

THE EXTERNAL CALL TO MINISTRY: AN ESSENTIAL FACTOR IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN MINISTERS

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Abstract

This article examines the call to ministry as it relates to Clinton's Leadership Emergence Theory and to the growth process of pastors and Christian leaders. This article argues that the external call to ministry is a vital factor in the development of pastors and Christian leaders because it confirms internal calling, establishes authority and trust, and produces greater confidence. External calling serves as a catalyst for growth in the leader as it provides assurance of God's leading towards ministry, leads to greater effectiveness, and yields perseverance during difficulties.

Introduction

Over the last couple decades, much of the literature on Christian leadership has focused on the character qualities and ministry skills needed for Christian leaders to thrive.¹ Recently, within the topic of Christian leadership, authors have discussed the value and practicalities of developing leaders; however, little attention has been paid to exactly how Christian leaders develop *over time*.² For example, researchers have studied leadership outcomes and topics related to pastoral self-care and burnout yet little research exists on leadership development in pastors and "little is known about the continuing development of pastors as they move through different developmental stages as leaders."³ While a small number of books, articles, and empirical research studies explore important stages and factors regarding how Christian leaders develop, very few have undergone the task of systematizing a theory.⁴ Among these few, J. Robert Clinton's *Leadership Emergence Theory* describes how Christian leaders develop over the course of a lifetime of ministry.⁵

Clinton's theory develops a general timeline of the phases of ministry leadership, details the factors that impact growth, and explains how to process critical incidents that arise along the leadership journey.⁶ *Leadership Emergence Theory* represents a comprehensive, historically conversant, and biblically informed perspective on how ministry leaders develop over time. Some authors argue that Clinton's theory is overly systematized, leaves little room for the diverse working of the Spirit, and has too tightly classified the "organic nature and diverse character of leadership formation."⁷

¹ Examples of this type of literature are: Albert Mohler, *The Conviction to Lead* (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2012), John C. Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1993), Aubrey Malphurs, *Being Leaders: The Nature of Authentic Christian Leadership* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2003), and John Piper, *The Marks of a Spiritual Leader* (Minneapolis, MN: Desiring God Publishing, 2014).

² Robert B McKenna, Paul R. Yost, and Tanya N. Boyd. "Learning Agility in Clergy: Understanding the Personal Strategies and Situational Factors that Enable Pastors to Learn from Experience," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 35, no. 3 (2007): 192.

³ Robert B. McKenna, Paul R. Yost, and Tanya N. Boyd. "Leadership Development and Clergy: Understanding the Events and Lessons that Shape Pastoral Leaders," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 35, no. 3 (07): 179.

⁴ Examples of these are, Thom Rainer, "Five Stages of a Pastor's Ministry," *ThomRainer.com*, October 5, 2013, Accessed May 6, 2016, <http://thomrainer.com/2013/10/five-stages-of-a-pastors-ministry/>. Mark H. Senter III, "Five Stages in Your Ministry Development," *Leadership Journal*, April 1989. Janet Hagberg and Robert Guelich, *The Critical Journey: Stages in the Life of Faith* (Salem, WI: Sheffield Publishing, 2005).

⁵ J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader: Recognizing the Lessons and Stages of Leadership Development. Second Edition* (Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress, 1988, 2012).

⁶ Clinton's prominent works explaining his *Leadership Emergence Theory* are: Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*; J. Robert Clinton, *Leadership Emergence Theory: A Self-Study Manual for Analyzing the Development of a Christian Leader* (Altadena, CA: Barnabas Publishers, 1989); J. Robert Clinton and Richard W. Clinton, "The Life Cycle of a Leader," in *Leaders on Leadership: Wisdom, Advice, and Encouragement on the Art of Leading God's People*, ed. George Barna. (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1997); J. Robert Clinton, *The Emerging Leader*. bobbyclinton.com, 1989.

⁷ Robert Banks and Bernice M. Ledbetter, *Reviewing Leadership: A Christian Evaluation of Current Approaches* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 91.

Yet the theory has remained viable for nearly twenty years. Numerous researchers have used the theory as a template to conduct their projects.⁸

Thesis

Although Clinton's *Leadership Emergence Theory* includes many significant phases and factors in the growth of Christian ministry leaders, the theory overlooks the call to ministry as a noteworthy aspect of development. In particular, external calling as an important element in a leader's growth process is missing. The external call to ministry represents an essential factor in the development of Christian leaders because it confirms the internal call thereby providing assurance of God's leading toward ministry, establishes a special relationship of authority and trust thus enabling greater effectiveness, and produces confidence in ministry which yields perseverance during difficulties.

Outline

After defining the call to ministry, this article will review recent empirical research on ministry leadership that reveals the importance of internal and external calling. This article will then explain Clinton's theory and identify how it overlooks the call to ministry in its discussion of Christian leadership development. Then, this article will describe why external calling is essential in the development of ministry leaders, particularly applying the principles to pastors. The argument will unfold in three sections of evidence. First, the external call validates the internal call, which gives the minister peace of mind that God has equipped him for leadership and led him into ministry. Second, external calling establishes a renewed relationship of trust and authority between the minister and the congregation providing him with focus and confidence that enables greater ministry effectiveness. Third, the external call establishes certainty of ministry calling which generates steadfastness during difficulties and trials in ministry.

The Call to Ministry Defined

Scholars have defined and categorized the call to ministry in various ways. Jeff Iorg defines calling as a "profound impression from God that establishes parameters for your life."⁹ Iorg explains three types of call experiences as 1) the *universal call* to Christian service and growth, 2) the *general call* to ministry leadership, and 3) the *specific call* to a ministry assignment.¹⁰ H. Richard Niebuhr explains the call to ministry as a complex interaction between "person, community, and God."¹¹ He describes four elements of a call to ministry as 1) the *call to be a Christian*, 2) the *secret call* as an inner persuasion to take up the work of the ministry, 3) the *providential call* representing God gifting the minister with the necessary talents and guiding his circumstances, and 4) the *ecclesiastical call* as "the summons or invitation extended to a man by some community or institution of the Church to engage in the work of the ministry."¹² A common definition of the call to ministry includes the dual elements of internal desire and external affirmation. Donald Whitney explains that traditionally the call to ministry has been divided into two parts: the *internal call* and the *external call*.¹³ Whitney describes the call to ministry as God "planting the desire" for vocational ministry into one's life (internal call) and persuading brothers and sisters in Christ that the desire is legitimate (external call).¹⁴ John Calvin

⁸ Examples of researchers utilizing Clinton's theory are Anita Stadler, "Leadership Emergence Theory in the Corporate Context," *International Journal of Leadership Studies* 5, no. 1 (2009): 115-122; Jeffrey S. McMaster, "The Influence of Christian Education on Leadership Development," *Journal of Applied Christian Leadership* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2013): 68-84.

⁹ Jeff Iorg, *Is God Calling Me?* (Nashville, TN: B and H Publishing, 2008), 16.

¹⁰ Iorg, 17-29.

¹¹ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Purpose of the Church and its Ministry* (New York, NY: Harper and Brothers, 1956), 66.

¹² Niebuhr, 64.

¹³ R. Albert Mohler, Donald S. Whitney, and Daniel S. Dumas, *The Call to Ministry* (Louisville, KY: SBTS Press, 2013), 9.

¹⁴ Mohler, Whitney, and Dumas, 9.

explains that together the internal and external call represent the “twofold calling” of the ministers of the church.¹⁵ Calvin describes the internal call as the secret call, “the good testimony” of the heart including a “sincere fear of God and desire to edify the Church.”¹⁶ Calvin explains external calling as the formal and public call of the people of God, the “common right and liberty of the Church” when “those who may have seemed fit are elected on the consent and approbation of the people.”¹⁷

Many contemporary writers reference Charles Bridges in *The Christian Ministry* for a concise definition:

The external call is a commission received from and recognized by the Church, according to the sacred and primitive order; not indeed qualifying the Minister, but accrediting him, whom God had internally and suitably qualified... *The internal call* is the voice and power of the Holy Ghost, directing the will and the judgment, and conveying personal qualifications. Both calls, however—though essentially distinct in their character and source—are indispensable for the exercise of our commission.”¹⁸

Bridges explains the internal call as the Holy Spirit working powerfully in the minister to direct the will and endow necessary qualifications. Internal calling represents God’s Spirit speaking to the heart and inner being of those he has called to serve as ministers. Bridges describes the external call as an accreditation and commission of the church after recognizing God’s work in the minister’s internal calling. In external calling, the congregation evaluates and affirms the character and gifts of the believer who senses God’s leading toward ministry. Spurgeon spoke of the external call as “needful proof” that the will of the Lord concerning pastors has been made known through the “prayerful judgment of his church.”¹⁹ Mohler, Whitney, and Dumas explain that in external calling God uses the congregation to “call out the called” through evaluation, affirmation, commissioning, and joyous celebration.²⁰ Brian Croft defines the call to ministry as both the internal call, a God-given desire for ministry combined with a conviction that one is gifted and empowered by God’s Spirit; and the external call, an affirmation from a local church that one possesses the gifts and godly character suitable for a Christian minister.²¹ Spurgeon, Bridges, Calvin and others in Christian history agree that both the internal and the external facets of ministry calling are essential to a minister’s identity and development.²²

Literature Review

Empirical research on leadership reveals that ministers place great significance on calling. This brief review will organize thoughts from ministry leaders about the importance of calling into three categories 1) calling in general, 2) the internal call to ministry, and 3) external calling.

¹⁵ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Translated by Henry Beveridge. (Edinburgh: The Calvin Translation Society, 1845), 4.3.11 and 4.3.Sections Summary.

¹⁶ Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.3.11.

¹⁷ Calvin, *Institutes*, 4.3.11 and 4.3.15.

¹⁸ Charles Bridges, *The Christian Ministry* (Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1830), 91-92. Contemporary writers who use Bridges as they explain calling: James M. George, “The Call to Pastoral Ministry.” In *Rediscovering Pastoral Ministry*, ed. John MacArthur (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1995), 102-115; Dave Harvey, *Am I Called? The Summons to Pastoral Ministry* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 169; and Brian Croft, *Prepare them to Shepherd*, 15.

¹⁹ Charles H. Spurgeon, “Lecture 2: The Call to Ministry” *Lectures to My Students* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2011), 34.

²⁰ Mohler, Whitney, and Dumas, 15.

²¹ Brian Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2016), 41.

²² Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 41.

The Importance of Ministry Calling

Recent research on pastoral development demonstrates the importance of calling. McKenna, Yost, and Boyd compared significant developmental events and lessons identified from interviews of one hundred senior pastors.²³ The pastors identified key events and important lessons significant to their development such as transitions, training experiences, and handling relationships. The pastors also acknowledged general ministry calling, “knowing that one is called to ministry” as an important event in their development.²⁴ McKenna, Yost, and Boyd classified this call to ministry as the most statistically significant event in the setting the stage category about ministry beginnings.²⁵ A study on clergy and organizational culture revealed that calling plays a significant role in the narrative of many who seek ordination.²⁶ The research found that the divine call represents an important reason why clergy embrace the ministerial vocation.²⁷ McKenna and her colleagues’ study about learning agility in clergy also demonstrates the importance that ministry leaders place on calling.²⁸ The study explored the personal strategies and situational factors that enable pastors to learn and develop as leaders. In the study, the pastors recognized “relying on faith and calling” as a significant personal strategy they utilize to grow as leaders.²⁹

Internal Calling in Empirical Research

Recent empirical research demonstrates the importance of the internal call to ministry. Researchers at Wheaton College studied important factors in maintaining resiliency in ministry by analyzing 398 surveys and twenty-six interviews of evangelical protestant clergy.³⁰ Internal calling phrased as “sense of calling into ministry” was identified as extremely important to pastors in their quest to maintain health, resiliency, and endurance in ministry.³¹ The researchers recorded one senior pastor’s quote about the importance of internal calling, which was echoed by many of the other respondents: “I think the most prominent feature of being a pastor is not choosing the profession but being called of God.”³² Meek and her colleagues noted that counselors should “rejoice” with pastors in their calling and should “respect the monumental importance” pastors place on their calling.³³ Researchers at Seattle Pacific University categorized data from surveys and interviews about how pastors measure their ministry effectiveness.³⁴ The researchers recorded a significant frequency of pastors reporting that an important factor in how they measure their effectiveness in ministry is “faithfulness or obedience to their calling”³⁵ The theme of internal calling resonated throughout the study as researchers concluded that pastors are “driven by a deeply rooted calling to their ministry.”³⁶

²³ McKenna et al., “Leadership Development and Clergy,” 179-189.

²⁴ McKenna et al., “Leadership Development and Clergy,” 182.

²⁵ McKenna et al., “Leadership Development and Clergy,” 182, 184.

²⁶ Terry Grey, “Divine Calling, Organizational Voice: A Discursive Study of ‘Calling’ and How it informs Clergy Organizational Identity,” *The Journal of Adult Theological Education* 9.1 (2012): 44-60. Grey found that their service is “grounded” upon the understanding that they are called by God.

²⁷ Grey, 44.

²⁸ McKenna, Yost, and Boyd, “Learning Agility in Clergy,” 190-201.

²⁹ McKenna et al., “Learning Agility in Clergy,” 195, 197.

³⁰ Katheryn R. Meek, Mark R. McMinn, Craig M. Brower, Todd D. Burnett, Barrett W. McRay, Michael L. Ramey, David W. Swanson, and Dennise D. Villa. “Maintaining Personal Resiliency: Lessons Learned from Evangelical Protestant Clergy,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 31, no. 4 (2003): 339-347.

³¹ Meek et al., “Maintaining Personal Resiliency,” 339. Forty-two percent of respondents experienced a distinct moment of calling and the other fifty-eight percent described a more gradual call to ministry, 343.

³² Meek et al., 343.

³³ Meek et al., 344, 345.

³⁴ Robert B. McKenna and Katrina Eckard. “Evaluating Pastoral Effectiveness: To Measure or Not to Measure,” *Pastoral Psychology* 58 (2009): 303-313.

³⁵ McKenna and Eckard, 307.

³⁶ McKenna and Eckard, 310.

Empirical studies related to burnout also reveal the importance of the internal call. According to Paul Tripp, one sign that a pastor might be headed toward burnout is when he begins to question his call to ministry.³⁷ Pastors struggling with burnout often experience a growing sense of cynicism and disillusionment which threaten to undermine the “very convictions which define their calling.”³⁸ Burnout among clergy represents a danger to one’s sense of life calling.³⁹ Research reveals that burnout often includes disillusionment and a loss of a confidence in the internal call of God upon one’s life—when a “sense of calling erodes.”⁴⁰ Those that experience burnout often have lost their sense of God’s internal calling upon their life and ministry.

The Importance of External Calling

In addition to calling in general and the internal call to ministry, research also demonstrates that the external call to ministry represents an important aspect of the identity of ministry leaders. A study of seminary students found that external calling had a significant influence in their choice of Christian ministry as a life vocation.⁴¹ In McKenna and her colleagues’ study on learning agility the external call to ministry was viewed as a significant aspect of pastoral identity and development. The “affirmation of calling” represented an important situational factor that helped the pastors grow as leaders.⁴² The researchers also identified that “confirmation of calling” through others helped the pastors create strategies to learn from their experiences and develop as ministers.⁴³ Researchers T. Scott Bledsoe and Kimberly Setterlund studied support systems and self-care practices that prevent burnout among experienced pastors.⁴⁴ Looking back on early ministry, these veteran pastors identified support systems that helped them develop. Researchers identified the theme of external calling in the category of early support. The pastors mentioned external calling, the encouragement and confirmation they received from the church, as an important factor in affirming ministry as their profession.⁴⁵

Calling Overlooked

Despite the importance of God’s calling through the internal desire of the individual and external affirmation of the church, it is peculiar that Clinton overlooks this developmental factor in his *Leadership Emergence Theory*. The theory is comprehensive, a result of compiling the trends of the lives of 500 biblical, historical, and contemporary Christian leaders and refined by analyzing over

³⁷ Paul David Tripp, *Dangerous Calling* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 38-39.

³⁸ Jonathan Golden, Ralph L. Piedmont, Joseph W. Ciarrocchi, and Thomas Rodgeron, “Spirituality and Burnout: An Incremental Validity Study,” *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 32, no. 2 (2004): 115. Also notable works supporting this point are Roy M. Oswald. *Clergy Self Care* (New York: The Alban Institute, 1991) and J.A. Sanford. *Ministry Burnout* (New York: Paulist Press, 1982).

³⁹ Golden et al., “Spirituality and Burnout,” 115. Researchers Vaccarino and Gerritsen in their study on self-care explained that even extremely competent clergy may suffer strains while trying to sustain their calling. Tony Gerritsen and Franco Vaccarino, “Exploring Clergy Self-Care: A New Zealand Study,” *The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society*, 3 (2013): 69.

⁴⁰ Laura K. Bernard and John F. Curry. “The Relationship of Clergy Burnout to Self-Compassion and Other Personality Dimensions,” *Pastoral Psychology*, 61 (2011), 150.

⁴¹ Marvin Judy, “The Professional Ministry: The Call, Performance, Morale, and Authority,” *Perkins Journal* (Winter 1977): 23-24. Judy defines the external call as the “ecclesiastical call” according to Niebuhr’s categories. “The summons by some person or persons in the organized church to accept the ministry and to be recognized by the denomination as qualified for the ministry.” Judy studied surveys of over 1,000 first year seminary students and found that this ecclesiastical/external call had a significant influence in their choosing the ministry as a life vocation.

⁴² McKenna et al., “Learning Agility in Clergy,” 194. rely on God and others

⁴³ McKenna et al., “Learning Agility in Clergy,” 194, 199.

⁴⁴ Scott Bledsoe and Kimberly A. Setterlund. “Thriving Ministry: Exploring the Support Systems and Self-Care Practices of Experienced Pastors.” *The Journal of Family and Community Ministries* 28, (2015): 48-66.

⁴⁵ Bledsoe and Setterlund, 54.

3,000 case studies.⁴⁶ Clinton compiled and compared the careers of Christian leaders from many countries, cultures, and eras. Clinton describes leadership development as measuring a leader's growing capacity to influence others as a result of three variables; processing, time, and leader response.⁴⁷ As leaders process events and factors that come their way, those that grow and develop go through a general six stage timeline: (1) sovereign foundations, (2) inner life growth, (3) ministry maturing, (4) life maturing, (5) convergence, and (6) afterglow.⁴⁸ As leaders demonstrate the ability to learn from life experiences and ministry dynamics they experience healthy movement through the stages. Clinton defines this healthy movement as "processing."⁴⁹ Clinton identifies three categories of processing (1) foundational items, (2) growth ministry processing, and (3) proceeding toward unique ministry items. The theory contains around fifty processing items such as leadership commitment, training, gift discovery, ministry conflict, life crisis, mentoring, and handling authority.⁵⁰

Given the abundance of phases with processing items and since ministry leaders view calling as important to their identity and growth, one would expect that internal or external calling would be included somewhere in the theory. Clinton does mention the process item of "guidance" but only in the context of the ability to understand God's leading for ministry decisions or leading groups towards God's purposes with no mention of an early prompting of the Holy Spirit or internal guidance by God toward ministry.⁵¹ Some external confirmation processing items are evident in the theory, yet even within these processing items Clinton does not mention the importance of leaders seeking the confirmation of their internal calling from church leaders.⁵² In fact, out of the over 140 terms in the glossary of *The Making of a Leader*, not one focuses on the general call to ministry, internal calling, the church, or the external call to ministry.⁵³

Why might Clinton overlook the call to ministry as an important developmental factor for ministry leaders? Perhaps calling was not a consistent theme throughout Clinton's case studies as he developed his theory. Maybe Clinton overlooks calling because he does not find the traditional definitions of internal or external calling biblically accurate or required for effective ministry.⁵⁴ Perhaps Clinton does not think that internal or external calling are necessary processing items for all leaders.⁵⁵ Clinton has in mind a wide scope of Christian leaders for which the theory applies such as pastors, parachurch directors, Sunday school volunteers, and small group leaders.⁵⁶ Since Clinton has

⁴⁶ Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*, 13.

⁴⁷ Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*, 22. Clinton's definition of *Leadership Emergence Theory* is "God develops a leader over a lifetime. That development is a function of the use of events and people to impress leadership lessons upon a leader (processing), time, and leader response."

⁴⁸ Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*, 37-40.

⁴⁹ Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*, 35-36, 260.

⁵⁰ Clinton, *Boundary Processing*, 30.

⁵¹ Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*, 110-111, 128. Clinton mentions growing in the ability to discern personal guidance for one's own life but it is in context of guidance for groups later in ministry.

⁵² Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*, 112-113, 103, 116, 128. These external confirmation processing items include a divine contact who provides verification, ministry affirmation as God giving approval to a leader through human expressions of appreciation, and an element within the double confirmation in an important decision as God confirming direction for an important decision through someone else.

⁵³ Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*, 245-264.

⁵⁴ Some authors disagree that internal calling should be required to accept pastors or ministry leaders into their positions, for this argument see Garry Friesen, *Decision Making and the Will of God*, "The Ministry and Wisdom," 317-330. Also, Kevin DeYoung says that he does not see Scriptural support that internal calling is a normative experience. He does not think that it is a biblical requirement for all pastors to have a "powerful, divine, subjective call to ministry that overwhelmingly points them in their God-ordained direction," thegospelcoalition.com, "How Can I Tell if I am Called to Pastoral Ministry" (February 15, 2013).

⁵⁵ Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*, 10. "Leadership is a dynamic process in which a man or woman with God-given capacity influences a specific group of God's people toward His purposes for the group."

⁵⁶ Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*, 10. The theory is "written for all who influence a specific group of people for God's purposes, whether or not they are professional, paid leaders." Clinton mentions many types of leaders for which his

in mind an extensive group of leaders, he may not view internal calling or external calling as applicable to such a broad range of people. Though it is not apparent why Clinton overlooks calling, it would strengthen the theory to include internal and external calling as important process items. The theory should include the internal and external call to ministry because a form of internal conviction and external confirmation should be present in all ministry leaders (1 Tim. 3:1; Titus 1:5). Brian Croft explains the importance of both internal and external calling,

Few today experience this sort of dual calling. Over the last century the role of the local church and the importance of the external call have diminished, and one could argue that even the need for an internal call is seen as less important today as people treat pastoral ministry as just one career option among many. A recovery of the biblical teaching on these matters is urgently needed.⁵⁷

While numerous arguments could be made for both external calling and internal calling as biblical ideas and indispensable developmental factors, the remainder of this article will focus on three specific reasons why the external call contributes to the growth of ministry leaders, with an emphasis on pastors.

Confirmation That Produces Assurance

So why is external calling an essential factor in the development of ministry leaders and how does it contribute to their growth? First, external calling develops ministers because it validates that God has already been working through the internal call thereby providing the minister with an assurance of God's leading and equipping toward ministry. Church confirmation supplies the protection of objective evaluation and the assurance that comes from approved qualifications and ministry readiness.

Affirmation and Protection

The external confirmation by the church protects the minister from self-deception and produces assurance that his inward sense of calling is valid.⁵⁸ Dave Harvey explains that the subjective sense of calling must be "objectively validated" as external assessment becomes an "essential cord" that tethers the pastor and the church to safety.⁵⁹ Charles Bridges observes that a "misguided bias" may take place with the internal call.⁶⁰ Left unchecked without the "necessary and authoritative" external call, people have the potential of making themselves the sovereign judges of their calling.⁶¹ The affirmation from Christian friends, experienced pastors, and church leaders assures the mind that one's desire for the work is of "sound principle" and not simply a feeling, impulse, or "self-deceiving presumption."⁶² External calling protects the individual from self-

theory applies including 1) men and women, 2) leaders in the church and parachurch organizations, 3) professional/paid pastor or directors or nonprofessional volunteers, 4) those paid to lead such as full-time pastors, evangelists, missionaries, missions organization directors, denominational leaders, Bible school and seminary directors or teachers, 5) volunteer leaders in local churches, 6) volunteer leaders in small Christian organizations, 7) Sunday school leaders, 8) small group leaders, and 9) lay people functioning in leadership capacities.

⁵⁷ Croft, *Biblical Church Revitalization*, 41.

⁵⁸ Thomas C. Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1983), 20. Oden explains that the external call—the affirmation of the visible, believing community, aids in avoiding the potential abuses of relying solely on the internal call, "the abuses of self-assertive, subjective, individualistic self-righteousness."

⁵⁹ Harvey, *Am I Called? The Summons to Pastoral Ministry* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 168.

⁶⁰ Bridges, 93.

⁶¹ Bridges, 92.

⁶² Bridges, 100.

delusion as people are often unable to accurately evaluate themselves.⁶³ Because people lack an unbiased view of themselves, the church offers an “honest evaluation” and an “objective view” of one’s gifts, abilities, and character.⁶⁴ This is why Beeley believes that the discernment of the faith community is the “greatest indicator” of leadership potential and success.⁶⁵ Thomas Oden adds that the affirmation of the believing community aids in avoiding the potential abuses of relying solely on the internal call while providing the minister confidence that comes from, “a sense of support, affirmation, and validated calling.”⁶⁶ This church affirmation protects the minister from self-deception and provides the confidence and assurance necessary for further ministry effectiveness.

Assurance of Ministry Fit

Not only does external calling protect the minister from self-deception, it also produces assurance that God has been leading the pastor toward ministry and equipping him to fit the position. Those called to ministry demonstrate biblical qualifications.⁶⁷ Leaders of the church body should possess the gifts and disposition to lead the church. Gifts are given for the common good (1 Cor. 12:8) and for building up of the church body (1 Cor. 14:26). Anyone considering ministry should honestly evaluate “whether God appears to be using those gifts for the sake of the church.”⁶⁸ External calling grants confirmation, testimony, and affirmation that God has called an individual to use his unique abilities and gifts for the whole church. External calling confirms the minister’s qualifications for ministry. Harvey says, “External confirmation gives a man confidence that he isn’t deceiving himself about his qualifications for ministry.”⁶⁹ This confirmation helps during uncertainty by bringing about God’s clarity to the situation. This assurance gives the minister greater confidence that he has been appropriately gifted and equipped for his work. The external confirmation equips the minister with the “mysterious and powerful” confidence in his “ability and suitability” for the job.⁷⁰

It is also important that the minister’s gifts and calling are affirmed by his congregation—the people who know him best. Spurgeon said that “The sheep will know the God-sent shepherd” indicating the importance of the congregation knowing the minister well and confirming him as their leader.⁷¹ Kevin DeYoung emphasizes this aspect of external affirmation of one’s gifts and abilities by those that know the minister as “the most important call.”⁷² Beeley says that “people are the best judges of whether or not they are being fed” and since pastoral ministry works for the well-being of the community, the qualities of effective church leadership represent those most readily perceived by others.⁷³ This is why Beeley believes that the discernment and approval of the community is the “chief criterion” of ministry qualification.⁷⁴ Even Cyprian, the early church father,

⁶³ Croft, *Prepare them to Shepherd: Test, Train, Affirm and Send the Next Generation of Pastors* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 54.

⁶⁴ Mohler, Whitney, and Dumas, 101.

⁶⁵ Christopher Beeley, *Leading God’s People*, 20. Beeley says, “Until we have been shaped, trained, and appointed to our respective ministries, our inward sense of calling can be either true or false when we are left to our own devices.”

⁶⁶ Oden, 20, 22.

⁶⁷ Mohler, Whitney, and Dumas, 87. The authors explain “One aspect of the external, or public, side of God’s call to the preaching ministry is confirmation by others. As your fellow Christians observe your life and service, and compare what they see with the scriptural qualifications for ministry, the Holy Spirit bears witness to them that God has called you, and they tell you so.”

⁶⁸ Mohler, Whitney, and Dumas, 101.

⁶⁹ Harvey, 174.

⁷⁰ Iorg, 72.

⁷¹ Spurgeon, 34.

⁷² Kevin DeYoung, “How can I tell if I am called to pastoral ministry?” *The Gospel Coalition*, February 15, 2013, accessed July 12, 2016, <http://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/kevindeyoung/2013/02/15/how-can-i-tell-if-i-am-called-to-pastoral-ministry/TGC-blog>.

⁷³ Beeley, 19.

⁷⁴ Beeley, 20.

believed that a pastoral candidate must be approved as “worthy and suitable” by the church and should be “chosen in the presence of the people, who have most fully known the life of each one.”⁷⁵ Edmund Clowney explains this process of recognition as joining “the gifts of the man of God to the gifts of the people of God.”⁷⁶ This “mutual sharing and fellowship of gifts” results in growth to Christ’s body.⁷⁷ As one’s own awareness of God’s calling unites with the affirmation of the congregation, confidence builds and the church grows.

Establishment of Authority That Enables Effectiveness

External calling not only validates the internal call thus providing assurance of God’s leading toward ministry, it also establishes a special relationship of authority and trust thus enabling greater effectiveness. This authority and trust contribute to the development of the pastor by enabling him to minister with greater confidence and focus within a renewed environment of mutual commitment.

Establishes Appropriate Authority

When a congregation confirms and endorses the gifts and calling of a minister, this establishes a new level of commitment and authority. Hebrews 13:17 (NIV) says, “Obey your leaders and submit to their authority.” External calling solidifies the relationship between leader and flock by establishing to whom the church will submit and obey. Iorg describes this aspect of the external call as God “infusing appropriate authority.”⁷⁸ Iorg explains that because God’s people expect God-called leaders to lead, external calling enables the pastor to exercise a unique “authority or ability to influence people.”⁷⁹ Niebuhr terms this influence “communal authority.”⁸⁰ This communal authority establishes the minister’s leadership over the local church as its representative. Niebuhr explains that a pastor possesses communal, teaching, institutional, and spiritual authority over a congregation.⁸¹ But Niebuhr believes that communal authority has the “greatest importance” because the congregation grants the pastor appropriate authority to fulfill all the necessary duties attached to his ministry.⁸²

Enables Greater Effectiveness

This relationship of authority supplies the minister with a sense of attachment and security leading to greater ministry effectiveness. Harvey explains that external confirmation gives the minister confidence and allows him to step into the authority of his position having already proved himself, thus “freeing him” to do work of the ministry.⁸³ Harvey explains this result of external calling,

It establishes a secure relationship between people and leader. Everyone involved knows there’s external evaluation and oversight to a man’s leadership and the church’s response to that leadership. The called man of God can then ‘go forward within the fellowship and under the

⁷⁵ Cyprian of Carthage, “The Epistles of Cyprian,” in *Fathers of the Third Century: Hippolytus, Cyprian, Novatian, Appendix*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, trans. Robert Ernest Wallis, vol. 5, The Ante-Nicene Fathers (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1886), 370-371.

⁷⁶ Edmund P. Clowney, *Called to the Ministry* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company, 1964), 86.

⁷⁷ Clowney, 86.

⁷⁸ Iorg, 77.

⁷⁹ Iorg, 77-78.

⁸⁰ Niebuhr, 86.

⁸¹ Niebuhr, 86-91.

⁸² Niebuhr, 86.

⁸³ Harvey, 174.

guidance of the church’...He weaves the cords of inner call, preparation, and confirmation and lashes you to the mast as you set sail for uncharted waters.⁸⁴

God works powerfully through external calling to provide a secure relationship of authority and trust so that the pastor and the congregation together can do even greater things for God. Oden explains that in external calling the minister not only relies on his “private, subjective, and intuitive sense” but also on the more objective fact that the “whole community is saying yes” to one’s ministry and also sending him “out on its behalf.”⁸⁵ After going through a time of evaluation by the church and receiving its blessing, the minister has “no further reason to dwell moodily upon the validity of his or her calling. It is time to say with Isaiah (6:9): ‘Here am I, send me.’”⁸⁶ With the assurance of external calling the minister is free to respond with “unencumbered commitment” and is “set apart for ministry.”⁸⁷

Paul’s words to Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:11-16 highlight that authority and greater effectiveness are results of external calling. Paul encourages Timothy to remain confident in his external calling, character, and abilities so that he can continue to effectively minister in Ephesus. Paul reminds Timothy of the confirmation he received from the church elders and exhorts him to continue to use his gifts with confidence (1 Tim. 4:14). Phillip Towner explains that God’s choice of Timothy’s leadership was verified through prophecy and also publically acknowledged as the elders laid hands on him.⁸⁸ Towner explains the establishment of Timothy’s authority, “both the servant and the congregation were bound to one another in acknowledgment of God’s selection.”⁸⁹ According to Mounce, Paul uses the memory of when his elders confirmed his calling to encourage Timothy during his ministry at Ephesus. In this passage Paul reminds Timothy that “his gifts were acknowledged by the body of elders” and that he “has the gifts to perform the task.”⁹⁰ Thus external calling established Timothy’s authority to lead the church. External calling was the foundation for Paul’s encouragements for Timothy to move forward in greater ministry effectiveness as he taught the Scriptures in Ephesus.

Building Confidence That Yields Perseverance

In addition to providing assurance of God’s leading and enabling greater effectiveness because of established authority, external calling also is an important developmental factor for ministers because it produces confidence which yields perseverance during difficulties. God uses difficulties and trials in the life of ministers to produce godly character and perseverance (James 1:2-4; Rom. 5:3-4). Warren Wiersbe explains that the demands and difficulties of ministry necessitate a definite call as “Men enter and then leave the ministry usually because they lack a sense of divine urgency. Nothing less than a definite call from God could ever give a man success in ministry.”⁹¹ The church-confirmed call of God supplies the minister with strength to grow during fruitful seasons and power to persevere during dark times.

⁸⁴ Harvey, 174-175, 178.

⁸⁵ Oden, 22.

⁸⁶ Oden, 25.

⁸⁷ Oden, 25.

⁸⁸ Phillip Towner, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*, vol. 14, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 1 Ti 4:11-15.

⁸⁹ Towner, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*, 1 Timothy 4:11-15.

⁹⁰ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, vol. 46, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2000), 261. The passage “also provides a strong argument to the Ephesian leaders that Timothy’s gifts were acknowledged by the body of elders, and now they stand under his authority.”

⁹¹ Warren Wiersbe and Howard Sugden, *When Pastors Wonder How* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1973), 9.

A Force of Almighty Strength

According to Bridges, the external call, joined with the internal desire and useful talents, becomes a powerful force of “almighty strength” in one’s developmental process especially in the midst of “all difficulty” and “anxiety” during the course of ministry.⁹² Research on support systems that prevent burnout among pastors demonstrates Bridges’ principle.⁹³ Looking back on early ministry, the experienced pastors identified that external calling help them prevent burnout. One pastor noted that the encouragement and confirmation he received from the church was extremely important, “That’s how God works...the Spirit actually comes through the calling of other members of the church. I have never forgotten that it was me whom they chose for this mission.”⁹⁴ These seasoned pastors identified external calling as an important factor that helped them persevere in ministry.

Paul’s exhortations to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:18, 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6) exemplify how external calling gives confidence and greater resolve during difficult times. Church leaders had affirmed Timothy’s ministry qualifications and character (Acts 16:1-2; 1 Tim. 4:14) yet later Paul needed to encourage Timothy to fan into flame his gift and continue to minister with confidence (2 Tim. 1:6-8).⁹⁵ During a particularly challenging time for Timothy, Paul reminded him of his calling that would give Timothy resolve to “fight the good fight” (1 Tim. 1:18). Mounce explains that Paul used Timothy’s external call to ministry as a “means of encouragement” during this difficult time by exhorting him to persevere in his ministry “despite the opposition.”⁹⁶ These passages reveal that external calling gives the pastor confidence that God has commissioned him for ministry, which becomes especially helpful during difficult times in ministry.

Calling Essential in Dark Days

Clinton, in his leadership theory, recognizes the potential of difficulties to produce growth in a leader. He identifies isolation, conflict, and crisis as three processing items that God uses to develop character and draw the leader into deeper dependence upon Him.⁹⁷ Yet Clinton does not emphasize the strengthening power that calling provides during trials. Whitney goes further than Clinton on this point, explaining that during difficult times a sense of calling acts as “fire in the bones” to keep one in ministry.⁹⁸ Whitney exhorts ministers, “certainty of the call of God is not only necessary for sending you into the ministry, nothing is more essential for keeping you there...there will be dark, heavy days when you would walk away from the Gospel ministry if it weren’t for the bedrock of assurance that you are doing what God Himself has called you to do.”⁹⁹ According to Whitney, confidence in God’s call brings great resolve during difficulties. George explains that this call produces perseverance for the ministry task that “only the power of God can sustain.”¹⁰⁰ During difficult seasons of ministry one can get discouraged, depressed, lose hope, or

⁹² Bridges, 100.

⁹³ Scott Bledsoe and Kimberly A. Setterlund. “Thriving Ministry: Exploring the Support Systems and Self-Care Practices of Experienced Pastors.” *The Journal of Family and Community Ministries* 28, (2015): 48-66.

⁹⁴ Bledsoe and Setterlund, 54.

⁹⁵ George, 106. George provides the example from Acts 16:1-2. Leaders confirmed ministry and character of Timothy so Paul took him along in ministry. Paul reminded him later of the public confirmation (1 Tim 4:14), “Both Paul and the leadership in the local community had seen how God had blessed and used Timothy in local service, so they recognized and commissioned him to serve God in the ministry on a broad scale.”

⁹⁶ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 476, 263.

⁹⁷ Clinton, *The Making of a Leader*, 137-145.

⁹⁸ Donald S. Whitney, “Is it Unusual for a Minister to Question His Call?” *The Center for Biblical Spirituality Blog*, March 10, 2016, accessed May 6, 2016. <http://biblicalspirituality.org/is-it-unusual-for-a-minister-to-question-his-call>.

⁹⁹ Donald S. Whitney, *The Call of God to Preach the Gospel*. Shepherdsville, KY: The Center for Biblical Spirituality, 2016, accessed at <http://biblicalspirituality.org/ministry-resources> article.

¹⁰⁰ George, 105.

even want to quit. The reminder of the confirmation of God's call aids in perseverance during those dark times because it provides certainty that the leader has been placed in ministry by a wise and faithful God.¹⁰¹

Conclusion

Spurgeon told his ministry students, "None of you can be pastors without the loving consent of the flock."¹⁰² Spurgeon emphasized to his students that it would be vital for local church leadership to affirm that their calling, character, and abilities were well-suited for the important work of the ministry. Thus Spurgeon conveyed to his students the essential role of the external call of God upon their lives and ministries. Just as in Spurgeon's time, external calling remains a critical growth dynamic for today's ministry leaders and pastors. Similar to Spurgeon, this article has argued that external calling is extremely important. Clinton's leadership theory overlooks external calling as an essential element of growth. It would strengthen the theory to include internal and external calling as important process items. The external call to ministry is a crucial factor in the development of ministry leaders providing them with much-needed affirmation, confidence, authority, and resilience. External calling opens renewed relationships of trust, security, and commitment between leaders and the people of God. It also serves as a catalyst for further ministry and for greater, more focused effectiveness. When times get difficult, the local-church-confirmed call of God provides the minister with confidence and strength to persevere and grow. External calling is God's gracious work through his people to affirm and sustain his appointed leaders, for the glory of God and the building of his church.

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¹⁰¹ This point is expanded in Iorg, 75-76.

¹⁰² Spurgeon, 34.