. Dunaetz, Ph.D. - a graduate of Claremont Graduate University, is Associate Professor of Leadership and Organizational Psychology at Azusa Pacific University. His research focuses on interpersonal processes in Christian organizations, especially churches and mission organizations. He was a church planter in France for 17 years.
ddunaetz@apu.edu

Joshua Henson, Ph.D. - is the founder of Rediscover Oikos, LLC, a Christian leadership coaching and church consulting company. He is also an adjunct professor of Organizational Leadership at Regent University and Southeastern University. He serves as the Editor of the Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership. He has published multiple articles and books including: *Exegetical Analysis: A Practical Guide for Applying Biblical Research in the Social Sciences*. He also serves as the Lead Pastor of Crossroads Church in Ocala, FL.
joshhen@regent.edu

Nathan Mizzell - is a Senior Contracting Officer and Procurement Analyst at the Department of Education, Federal Student Aid. He is a Senior Elder serving as the Director of Discipleship at First Church of Christ Holiness, USA, located in Washington, DC. He is also completing his doctoral degree in Strategic Leadership with a concentration in the Ecclesial at Regent University. He has published an article entitled *When Servant Leadership Fails: The Importance of Aligning Values* in the Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership and a book chapter in: *Modern Metaphors of Christian Leadership: Exploring Christian Leadership in a Contemporary Organizational Context*.
nathanmizzell@comcast.net

Saba Senses-Ozyurt, Ph.D. - is an associate professor and program director in the California School of Management and Leadership at Alliant International University. She received her Ph.D. in political science and political psychology from the University of California, Irvine. Before joining Alliant University, she taught at the University of California San Diego (UCSD), the University of California Irvine (UCI), and Chapman University. Dr. Senses-Ozyurt's research focuses on the impact of non-governmental organizations, political processes and public policies on the rights and empowerment of women, religious minorities, and immigrants into pluralist societies. Her research is published in some of the leading academic journals such as Political Psychology, Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies, and the Journal of Organizational Theory and Behavior.
sozyurt@alliant.edu

Mark Simon - has more than 20 years of cross-cultural management experience in the fields of Information Technology, Leadership Development, and Christian Ministry. He holds a B.S. in Information and Computer Science from the University of California, Irvine, and a M.A. in Human Services Counseling from Liberty University. He is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Intercultural Studies from Biola University's Cook School of Intercultural Studies. He lived in China for fifteen years and has three children and one wife.
mr.laowai@gmail.com

Angela Spranger, Ph.D. - is an encouraging, engaging facilitator who transfers her knowledge and experiences in ways that learners and participants can relate to and remember. Dr. Spranger is a consultant and Gallup-trained Strengths coach, who also uses the MBTI and Emotional Intelligence tools to help clients identify and address issues that may hinder personal and professional development or team effectiveness. Her instructional experience includes eight years of teaching adult non-traditional learners at Hampton University and Regent University in the business curricula, specializing in Marketing, Labor Management Relations, and Human Resources courses. As of 2012, she added instructional experience with traditional young adult learners at Christopher Newport University, facilitating courses in Leadership Theory and Research, Organizational Behavior, Human Resource Management, and Leadership in Business. Additionally, Dr. Spranger has provided professional development and motivational presentations to local churches, women's groups, military installations, and professional associations, and always seeks to offer a unique and inspirational way of approaching the theme topic. Angela is a scholar-practitioner who worked for over 20 years in non-profit, state, and corporate management and HR positions while undertaking graduate studies.
angela.spranger@cnu.edu