

Reaction to *Paul and Luther as Paradigms of Shepherd Leaders*

E. Allen Sorum

The topic that the seminary's Symposium committee assigned to Professor David Scharf posed a challenge. Before our essayist could present on Paul and Luther as paradigms of shepherd leaders, Professor Scharf had to first figure out what those paradigms might look like. Had we asked Professor Scharf to present on Paul's teaching of justification or Luther's doctrine of vocation, we would have come here with an inkling of what he was going to say. It is safe to say that we arrived wondering what Professor Scharf might teach us about Paul and Luther as paradigms of shepherd leaders. And it is double safe to say that we did not expect his topic's outline to come from verse one of "I am Jesus' Little Lamb."

We just heard a superb essay organized under the first verse of "I am Jesus' Little Lamb." When our essayist announced his organizational scheme, none among us fumed, "Here comes another business model of leadership," or, "Here comes jargon of the social sciences." Professor Scharf's paradigms did not come from these places. He reflected upon the words of Paul and Luther who themselves were known to reflect upon the words of Jesus. This was the inspiration for the paradigm before us. As a portion of Jesus' flock of little lamb's, let's begin a reaction to our essayist's presentation.

I am Jesus' Little Lamb (A shepherd leader first recognizes that he is a sheep. Humility is in order.)

Professor Scharf does not use the language of the social scientists, but he shares some of their conclusions. For example, research suggests that followers prefer virtuous leaders. There is no agreement as to what these virtues should be. Nor is there agreement that the leader must actually possess virtue as long as the leader is behaving virtuously. But our essayist's paradigm begins on the chief point that a Christian shepherd leader is above all a true follower of the Chief Shepherd. As a true follower of Jesus, shepherd leaders are reborn and created anew. We've been given the virtue of Christ not only as a garment but as a goal to aspire to.

Professor Scharf's paradigm rightly insists that shepherd leaders listen to the voice of the Chief Shepherd, rely upon the Chief Shepherd, draw confidence from the Chief Shepherd, and find our strength in the Chief Shepherd. These commitments put on display a true humility in the heart and attitude of shepherd leaders who place their faith, hope, love, and firm trust only in the Chief Shepherd. With virtue as this, the shepherd leader will inspire loyal and committed followers. Shepherd leaders want to be Jesus' little lambs. "We must start there and not take it for granted." This secures our eternal future and empowers our present service. The evangelical tone with which our essayist presents this section is wonderfully comforting and empowering.

Ever Glad At Heart I Am (Shepherd leaders are joyfully optimistic)

Professor Scharf's shepherd leader paradigm wants shepherd leaders to display joyful daily living even in the face of trials. Followers will emulate this. The world around us will take notice of this. This is an authentic joy and optimism because it is nurtured in us by the Holy Spirit through Word and Sacrament. This conviction is "infectious." As shepherd leaders currently serving among God's people, we do well to assess—or to ask a trusted colleague to assess—what we are communicating by our attitudes and body language in terms of joy and optimism. To speak bluntly, if it does not appear that our religion is working for us, who would want to participate in it with us? On the other hand, if the life of a shepherd leader displays resilience and confidence and a joyful optimism in the face of trial, followers will be encouraged.

For My Shepherd Gently Guides Me (A shepherd leader gently guides)

Our essayist insists that a shepherd leader will lead his sheep. This leading and guiding involves training, mentoring, developing, appointing, and sending a new generation of shepherd leaders into the Father's harvest fields. A shepherd leader will lead with an attitude that celebrates the "true, pure, and lovely work" that the Chief Shepherd gives to his under-shepherds to do, namely, rescue sinners.

The shepherd leader guides with a gentle and patient spirit. This gives testimony to the fact that the under-shepherd recognizes that he is an agent of the Chief Shepherd. The Chief Shepherd empowers his under-shepherds with Word and Sacrament to accomplish the Chief Shepherd's good purposes. When a shepherd leader's style relies on impatience and violence, he betrays "a lack of confidence in God."

Professor Scharf's challenges the notion that a shepherd leader's congregational members are in place to help him, the shepherd leader, carry out his ministry. No. Shepherd leaders share Paul's concern to guide others into ministry so that "more and more might be involved in spreading the Gospel."

Shepherd leaders, therefore, do not just talk about leadership. They set out with determination, motivated and equipped by the Word, to teach and mentor new leaders for God's Church. Social scientists have observed that good leaders—leaders who endeavor to lead—naturally and automatically produce new leaders. The followers of a shepherd leader under his gentle mentoring and teaching, will become his partners in leading God's people into the mission God has given his people to do. This gives us cause to ponder: If my people are not following me, am I leading them?

Knows My Needs And Well Provides Me (A shepherd leader loves God and loves people by supplying people's need)

A critical component in Professor Scharf's Paul/Luther paradigm for shepherd leaders is the determination to help people "see Jesus." I appreciated Professor Scharf's reference to Luther's Small Catechism in this regard. The Small Catechism continues to this day to help God's people around the world to see Jesus and to share Jesus. The Small Catechism is the primary tool for outreach and adult instruction in a vast refugee community in Kakuma, Kenya. This is a difficult place for scorpions let alone human beings. Yet through Peter Bur's translation of Luther's Small Catechism, our brother, Pastor James Dubol of Kakuma, brought 150 new members into his congregation in Kakuma in one year.

Shepherd leaders themselves need to see Jesus. I enjoyed the observation that “when you are reading his (God’s) Word, you have more of his attention than he has of yours.”

Loves Me Every Day The Same (Shepherd leaders are consistent)

A strong suggestion to all shepherd leaders out there: “NEVER GET FRUSTRATED.” How is such consistency possible for us weak human leaders of weak human followers? “For Jesus, Paul, and Luther, the key was to keep their eye on the prize.” The prize is a faithful preaching of the gospel to win as many as possible for eternity. Professor Scharf’s paradigm reminds us that precious souls are “on the line.” It cannot be about us. It is always about Jesus, helping people to see Jesus, and keeping people in the kingdom of Jesus. This attitude gives our leading a strong foundation. It also protects us from frustration that could follow setbacks, failures, betrayals, and attacks. As I look back on my own time in ministry, I must agree with the message tucked into our essayist’s rhetorical question, “When is the last time your temper paid dividends in ministry?”

Professor Scharf’s family history was a lovely case study of the truth that consistent focus upon God’s mission to save people bears precious fruit.

Even Call Me By My Name (A shepherd leader knows his sheep)

Professor Scharf’s final point—also the last stanza of his youngest child’s favorite hymn—comforts shepherd leaders with the fact that Jesus knows us. The corollary that Professor Scharf draws from Scripture, Paul, Luther, and clear logic is that shepherd leaders will work to know the sheep under their care.

It requires effort for a shepherd leader to know his sheep. Professor Scharf encourages pastors to conduct every member visits. I wonder what encouragement Professor Scharf would have for us who teach in our synod’s schools and worker training programs? In view of the impact of hyper-devotion to social media and electronic devices, our young people need to be known and to be shown how to know others more than ever. Professor Scharf concludes on a point that is critically urgent and relevant for every shepherd leader today.

In a winsome way without jargon or buzzwords, Professor Scharf has conveyed his thoughts on key points touching on Paul’s leadership and Luther’s leadership. Paul and Luther received their commitments regarding leadership from Jesus. It seems that there are exactly the right number of phrases in that first stanza of “I Am Jesus’ Little Lamb.” The organization was tight. There was no fluff in the paradigm. Every point was urgent and valuable. Here is a paradigm we can follow and values we can imitate. We will be blessed if we do.