The last two decades have seen a flurry of research and publications on the subject of Christian Leadership. A new text by Choi Hee Ann (2020) is a welcome addition to extend this research to the context of Asian immigrants in the United States of America that seek to lead from a Christian perspective. Choi’s text, entitled “A Postcolonial Leadership: Asian Immigrant Christian Leadership and its Challenges”, structures its proposals in three areas of foci: (a) understandings of leadership, (b) leadership and its challenges in U.S. culture, and (c) postcolonial leadership in an Asian immigrant Christian context. This review follows Choi’s outline in an attempt to summarize and evaluate its contributions to the emerging field of Christian Leadership research and especially contextual considerations of it.

The first part of Choi’s (2020) text on “Understanding Leadership” is logically divided into two parts: (a) leadership in a secular culture, and (b) leadership in Christianity. The opening chapter, exploring secular leadership models, is a good summary of the trajectory of organizational leadership theory development from the late 1800’s till the present time. Ranging from a succinct treatment on the component parts of Trait Leadership Theory to a descriptive analysis of contemporary proposals on Collaborative Leadership approaches, this chapter carefully surveys the major theorists, theories and models in organizational leadership research. The second chapter in this section of Choi’s text turns its focus on exploring the development of a distinctly Christian understanding and approach to leadership theory. In this chapter, Choi accurately points out that Servant Leadership Theory, the “go-to” theory often employed by Christian leaders, actually did not find its origin in distinctly Christian circles but in the management theories of Robert K. Greenleaf. However, Choi misses an important opportunity to explore the contemporary developments within Servant Leadership theory that has been done from a distinctly Christian perspective. The ground-breaking work of Bruce Winston (2018) and Kathleen Patterson (2010) come to mind as foundational in any treatment of Servant Leadership in Christian contexts. The chapter concludes with an erudite and helpful exploration on the of the theological dimensions of diakonia as leadership in the New Testament church and a how gender roles have been expressed and/or limited within leadership perspectives in the church. Although this first section of Choi’s text is good primer to unlock the fields of leadership research and its iteration in Christian contexts, it falls short to introduce its audience fully to the burgeoning domain of Christian, exegetical and theological research in organizational
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leadership research. The work of two journals devoted to fostering research in this area would have strengthened this introduction in significant ways: The Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership and the Theology of Leadership Journal.

In the second part of Postcolonial Leadership, the book turns its focus on situating Asian immigrant leadership within the wider cultural landscape of the United States of America. Choi (2020) opens this section with a strong, somewhat ideologically-laden, position statement:

Leadership positions in the US culture have been occupied by an elite upper-class while Anglo-European heterosexual male group without disabilities (the privileged white group) throughout US history. Whether in a secular context or a religious context, most leadership positions are occupied by this group. (p. 53)

Although this statement has some elements of truth to it, it unfortunately lacks the necessary nuanced analysis of the complex history of leadership perception and development in world history and in particular the US. Leadership, as a sociological phenomenon, cannot solely be defined or evaluated by the institutional or socially sanctioned positions of leadership. To do so, would not only place a debilitating limitation on any phenomenological exploration of the construct of leadership, but also unintentionally silence some of the voices of transformative leaders that have led from the margins. Choi provides somewhat of an interpretative lens for the cultural analysis that frames this section of the text in the form of “hidden assumptions that already exist in both secular and Christian religious contexts” (p. 54): (a) leading inherently includes a sense of a superiority, (b) leadership is framed in a binary system of leader and follower roles marked by a degree of power differentiation, and (c) models of leadership typically expresses itself in models of hierarchical organizational (pp. 54-55). As helpful as this framework is in following Choi’s analysis, it also betrays the inherent limitations that such a reading places on the possible contributions of this study. Accepting the “hidden assumptions” of leadership offered by Choi’s analysis could lead a researcher to fall prey to too narrow a scope of investigation, a divisive ideological orientation and sometimes uncharitable generalizations. In contrasting “white leaders and leadership” (p. 55) with that of African American and Latinx counterparts, the texts then sets the stage to explore the realities and challenges that face “Asian immigrant leaders” (p. 107) in the US. Choi’s following descriptive analysis of Asian immigrant Christian leadership (pp. 139-180) is the heart of this text and as such makes an original contribution to the field. It is well-written, with strong support offered for the clear and persuasive arguments presented. However, two odd choices in framing detracts from the valuable contributions this section makes: (a) proposing that the gender of Jesus of Nazareth is somehow socially constructed (p. 141), and (b) the presentation of Asian cultures and experiences as a monocultural expression.

The book ends with a final chapter exploring the critical features of a postcolonial leadership. It is in this concluding chapter that Choi presents a vision for what Asian immigrant Christian leadership could be. It is a hopeful and insightful vision, but unfortunately so heavy with the burden of postcolonial critique that it fails to fully capitalize on the very best of Christian and American traditions - traditions that give hope of a united people “from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages” (Rev 7:9, ESV). A Postcolonial Leadership is a good and original contribution to the emerging field of Christian Leadership but for all its good is significantly hindered by its strong ideological commitments.
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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 Bocock - 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. jbocock@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

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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

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