

THE IMPACT OF WORLDVIEW ON THE PROCESS OF ADMINISTRATION: A STUDY
OF SHONA AND NDEBELE CHRISTIANS IN ZIMBABWE

by

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Summary

THE IMPACT OF WORLDVIEW ON THE PROCESS OF ADMINISTRATION: A STUDY OF SHONA AND NDEBELE CHRISTIANS IN ZIMBABWE

As a Euro-African I wish to explore the validity of the idea that worldview factors are fundamental in determining the praxis of administration. From observation and experience, problems with the practice of administration appear to be generic, rather than primarily personal. (It was noted, however, that personality and temperament also play a role.) The enquiry focuses on Shona and Ndebele Christians in Zimbabwe. As the field of study is Practical Theology and to give a theological foundation for and, perhaps, at least a partial solution to some of the perceived problems, a nascent theological approach to administration is presented, together with proposed training courses in administration and leadership for Bible colleges.

Because the notion of administration is somewhat abstract, a fivefold framework was used comprising Planning, Organising, Leading and Controlling, all performed within Time. Questions on the connections, values, perceptions, expectations and use of these components by Shona and Ndebele Christians were discussed in light of their worldviews.

Although the intended research approach was social construction, the need for the framework undercut this approach somewhat. I also came from a moderately soft postfoundationalist viewpoint, using narrative practical theology. Six Christian leaders as co-researchers – three Shona and three Ndebele; three Pentecostal and three non-Pentecostal – shared their multicultural insights through personal anecdotes and narrative interaction.

Chapter One, in two parts, begins with a personal anecdote and other illustrations highlighting some of the difficulties experienced with administration and its processes in a multicultural African context. The research question – whether worldview shapes the praxis of administration – together with sub-problems, is then outlined. The second section explains the research methodology.

Chapter Two defines worldview and administration from both the natural and Christian perspectives, to clarify their nature and praxis. Some underlying problems are introduced.

Chapter Three explores what constitutes administration in Christian ministry. Here, values and tasks are itemised to reveal the actual content of administration (at least from a local church pastor's perspective) and some assumptions behind it.

Chapter Four presents individual conversations with the six co-researchers. These personal responses begin to highlight the connection of worldview to administrative praxis and some initial issues arising there from.

Chapter Five reflects group dialogues, which allow for cross-cultural and cross-theological views. Gender is introduced as a woman para-church ministry leader replaces a pastor. This provides further fusion of views.

From there, Chapter Six examines the Shona, Ndebele and Christian worldviews in more depth. Two case studies are explored narratively, to identify how worldview factors impact the praxis of administration in specific settings.

Chapter Seven discusses the group's understanding of the Biblical perspective of administration. A tentative theological approach to administration is offered.

And lastly, Chapter Eight summarises the findings, identifies the issues and presents some solutions. The focus for the latter is on possible administration courses for Bible colleges. Although not directly social constructionist, the team affirmed this approach. The intention here is to enhance this training and thus improve administration in Christian ministry for the wider benefit of the Church community.

Key Terms

Administration: The art and science of planning, organising, leading and controlling people and tasks so that the primary objective is accomplished efficiently and effectively. Often nebulous, it encompasses a wide range of tasks which may vary in detail depending on the context and requirements of the work. It is often used synonymously with management and has a strong overlap with leadership.

In Christian ministry, it is identified as one of the spiritual gifts. But, since it is also a natural talent involving skills and capabilities, it can be learned and improved upon; different people thus have varying levels of competence. It is not axiomatic that one with a natural talent automatically has the spiritual gift.

Narrative: A research methodology where the primary data is gleaned from the narratives and discourses of an individual or a community. It listens respectfully to those voices; the participants thus become co-researchers, since their input provides both the content and rationale for the actions being investigated. Although the content is important, the process is predominant.

Ndebele: This Bantu-speaking people group is an off-shoot of the Zulus and is thus found in both South Africa and south-western Zimbabwe. They arrived after internecine war in the 1820s and, on their trek northwards across the Limpopo River, absorbed or inculturated many smaller groups in their hegemony.

Postfoundationalism: A philosophical approach to understanding meaning and reality. It is a counter-reaction to foundationalism (there is only one truth) and non-foundationalism (there is no truth, since one person's interpretation [from their context] is just as valid as the next; hence, it is highly relative.) Postfoundationalism is therefore a middle-of-the-road attempt to provide opportunity for dialogue which the extremes of the other two approaches necessarily exclude. It is clearly aligned to the philosophical notion of postmodernism, a relativity-based reaction to the extreme unitariness of modernism (esp. as espoused by the Western worldview of scientific rationalism [things are only 'rational' if they can be 'proved' by science.])

Practical Theology: A multi-faceted cross-disciplinary social science field focussing on the interpretation and application of theological principles in daily living. It interacts with a variety of other social science disciplines to provide a rationale and 'understanding' for behaviour and attitude within a Christian context. While a sub-field of Theology, it nevertheless interacts with all the other sub-fields and serves as the hub for application.

Praxis: The customary practice or exercise of a skill, art or science.

Shona: A general term for the Bantu-speaking people group dominating south-central Africa. Associated primarily with modern day Zimbabwe, Shona speakers are also found in western Mozambique and southern Zambia. It is the predominant people group in Zimbabwe and, with its dialects, constitutes about 80% of the population of Zimbabwe. A pastoral group, the Shona forebears arrived in the area during the Third Century.

Social Constructionism: A philosophical base that shapes meaning and reality. It is premised on the idea that such meaning and reality is formed by a community that constructs phenomena such as institutions, rules and other social entities that allow the community to define meaning and reality and, thus, to live in harmony. This view of reality is shaped by the context(s) of the community and, therefore, will vary from group to group. The group's social constructs are thus tied to worldview. Social constructionism is also utilised as a research tool that focuses on listening respectfully to what the other has to say to establish and understand the rationale for their sense of meaning and reality. It also involves communal problem solving, as the research is an attempt to help the community highlight issues and find contextually relevant answers.

Worldview: The way one sees reality, interprets the world; the rationale (often unrecognised and unexpressed) for attitude and behaviour. It is a unifying view of life that distinguishes one group from another. It includes culture, tradition, habit, language, logic, assumptions and expectations.

Christian Worldview: The reality as understood, interpreted, articulated and practised by Christians. It is shaped not by human entity but by one's understanding of Scripture and interaction with God. It is not limited by human worldview, people groups, geography, race, gender, language or culture. Rather, it is universal, being adapted and interpreted within human cultures. Indeed, it is also a call to reshape those elements of human culture and worldview impacted negatively by the Fall and the human propensity to sin. As such, it is counter-cultural.