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3rd Place Essay: Christian Leadership in Modern Culture

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Title?

“We have left the era of the Christian superstar.” These words from Dr. Brenda Salter McNeil embody an intriguing truth. Leadership in modern society, especially in the Church, looks so different than it did even 50 years ago. It is our job as aspiring leaders to discover what it looks like to be a Christian as well as a leader in our culture. First, we must figure out what things have changed in our society’s view of true leadership. Then we must discover how to embrace those changes in order to become thriving leaders.

Billy Graham. Nelson Mandela. Paul the Apostle. Dwight L. Moody. Ghandi. Mother Teresa. These are all past leaders of the Church or culture. Each had a unique voice and spoke on behalf of the people. Each of them did something to single-handedly change the world.

For the past several decades, this is exactly what the Church has needed to thrive. The Church needed a face with which to identify, a singular role model to follow. Is there anyone in our society whom Christians can truly rally behind? Is there anyone who is truly the voice of the people? No. There are people who have a louder voice who can speak on behalf of others, but there is no one who is spear-heading a revolution in the Church.

That does not mean there is no leadership in the Church; in fact, it means just the opposite. Modern society is not looking for a face with which to identify. What people want today is to know they are loved and valued. As Professor Ben Geeding says, “We all want to change the world. But if you change one person’s life, you have changed his or her whole world. Should that not qualify as changing the entire world?”

That is what people in our current culture want. They want someone to come in and focus on them. People are no longer looking for a Christian superstar. Instead, people are looking for someone they can trust to do life with them, to walk through the valleys and to celebrate on the mountaintops. People are looking for genuine love.

Knowing what people require of a good leader is only half of the battle. Many people know what a good leader looks like, but few people know how to ascertain those qualities. As an aspiring leader in the Church, one can be tempted to become a “Christian superstar.” The materialistic culture we live in teaches us that the most successful Christian leaders are those who have the most money, largest congregations and most comfortable service. That may be the message society displays, but it is not the message that will save the souls of the broken and hurting.

As Christian leaders, we are called to love. It is that simple. Unfortunately, loving is an easy concept but a challenging action. Loving someone as a leader means taking a risk by trusting him/her. Loving someone is forgiving him/her when he/she makes a mistake. Loving someone is not treating him/her any differently, even though his/her lifestyle differs from your beliefs. Loving someone is making sure that person knows you respect him/her for who he/she is, not for what he/she has or has not done. Love is what it means to be a Christian leader.

Although loving without exception may not seem like a fast path to success, it is what will help us gain respect as aspiring leaders. The fame of being the “Christian superstar” may be tempting; but the rewards of going against the materialistic standard of fame to live a life of humble, loving leadership will be priceless. People will notice and respect leaders who care

about their personal well-being. We are called to be the generation that changes the face of leadership. We are the generation that will lead with love.