Embracing religions in moral theories of leadership

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Abstract: Religions are social constituents of present societies that need to be integrated into theories of leadership. In this article, I outline how three distinct characteristics, particularly present in Abrahamic religions, can significantly impact leadership principles and practices: a belief in the existence of and relationship to a God, the faith in and pursuit of a hereafter purpose, and the belief in and attempted adherence to a sacred scripture. Subsequently, I classify two approaches to examine their impact on leadership: a scripture-based and an empirical-based lens. I then highlight how the distinct characteristics can either inform and blend into or transform and modify moral theories of leadership.

Keywords: Leadership, moral theories of leadership, religion

Introduction

On a manager's desk in Germany I once saw a prominently placed stone. When asked about its meaning, she told me that it reminds her of the Bible verse John 8:7 where Jesus utters that the person who is without sin should cast the first stone. She explained that the artifact symbolizes her and her employees' fallibility, which helps her to put things into perspective. During a visit to Pakistan, another manager welcomed me into the company's prayer room, which also functioned as his office. He said that he does not want a costly office, as this world is ephemeral anyway, and he wishes to be approachable for his staff.

When talking to religious leaders of secular organizations like these two managers about their leadership, religion often features prominently in their reasoning for how and why they lead in certain ways. However, such explanations are not mirrored sufficiently in contemporary theories of leadership (Neubert, 2018). Religious beliefs, values, norms, and practices are still largely absent from their theorizations. In this article, I therefore address the question: How do distinct characteristics of religions impact existing moral theories of leadership?

In the following, I explain that religions are a social factuality, as they are wide-spread, significant, and distinct. Subsequently, I focus on moral theories of leadership that are particularly receptive to integrating religions. The article then progresses along its three contributions. First, I outline how distinct characteristics of many religions, namely a perceived relationship to a God, a hereafter pursuit, and adherence to a sacred source have an impact on leadership. Second, I identify a scripture-based and an empirical-based lens through which these characteristics shape leadership. Third, I show how they can either inform and blend or more fundamentally transform and modify existing theories. Finally, I mention limitations, areas for future research, and conclude.

Religions as social factuality

The implications of including religions in theories of leadership warrants examination for at least three reasons. Religions are wide-spread, significant, and have distinct characteristics. First, religions are social constituents of present societies. According to the Pew Research Center (2012), 84% of the world population is religiously affiliated, expected to reach 87% by 2050 (Pew Research Center, 2015). While this does not imply that religions are predominant in an individual life, organization, or society, it shows that they have an extensive reach. For Habermas (2001), we live in what he calls a "post-secular society". Religion is a social fact, so that the metaphysical becomes a social truth. Stark (1999, p. 270) argues that the secularization "doctrine" should be buried in "the graveyard of failed theories". Postsecularism "affords a place for religious voices in academic discourse" (Miller, 2018, p. 2). Guidelines of religion for leadership are important both for religious people who consider enacting them as well as for those who wish to comprehend leaders that are acting according to a religious paradigm.

Second, people may position a religion at the center of their lives. For some believers, their religion is holy and conceived as an "ultimate concern" (Tillich, 1957). In this sense, religions condition human beings' very existence and claim ultimacy and primacy. They may be conceived as prevalent and situated above other values' systems, logics, or orders of worth (Gümüsay, 2017a). This significance for some believers, who are leaders, followers, and colleagues in and across organizations, makes it important to consider a religious perspective on leadership.

Third, religions have certain distinct commonalities and similarities, which allow a funneling into a unique approach towards leadership. Specifically, there are three commonalities in particular but not exclusively for the three largest Abrahamic religions Judaism, Christianity

and Islam: the belief in the existence of and relationship to a God; the faith in and pursuit of a hereafter purpose; the belief in and attempted adherence to a sacred scripture. These commonalities can shape the understanding of leadership in a unique manner. They also have the potential for both a positive and negative influence on leadership behavior. Other aspects, such as specific communities, institutions, traditions, or practices, may also shape leadership, but are not unique categorical characteristics to such a religious perspective.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam encompass around 54% of the world population, comprised of roughly 31.5% Christians, 23.2% Muslims and 0.2% Jews (Pew Research Center, 2012). They have a monotheistic God, divide life into this world and a hereafter, and have a specific scripture. The Torah is the foundational text in Judaism and is part of the larger set of texts known as the Tanakh. The Bible is the core book in Christianity consisting of the Old and New Testament. The Quran is the central text in Islam alongside hadith collections, which contain reports about the sayings and doings of Muhammad. Two other large faith groups are Hinduism and Buddhism. Around 15% of the world population are religiously affiliated to Hinduism with four prominent denominations Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism and Smartism, while approximately 7.1% of the world population belong to Buddhism with two dominant branches Theravada and Mahayana (Pew Research Center, 2012). Certain denominations of Hinduism and Buddhism entail an afterlife component, sacred sources, and believe in a deity. Insights in this article are hence to some extent applicable to these and other religions with similar characteristics, too.

Moral theories of leadership

The recent *Academy of Management Perspectives* symposium on "Faith in Management Scholarship and Practice" called for an integration of faith into scholarship and theorization (Neubert, 2018). Given the significant social factuality of religion, I completely concur.

Scholarly work has engaged with the intersection of religion and business ethics (Agle & Van Buren, 1999), religion and entrepreneurship (Busenitz & Lichtenstein, 2018; Dana, 2010; Gümüsay, 2015, 2017b), religion and work (Cash & Gray, 2000), and the interconnection between theology and management (Dyck & Schroeder, 2005). Colleagues have refocused their attention on faith at work (Lynn, Naughton, & VanderVeen, 2008, 2011), religion in organizations (Chan-Serafin, Brief, & George, 2013; Dyck & Purser, 2018; Gümüsay, 2017a; Lounsbury, Tracey, & Phillips, 2014; Tracey, 2012), the 'theological turn' (Dyck, 2014), as well as religion and leadership (Gümüsay, 2016; Hicks, 2002; Kriger & Seng, 2005; Worden, 2005). While the significance of religion is acknowledged in these streams of work, we do not sufficiently capture how to integrate distinct characteristics of religions into existing theories of leadership.

More generally, religions seem to be neglected in articles that do not directly address questions of faith. In 2005, Dent, Higgins, and Wharff (p. 642) write "our research revealed limited scholarship linking religion with leadership." Within the recent leadership literature overview compiled by Dinh et al. (2014) an absence of religion is particularly apparent: it is not mentioned at all. In their overview, a religious perspective on leadership could either form its own subcategory or as a separate yet connected stream of work under the category of emerging ethical/moral leadership theories. Alternatively and theoretically more auspicious, religion could inform and transform existing theories of leadership.

In particular but not exclusively, moral theories of leadership would benefit from an integration of religion into their theorizing. According to Dinh et al. (2014), under this category fall authentic, ethical, servant, and spiritual leadership. Such theories incorporate a concern for others, values, altruism, ethics, integrity, and role modeling (Brown & Treviño, 2006). However, while moral theories of leadership offer insights into the impact of values

and views on leadership behavior that can be implicitly related to religion, they do not encompass certain attributes of a religious perspective. In the following, I hence outline authentic, ethical, servant, and spiritual theories of leadership and briefly relate them to religion.

Work on authentic leadership commenced as a result of writings by Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) and others on transformational leadership identifying pseudo versus authentic transformational leaders (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). Authentic leadership concentrates on self-aware, ethical, consistent, and transparent leader behavior. Walumbwa, Avolio, Gardner, Wernsing, and Peterson (2008, p. 94) define authentic leadership as "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."

Authentic leadership effectively entails two elements, leaders own awareness of their personalities in addition to values and behavior based on who they are and what they believe in (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Gardner, Cogliser, Davis, & Dickens, 2011). They are authentic, inasmuch as their inner values are aligned to their outer behavior. The concept of authenticity thereby has its roots in Greek philosophy reflected by the Greek aphorism 'Know Thyself' (Erickson, 1995; Harter, 2002). Authentic leaders are self-aware and harmonize their internal values, thoughts, and emotions with their external actions (Luthans & Avolio, 2003). They are guided by an internal moral perspective and their actions are in accordance with their intentions. Authenticity refers to "one's relationship with oneself" (Erickson, 1995, p. 124). An authentic leader acts "in accord with the true self, expressing oneself in ways that are consistent with inner thoughts and feelings" (Harter, 2002, p. 382). Religion can profoundly

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impact this notion of leader authenticity and also followers' trust.

Ethical leadership is "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making" (Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005). Eisenbeiss (2012) develops four central normative reference points of ethical leadership. These are humane orientation to treat others with dignity and respect, justice orientation to act fair and consistent, responsibility and sustainability orientation to enact long term views and consider societal and environmental welfare, and moderation orientation to be humble. While much research focuses on the leader, recent research has zoomed in on the followers and their moral attentiveness (Fehr, Yam, & Dang, 2015; van Gils, Van Quaquebeke, van Knippenberg, van Dijke, & De Cremer, 2015). Religion offers specific views on ethics as well as reason and reasoning to adhere to it (Eisenbeiss, 2012; Kriger & Seng, 2005). It can function as a defining and binding source for ethics.

Servant leadership is an emerging research area linked to ethics, morality, and virtues (Graham, 1991; Liden, Wayne, Zhao, & Henderson, 2008; Parris & Peachey, 2013; Sendjaya, Sarros, & Santora, 2008). This theory emphasizes service to others related to an expected enhancement of the psychological needs of followers (Mayer, 2010; van Dierendonck, Stam, Boersma, de Windt, & Alkema, 2014). It was introduced through three essays by the practitioner Greenleaf (1970, 1972b, 1972a). For Greenleaf (1977, pp. 13–14): "The Servant-Leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead... The best test, and difficult to administer is this: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, and more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit, or at least not

further be harmed?" Dierendonck (2011) develops a conceptual model of servant leadership with six key characteristics, namely that servant leaders empower and develop people, show humility, are authentic, accept people for who they are, provide direction, and take stewardship. Service of a leader may be encouraged and specified by religion. Servitude towards a Higher Being can also shape service towards followers.

While there are multiple definitions of spiritual leadership (Dent et al., 2005), it is commonly about meaning, faith and the notion of a calling. According to Ashforth and Pratt (2003) spirituality is comprised of a transcendence of the self, holism, and harmony as well as growth. Fry (2003, pp. 694–695) defines spiritual leadership as "comprising the values, attitudes, and behaviors that are necessary to intrinsically motivate one's self and others so that they have a sense of spiritual survival through calling and membership." Spiritual leaders create a vision and value congruence towards organizational commitment and belonging instilling a sense of calling and meaning as well as infusing hope, faith, and a culture of altruistic love into the organization.

The concept of spirituality has produced a growing body of literature (Melé & Fontrodona, 2017; Mitroff & Denton, 1999; Neck & Milliman, 1994; Steingard, 2005). While some scholars relate spirituality to various religions (Korac-Kakabadse, Kouzmin, & Kakabadse, 2002), it is not, however, considered identical with spirituality (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2003; Mitroff & Denton, 1999). King (2008: 220) highlights that researchers are encouraged towards spirituality and away from religion. Hicks (2002) critically engages with the spirituality-religion dichotomy and points out that spirituality is often defined in opposition to religion. For Hicks (2002, p. 380) religion is falsely contrasted with spirituality as "institutional, dogmatic, and rigid" while "spirituality is personal, emotional, and adaptable to an individual's needs." Religion can shape spirituality, as it may be a source of specific

spiritual practices, values, and beliefs. Spirituality is possibly a necessary condition for a religious perspective on leadership. A religious perspective on leadership could therefore be conceived as a sufficient condition for the existence of spiritual leadership. Spiritual leadership comes closest to a religious perspective with its faith-based and self-transcendence attributes. However, spiritual theories are different from religious theories of leadership, as they do not entail a sacred scriptural source, a concept of the hereafter, or necessarily relate to a supreme being.

A religious perspective on leadership

Religion can be defined through a focus on its substantive characteristics. Worden (2005, p. 221), for instance, provides a substance definition of religion "as a particular institutionalized or personal system of beliefs, values and practices relating to the divine – a level of reality or power that is regarded as the 'source' or 'ultimate', transcending yet immanent in the realm of human experience." Such a definition entails components that are not unique to religion but also exist outside the religious sphere like a system of beliefs. In contrast, focusing on the unique attributes of religion offers insights into the distinct impact of religion on leadership theory. In other words, I intend to look for those characteristics that are both significant for leadership as well as distinctively religious and thus conceptually complementary for existing theories of leadership so as to develop a religious perspective for leadership theory and practice more generally.

Through conversations with leaders, I began exploring what aspects of religion have an impact on leadership principles and practices. They mentioned multifold facets such as communities, rituals, or a deity. I then distinguished those aspects that are distinctly religious. Communities and rituals, for instance, are significant attributes that are shaped by religion in the form of religious communities and sacred rituals. However, non-religious leaders have

similarly mentioned the significance of rituals and diverse communities. Secular organizations can even mirror religious beliefs and practices (Ashforth & Vaidyanath, 2002). In other words, aspects such as communities and rituals are not exclusively used in religious contexts. Ultimately, three characteristics of religion emerged that are both significant for leadership and distinctive for most religions: a deity, a hereafter purpose, and a sacred scripture.

A first distinct characteristic of a religious perspective is the relationship with a perceived higher being. Such a deity is above and beyond the leader. In this relationship, the leader is positioned towards someone, who is not lead by him/her. Instead, the leader may be conceived as a follower of such a God. This affects the concept of leadership, as a leader is thereby simultaneously a follower or servant of this supreme being, to whom the leader is ultimately accountable. It also means leaders act and embody being servant leaders, as they do not only serve their followers, but they are also servant followers in relationship to their God. The fact that a higher being is above the leader and the specific characteristics and understandings of that relationship may shape the leadership approach of the leader towards followers. The perceived relationship has also a potential 'dark side of leadership' (Haynes, Hitt, & Campbell, 2015; Vince & Mazen, 2014), for example, when leaders abuse their power and misuse religion claiming they act as agents of God to legitimize destructive activities. We can observe this empirically, for instance, through fundamentalist interpretations of religions (Miller, 2018).

A second distinct characteristic of a religious perspective on leadership is a hereafter pursuit and purpose. The primary objective is to draw nearer to and to please a God. This does not exclude value creation or values pursuit in this world. On the contrary, religions may emphasize both, to act in this world and pursue a hereafter. However, it shifts the focus and

purpose towards a God and life beyond this world potentially broadening the temporal horizon of a leader. This means that a leader aspires something transcendental, other-worldly and eternal. As a result, religion transmits a distinctiveness to the purpose, which makes it otherworldly or 'extra-ordinary'. It offers a purpose beyond the finite boundaries of this world. However, it may also induce a neglect of this world or simplistic and dyadic categorizations of good and evil, correct and wrong.

At the same time, knowing that a leader has a certain otherworldly pursuit may shape the behaviors of followers. They may, for example, reconsider the implications of the principal-agent problem, whereby the agent may be motivated to act in his own and contrary to the principal's interest. If an organization selects a leader and then faces the principal-agent problem of this leader-agent, religion may shape the leader-agent's behavior. Such a leader might not maximize his/her utility in this world, but rather focuses on enacting truly his/her values and hereafter purpose. In other words, when a leader adheres to religious values and this is recognized by followers, the leader might obtain perceived and/or actual integrity, which can resolve the principal-agent problem.

A third distinct characteristic of a religious perspective on leadership builds on sacred scripture. Such scripture entails divine guidelines for and stories about leadership. Works have considered the leadership qualities of different key individuals in religions such as Abraham (Fischer & Friedman, 2017), Jesus (Jones, 2001; Mabey, Conroy, Blakeley, & Marco, 2017; Manz, 2011), Moses (Ben-Hur & Jonsen, 2012; Wildavsky, 1984), Muhammad (Beekun, 2012), Paul (Whittington, Pitts, Kageler, & Goodwin, 2005) and Solomon (Manz, Manz, Marx, & Neck, 2001). Alternatively, one may look at direct scriptural advice for leaders such as how Moses listened to advice and delegated responsibility (Exodus 18:13-27), more generally the so-called golden rule to "do to others as you would have them to do to

you" (Luke 6:27; Matthew 7:12), to reach out the poor (Deuteronomy 15:7-8; Psalms 41:1-3; Proverbs 28:27; 29:7), or to respect everyone (Peter 2:17). These narratives, recommendations, and commandments inspire and prescribe practice and purpose. A leader may infer how to act through the scripture, which functions as a sacred guideline and a moral or immoral compass. Scripture can thus guide and misguide leaders. The compass may offer a framework for action, which is both somewhat divinely binding to the leader and transparent for the followers.

The three distinct characteristics of certain religions contribute towards the development of a religious perspective on leadership. For and within each religion, there are nuanced differences in their conceptualization and application. For instance, the Christian Trinity doctrine holds that God is the unity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The relationship between a leader and the Christian deity is therefore potentially impacted by the Trinity as well as the fact that Jesus is conceived as both God and man. Similarly, diverse views of an afterlife and its relationship to this world, as well as different scriptural guidelines between and within religions, including their variations and interpretations of texts, requires zooming in on these nuances.

In table 1, I use scriptural examples of the Islamic faith and illustrate how the relationship to God, the hereafter purpose and guidelines and narratives of the sacred scripture shape leadership. Scholars have advanced our understanding of an Islamic perspective on leadership inter alia through historical analysis of leadership succession in early Islam (Campbell, 2008), engagement with religious sources (Abeng, 1997) and empirical analysis of Islamic organizational leadership within a Western context (Faris & Parry, 2011). Beekun and Badawi (1999) have developed a normative model on Islamic leadership based on four layers of Islamic moral character linked to belief, practice, God-consciousness, and love for

God, and five parameters of Islamic behavior: justice, trust, righteousness, inner struggle for self-improvement, and keeping promises. The insights I contribute to with this article are compatible with their model, as both moral character and Islamic practice are shaped by a belief in God, a hereafter purpose, and adherence to a sacred scripture. At the same time, I offer wider applications, theoretical implications as well as reasoning for the potential dark side of leadership by religious people.

Insert Table 1 about here

A belief in a deity, hereafter and sacred scripture may offer guidelines and narratives that help as a stable –but also too rigid– framework particularly in volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous, and even paradoxical moments and times. A religious framework offers fundamental values even when fixed goals may be difficult to define. Woolfe (2002), for example, infers leadership values from the Bible and classifies them as honesty and integrity, purpose, kindness and compassion, humility, communication, performance management, team development, courage, justice, and fairness and leadership development. Religion may provide a source of and for meaning for leaders, whose values they can convey to their followers. While the interpretation may change over time and across space and guidelines may be flexible, the textual core remains rather fixed. The values and meaning may thus offer a leader an anchor on how to lead. This is of particular significance, if other potential anchors are in flux.

A religious perspective also needs to take into account context, for example, the communities, environment, organizations, and traditions. These are not unique components to a religious perspective, but they are integral parts of religion and leadership. Synagogues,

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churches, mosques, and temples offer places of worship, where leaders and followers can come together and form a community. The self becomes embedded in a larger contemporary and historic community. Equally, communities, institutions, and traditions may induce division and social dissonance. Leaders, followers, and their context are shaped by rituals, ceremonies, and social bonds that (dis)connect across time and space.

Followers may also be more or less religiously inclined. They may obtain prescriptions on how to follow and how to enact their relationship with leaders. For example in Hebrews 13:17, people are told to submit to the authority of leaders. Equally, leaders are bound by these guidelines, which are self-imposed due to their beliefs. For instance, Abu Bakr, the first Caliph in Islam, said on the occasion of his first Friday sermon: "O people! I have been selected as your trustee although I am no better than anyone of you. If I am right, obey me. If I am misguided, set me right" (Beekun & Badawi, 1999, p. 45).

It should be added that a religious perspective does not require followers or the organization to be religious, nor does it necessitate the desire of the leader to make followers or the organization religious. There may be a special bond between a leader and followers, if both believe in a or the same religion and acknowledge strategic issues in religious organizations (Miller, 2002). However, the leadership behavior is not dependent on the religiousness of followers or the organizational setting. Leadership is shaped by religion, if the leaders are religious to a certain extent and integrate their religious beliefs and values in their leadership practices and principles.

Two lenses for a religious perspective

Religions comprise both texts and context. Texts are a source for enactment in context. The religious perspective on leadership may hence be approached both conceptually and methodologically from two angles: a scriptural and an empirical lens. The former moves

from texts like the Torah, Bible, and Quran to people and considers proscriptions and prescriptions for leadership. It derives *potential practices* from scripture. The latter analytically moves from people to texts looking at the enactment of religious sources. It observes and analyses the interpreted *actual practices* of sacred texts by religious people.

A scriptural lens analyses inter alia guidelines for and stories of leadership. For leadership theories, these guidelines and narratives are analyzed and understood to have an authoritative and dispositive value for religious leaders. Scriptural rules, narratives, and guidelines are thereby interpreted, institutionally contextualized, and finally wholly or partially enacted. Such an approach determines the selection of sacred scriptures, examines scriptural guidelines, contextualizes them, and identifies specific values and practices. For leadership theory, the entire process is worth analyzing to observe how sacred scripture is transformed into practice.

Leadership advice, rules, and regulations have different sources in scriptures. They may be direct commands or recommendations, which exist as indirect narratives and may be categorized in prophetic and non-prophetic stories. For example, in Exodus 18:21, Moses is advised to select a successor who possesses a fear of God, is a man of truth, and hates covetousness. In Luke 22:26, Jesus advises his apostles that a leader should be like a servant. He himself is a role model, who came to serve (Matthew 20:28). In Proverbs 29:4 a king is described as someone who gives stability to a land by justice. Hence leadership attributes can be derived through these verses.

Certainly, scripture does not stand for itself but requires interpretation. It may even offer what can seem to be incompatible guidance. For instance when a king called Yusuf to himself, Yusuf said in the Quran (12:55): "Appoint me over the storehouses of the land. Indeed, I will be a knowing guardian." He emphasized to be knowing, that is competent, and

a guardian, that is intending to be a protector. Yusuf showed that he is able and willing to lead. We may link this to the hadith (Bukhari 1) that deeds are judged by their intentions. The inner intentions are supposed to be in line with external action. At the same time, there is also the notion in Islam that leadership should not be directly requested and desired. When two companions of Muhammad asked him to be appointed as governors, he responded: "We do not assign the authority of ruling to those who ask for it, nor to those who are keen to have it" (Bukhari 7149).

It is also worth observing who is interpreting these scriptures and how leaders receive, comprehend, and contextualize these interpretations. They may seek expert advice, views from other leaders or interpret and contextualize guidelines themselves. The contextualization finally leads to potential practice, which is commonly enacted only partially by leaders. Often, religious institutions such as churches, mosques, synagogues, and temples have a key role in this process. In addition, it is also of importance whether and how enactment traverses back to religious institutions, which may shape their future guidelines or communication of guidelines.

A second approach examines actual practice. Unlike a scriptural approach, such an empirical lens contemplates on the enactment of leadership by professionals in specific fields like religious managers in secular workplaces or leaders in public organizations. Religious professionals can be interviewed and surveyed about their religious motivations and enactments, or the effects of how religion shapes their leadership can be observed. Leaders of organizations, such as churches, mosques, synagogues, and temples, may form a special group, as their organizations are explicitly religious. An empirical approach would analyze views and observations and incorporate these into an empirically grounded religious perspective on leadership with respect to the particular organizational settings.

The scriptural and empirical lenses are interlinked both in practice and in theory. In practice, leaders are shaped by scripture and influence the interpretation of it. In theory, an understanding of the scripture informs empirical analysis and empirical observations inform a reading of the scripture. In between a scriptural and an empirical lens could be added a focus on authoritative and contextualized documents such as the catholic magisterium, work and practices by eminent figures such as Maimonides, Augustine of Hippo, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, or Al-Ghazali, or sermons offered by priests as interpretations and contextualizations of sacred sources, but not enactments. These works, figures and sermons offer an in-between to comprehend the role of religion in leadership. Overall, the scriptural and empirical lenses offer two different means to conceptualize theoretically and analyze methodologically the impact of religion on leadership. Given this is a conceptual article, I use a scriptural lens to derive implications for theory.

Implications for theory

The distinct attributes of religions shape existing theories of leadership in two ways. They can either inform and refine or transform and modify such theories. In the following, focusing on moral theories of leadership, I illustrate how religion informs ethical and spiritual and transforms authentic and servant leadership theories. I also briefly add its potential impact on other theories of leadership. Figure 1 presents a graphical overview.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Informing existing moral theories of leadership

Ethical leadership is "the demonstration of normatively appropriate conduct through personal

actions and interpersonal relationships, and the promotion of such conduct to followers through two-way communication, reinforcement, and decision-making" (Brown et al., 2005). For religious leaders, what is deemed appropriate is shaped by their faith. For instance, Kriger and Seng (2005) show how leadership is contingent on diverse inner meaning, values, vision, and moral often derived from religions. Similarly, work in ethical leadership has considered the religious roots of many ethical orientations that are directly influenced by religion (Eisenbeiss, 2012). A transcendental pursuit may offer an additional normative reference point. Religious leaders may conceive these reference points derived from scripture as inspirations, binding rules and commands, or recommendations that inform and specify leadership principles and practices. Equally, the belief in a hereafter and a deity may form a sense of commitment for ethical as well as unethical behavior, potentially out of reasons such as love, fear, or respect.

Each religion is likely to have a particular angle that blends in a certain way with ethical leadership theory. For instance, Beekun (2012) identifies the following core virtues to describe character and behavior of Muhammad: truthfulness and integrity, trustworthiness, justice, benevolence, humility, kindness, and patience. Muslim leaders, who wish to emulate Muhammad, are guided accordingly towards virtuous and ethical behavior. For Christians, Jesus' sacrifice on the cross is an essential component of their belief and their conceptualization of their relationship to God.

While scholars have engaged with the role of religion in spiritual leadership (Dent, Higgins, & Wharff, 2005; Fry, 2003; Phipps, 2011), zooming in on the distinct characteristics can offer additional insights. The spiritual is informed by the belief in a deity, the hereafter, scriptural guidelines, values, and views as well as practices and performances. Key components of spiritual leadership, namely transcendence of the self, growth, holism, and

harmony (Ashforth & Pratt, 2003), are qualified by religions. For instance, the transcendence of the self is linked to a transcendent deity and the objective may be to come ever closer to this deity. The calling and meaning of life is related to pleasing a God and seeking a hereafter.

At the same time, a focus on the distinct characteristics may result in leaders losing sight of transcendence towards institutional rigidity. Religion is "a double-edged sword" (Gümüsay, 2016, p. 4). On the one hand, it can offer specificities for spirituality as well as social communities, rituals, and practices that may assist in spiritual leadership. On the other hand, it can move leaders away from spirituality. Either way, the distinct characteristics inform spiritual leadership principles.

Transforming existing moral theories of leadership

Authentic leadership is commonly about internal and external congruence. Authentic leaders enact their own values and beliefs. It is not about others observing one's behavior or attaining a certain reputation, but due to one's own personal intent. At a basic level, religion may offer leaders reasons and values for authenticity. When a God is considered all-seeing and all-knowing, the inner intent of leaders becomes transparent to an external deity. The belief in a God, who knows both the inner self and outer behavior, and specific religious guidelines for behavior impact an authentic leadership style. Awareness of a leader's intent to adhere to certain values for religious reasons derived from sacred sources and possibly for a hereafter pursuit may also instill trust in followers. Equally, an authentic but destructive or fanatic adherence to a religion can cause mistrust and skepticism in followers.

More profoundly, and in line with sociological work, authenticity acts as a matter of conformity to more or less agreed upon criteria from a particular type or category (Carroll & Wheaton, 2009) Religious beliefs and values may form such a social category that demands

authenticity. This implies that a leader conforms and commits to the religious guidelines, i.e. is authentic and consistent vis-à-vis these criteria, regardless of or in tension with the internal-external personal consistency, thereby fundamentally modifying authentic leadership theory. The internal-external personal consistency is substituted by a scripture-external consistency. Followers may then use scripture to examine leader authenticity.

Servant leadership accentuates service to followers. The notion of leaders as servants has often an implicit Christian connotation and background, for instance through Matthew 20:27-28. Similarly in Islam, leadership "is a relational social practice, a process of interaction between leaders and followers which should be based on mutual engagement and trust" (Metcalfe & Mimouni, 2011, pp. 25–26). It is conceived as a responsibility of leaders and a trust (amanah) between leaders and followers (Ali, 2009; Beekun & Badawi, 1999; Faris & Parry, 2011).

An explicit religious perspective may add novel relationships that fundamentally modify servant leadership theory. Humans are thereby conceived as servants to their God. Servant leaders thus become double-servants to both their followers and God. These relationships consequently can shape each other and questions arise about their primacy and significance: do leaders serve both their God and their followers or is there a hierarchy that results in neglecting one for the other? Is serving a deity always compatible with serving followers or are their instances where leaders perceive that they have to decide to serve one instead of the other? In fact, scripture may entail narratives and guidelines not only about how to serve others but also the structural significance and ordering of serving both a God and people. Clearly, the belief in a deity increases complexity to servant leadership theory, as it adds relationships between the higher being on the one hand and the leader as well as followers on the other hand. Moreover, believes and guidelines shape the relationship between leader and

followers, too. In Christianity, the belief that Jesus interfuses these categories as being considered both the son of God and a human being presents a unique angle on the double servitude.

Impact on other theories of leadership

Religion needs to be integrated into other theories of leadership, too. For instance, transactional leadership (Bass, 1990) could be connected to the role of eschatological and hereafter rewards and punishments in religions, whereas charismatic leadership (Conger & Kanungo, 1987; Conger, 1989; House, 1977) may be evaluated through an analysis of the impact of charismatic prophets in scripture. Religion can also provide inspiration, narratives, stories, and advice for transformational leaders who have an idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration (Bass, 1990; Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Social exchange or relational theories like leader-member exchange (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995) examine the dyadic relationship between leaders and followers. Leader-member exchange (LMX) could be amplified to a triadic relationship including a God-entity and by considering the impact of religion on the leader-member relationship. This results in a God-leader-member exchange (GLMX). The perceived existence of a God can thereby impact the leader, the members and the exchange.

In various theories leadership is linked to humility (Morris, Brotheridge, & Urbanski, 2005). A leader is both humble and forceful. For Collins (2001) a great leader combines these qualities as a "level 5 leader", who has a paradoxical blend of personal humility and professional will. Religion may provide a means to deal with this paradox. Inspired and motivated by religion, such a leader is leading for the sake of a God, with God in mind. Both the ultimate guide as well as the value system is not provided by, but rather interpreted and

reflected through the leader. While such a leader may act with strength and will, s/he is also ultimately not the final focal point. This ultimate entity above the leader may provide him/her with humbleness – but also potentially with arrogance and a false claim to a divine right to lead. In the face of an all-powerful God, a leader can find humility, while remaining strong and willful to lead. For instance, Al-Ghazali (1983, p. 49), an influential Islamic theologian, commented: "humility is caused by the awareness that we are always in the sight of God, by awareness of His Majesty and by awareness of our human failings." At the same time, we should note that fundamentalists may interpret the stewardship as a divine legitimacy to use destructive force.

Limitations and future research

This article concentrated on distinct characteristics of religions and how these affect leadership theory and practice. While I provided examples from different religions, I did not elaborate on the intra-complexities of each religion and inter-complexities between religions. Rather I intended to build a parsimonious conceptual understanding as a starting point. In the following, I will outline four areas, which I think would benefit from more conceptual and empirical work.

First, we need to consider the diversity within each religion. While I argue for a uniqueness of a religious perspective, this does not infer a uniqueness of religions. We need to analyze, for instance, how the role of a God, the hereafter purpose and the sacred source diversely impact the understanding of leadership within religious denominations and institutions. This requires a coherent analysis of *intra*-religious differences, such as Orthodox, Reform, Conservative and Reconstructionist Judaism; Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Christianity; Hanafi, Hanbali, Maliki and Shafi'i Sunni and Shia Islam; Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism

and Smartism as Hindu denominations and Theravada and Mahayana branches in Buddhism, as well as organizational settings, and consequences for leadership.

Second, we warrant more comparative analysis on the impact of religions on leadership. Given the diverse specificities of religions, leadership is shaped in different manners. The role of human beings and their relationship to a God, the hereafter purpose and the means of this pursuit, as well as the content of the sacred sources have an *inter*-religious diversity. Kriger and Seng (2005) offer valuable comparative insights into leadership in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Hinduism. Building on these insights, we need to integrate the three distinct components of a religious perspective on leadership with such comparative findings. This calls for empirical research into how the scripture is diversely comprehended and enacted both in religious institutions and secular organizational settings.

Third, we need to identify and examine moderators between leadership and religion. Weaver and Agle (2002) underlined that behavior in business due to religious role expectations is moderated by religious identity salience and religious motivational orientation. Equally, the impact of religion on leadership is likely moderated by organizational factors. The religious diversity of workers, for instance, can impact the explicit or implicit significance of religion on leadership. More broadly, contextual factors influence and interweave with religious ones to shape management and leadership (Forster & Fenwick, 2015). Further research on the type of moderators, the process of moderation, and the size of impact is warranted.

Fourth, religious beliefs, values, guidelines, and distinct characteristics need to be further integrated into theories of leadership. To name a few aspects, religions impact the behavior, cognition, emotion, ethics and identity of leaders. I have suggested some implications in this article, but to more accurately mirror reality leadership theories would benefit from further research.

The specificities of each religion, comparative analysis of religions, moderators between

religions and leadership, and the integration into other leadership theories encompass a large

research agenda. It necessitates both engagement with the sources of religions as well as the

interpretations and enactments. This warrants both conceptual and empirical work, which

identifies patterns of commonalities and differences. It involves comprehending contextual

influences in two ways. First, context impacts religion directly, which may shape leadership

theory. Second, context may frame the setting of leadership (Gagnon & Collinson, 2014) and

thus impact leadership alongside religion. This entails further scrutiny of how a multiplicity

of value systems shape leadership theory and practice. In other words, we need a clearer

understanding of intra-religious, inter-religious, and inter-values systems impact on

leadership theories and practices.

Conclusion

Religions are part of social reality that shape contemporary societies, organizational settings,

and leadership behavior. They are present in religious institutions such as churches,

organizational hybrids with a distinct religious focus like faith-based funds, or secular

organizations with (some) religious managers and workers. Most religions entail a belief in

and relationship to a God, a hereafter pursuit, and sacred scripture. In this article, I considered

how these impact leadership behavior. A deity above a leader is an additional relationship

outside formal organizational boundaries, which positions a leader below another entity. A

hereafter purpose frames actions and activities in this world here. A sacred source provides

religious leaders and followers holy guidelines and meaningful narratives by, for example,

prophetic role models. Importantly, these characteristics have both potentially negative and

positive implications for leadership behavior.

Consequently, I presented two approaches towards integrating religion into leadership. On the one hand, a scriptural lens looks at sacred sources – often interpreted and explained by religious institutions – and their implications on leadership. On the other hand, an empirical lens considers the enactment of religious guidelines, values, and narratives by individuals and organizations, deriving insights for leadership. In between, there is also the possibility to consider sermons or other documents and practices, which interpret and contextualize scripture, but do not enact it directly.

Finally, I outlined how the distinct attributes shape theories of leadership and thus warrant integration. Specifically, I showed how they inform ethical and spiritual and transform authentic and servant leadership theories. Certainly, this would benefit from further research to increase our understanding of the impact of religion on leadership theory and practice. I *believe* wholeheartedly, more is to come.

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Figure 1

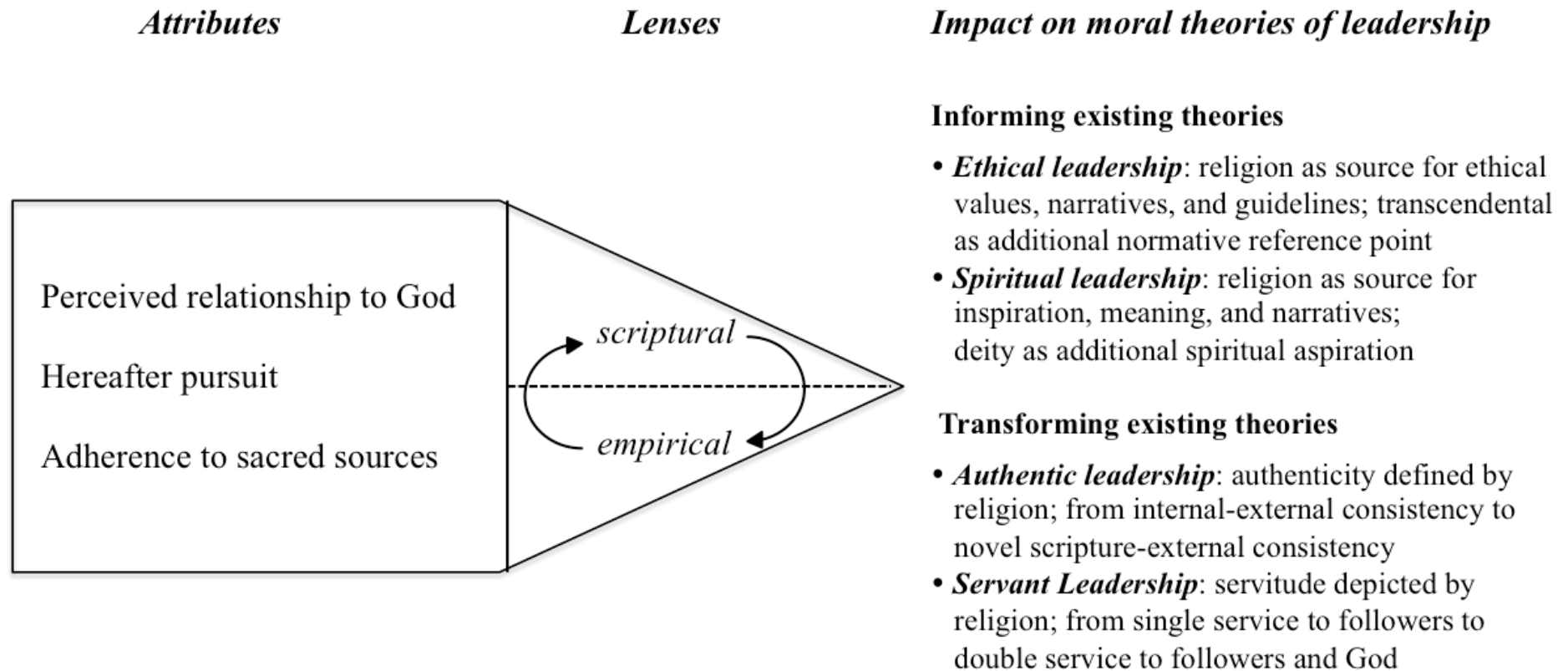**Distinct attributes, two interrelated lenses, and impact on moral theories of leadership.**

Attributes

Perceived relationship to God

Hereafter pursuit

Adherence to sacred sources

Lenses

scriptural

empirical

Impact on moral theories of leadership

Informing existing theories

- *Ethical leadership*: religion as source for ethical values, narratives, and guidelines; transcendental as additional normative reference point
- *Spiritual leadership*: religion as source for inspiration, meaning, and narratives; deity as additional spiritual aspiration

Transforming existing theories

- *Authentic leadership*: authenticity defined by religion; from internal-external consistency to novel scripture-external consistency
- *Servant Leadership*: servitude depicted by religion; from single service to followers to double service to followers and God

Table 1

Distinct attributes and their impact on leadership from an Islamic faith perspective.

Perceived relationship to God	Hereafter pursuit	Adherence to sacred sources
While God is self-sufficient in his being, humans are conceived as dependent and contingent on him. Allah is seen as the one and only God, who is eternal and absolute (Quran 112:1-4). Humans are created to worship God (Quran 51:57). God is beyond human comprehension, yet closer to humans than their jugular vein (Quran 50:16). Through his 99 names, one may infer his attributes such as the All-Compassionate, Sustainer, All-Aware, Loving One, and All Powerful. In Surah 25, verse 63 it says: "And the servants of the Most Merciful are those who walk upon the earth easily, with humility." Leaders are thereby seen as servants of God, who refers to himself as the Most Merciful in this verse. Humans are considered trustees or vice-regents in this world (Quran 2:30; 57:7) with final ownership belonging to Allah (Quran 24:33). This gives them both a role in this world as well as a relationship towards God. In Islam, human beings have a position as trustee of something for someone.	A non-enactment of proper leadership has direct repercussions for the leader. Given the consequences, this can result in more prudent but also more aggressive behavior. In a hadith (Muslim 142d) Muhammad stresses: "A ruler who has been entrusted with the affairs of the Muslims, but makes no endeavor (for their material and moral upliftment) and is not sincerely concerned (for their welfare) will not enter Paradise along with them." Muslims are not supposed to only focus on the afterlife. They may pursue "from the bounty of Allah" in this world (Quran 62:10). However, the ultimate objective is to return to God (Quran 89:28-29). An afterlife linkage of the metaphysical hence shapes both an understanding and behavior in this world and its role vis-à-vis the hereafter.	According to Islamic tenants, leadership is acknowledged, required and performed by everyone in certain situations. Muhammad stated (Bukhari 2751): "All of you are guardians and responsible for your charges (...)". There is explicit acknowledgement of leadership in the Quran in Surah 43 verse 22, where it says: "that Allah has raised some of us above us in rank." A well-known hadith (Abu Dawud 2602) states: "When three are on a journey, they should appoint one of them as their commander." The Quran entails specific guidelines for leaders and people more generally like not to cheat (Quran 17:35) nor to be arrogant (31:18; 57:23), to be righteous (49:13), to act justly (5:11; 6:152; 33:70), to be patient (32:24; 42:43), humble (25:63), competent and knowledgeable (28:14), and to seek advice and consultation (Quran 42:38). People are told to give just measure and weight (11:85; 17:35; 55:9) and to fulfill their contracts (5:1). They are obliged to compensate their workers in full and in time (Ibn Majah 3:16, 2443; hadith qudsi 21). Various narratives offer indirect advice by illustrating mainly, although not exclusively, the leadership behavior of prophets. For instance, Musa (Quran 28:26) and Yusuf (Quran 12:46) are depicted as trustworthy. A special role is conferred to Muhammad, described in the Quran as an illuminating lamp (33:46), and of great moral character (33:21; 68:4). The so-called Sunnah, his doings and sayings, are extensively enacted by Muslims. There are also guidelines and narratives for followership. In one hadith (Bukhari, 7145), Muhammad appointed someone as a commander of an army unit and ordered the soldiers to obey him. The commander became angry with them during the campaign and ordered them to collect wood, make fire and throw themselves into it. They collected wood and made a fire, but they did not throw themselves into it, but responded that they followed the prophet to escape from the fire, so they would not enter it now. The commander's anger abated and the fire extinguished. Muhammad heard about this incident and remarked: "If they had entered it, they would never have come out of it, for obedience is required only in what is good." In another hadith (Abu Dawud 4344) Muhammad said: "The best fighting in the path of Allah is a word of justice to an oppressive ruler." Followership hence requires obedience, but also critical engagement with the behavior of leaders.