

---

---

# Towards a normative theological foundation as a Manifesto<sup>1</sup> for sports ministry leaders

*Noel B. Woodbridge*  
*South African Theological Seminary*  
*GLENSTANTIA*  
*Noel@sats.edu.za*

*Timothy Tucker (Corresponding author)*  
*Faculty of Theology*  
*North-West University*  
*POTCHEFSTROOM*  
*timtuckersa@gmail.com*

*George A. Lotter*  
*Faculty of Theology*  
*North-West University*  
*POTCHEFSTROOM*  
*George.lotter@nwu.ac.za*

---

<sup>1</sup> Tucker (2016:109) has coined the term SCRIPTURAL MANIFESTO FOR SPORTS MINISTRY LEADERS. The rationale being that when one believes something passionately, one calls it a manifesto. The authors strongly believe that sport is a powerful vehicle for creating personal and social change. Hence the urgent need for leaders to be provided with a Scriptural foundation for implementing an effective and sustainable sports ministry in South Africa.

## **Abstract**

*The central focus of this article is to show that a normative theological foundation for sports ministry leaders as a Manifesto should be developed. Seeking a normative theological foundation for sports ministry is a relatively new field of research. Most authors on the subject acknowledge that the sports ministry movement has developed without a clearly articulated theology of sport. The aim of this article is, therefore, to develop a normative theological foundation to address this challenge. This is conducted through providing a short exposition of five passages of Scripture that may be used as points of departure and contribute towards a Manifesto for sports ministry leaders. For each of the five passages the focus is on three primary elements of the exegesis, namely, a) why the passage was chosen, b) the relevance of the passage for sports ministry leaders today, and c) basic theological principles that can be derived from each pericope. Finally, the article proposes a normative theological Manifesto (derived from the exposition of the five passages) for sports ministry leaders that will be able to guide and help to equip them for a sustainable sports ministry.*

## **Opsomming**

### **Op weg na 'n normatiewe teologiese fundering tot 'n Manifes vir sportbedieningsleiers**

*Die sentrale fokus van hierdie artikel is om aan te toon dat 'n normatiewe teologiese fundering vir sportbedieningsleiers as 'n Manifes ontwikkel behoort te word. Die vraag na 'n normatiewe teologiese fundering vir sportbediening is 'n relatiewe nuwe terrein van navorsing. Die oorwig van outeurs oor hierdie onderwerp erken dat die sportbedieningsbeweging ontwikkel het sonder 'n duidelike teologie van sport. Die doelwit van hierdie artikel is derhalwe om 'n normatiewe teologiese fundering te ontwikkel om dié uitdaging aan te pak. Die metode wat gebruik is, is om kort verklarings te gee van vyf Skrifgedeeltes wat moontlik gebruik kan word as vertrekpunte en om 'n bydrae te lewer tot 'n Manifes vir sportbedieningsleiers. Vir elkeen van die vyf gedeeltes wat hanteer is, is die fokus telkens op drie hoofsaake van die eksegesis, naamlik a) hoekom die gedeelte gekies is, b) die relevansie van die gedeelte vir*

*sportbedieningsleiers van vandag en c) basiese teologiese beginsels wat uit elke perikoop afgelei kan word. Ten slotte stel die artikel 'n normatiewe teologiese Manifesto voor (afgelei uit die verklaring van die vyf gedeeltes) vir sportbedieningsleiers wat hulle kan rig en help toerus vir 'n volhoubare sportbediening.*

## Keywords

**Normative, Theological foundation, Manifesto, Sports ministry, Sports ministry leaders**

## Sleutelsterme

**Normatiewe, Teologiese fundering, Manifesto, Sportbediening, Sportbedieningsleiers**

## 1. Introduction

The central focus of this article is to provide a normative theological foundation as a Manifesto for sports ministry leaders.

In a recent unpublished study, Tucker (2016:109) has indicated that a Manifesto for sports ministry leaders should be developed to provide a theological foundation for effective and sustainable sports ministry. What follows in this article is a reworking of the normative part of the study.

Tucker followed the Practical Theology model of Osmer, which is widely used in South Africa as guiding paradigm for Practical Theology (for example Meekins, 2015; Oldewage, 2014). This article considers the third step in Osmer's model, namely the normative task (Osmer, 2008:29), which seeks to answer the question, 'what ought to be going on'?

Smith, in his review of Osmer's book, *Practical Theology*, highlights that Osmer advocates for 'prophetic discernment' in the normative task which involves, a) theological interpretation, b) ethical reflection and, c) good practice (cf also Smith, 2010:6). Smith (2010:8) states that he would like to see a greater emphasis on the role of Scripture in the normative task. Although recognising that the other elements of prophetic discernment are important in the normative task, this article focuses on Scripture as providing a normative foundation for sports ministry leaders. As shall be demonstrated, this is a critical phase in the task of seeking to equip leaders for effective and

sustainable sports ministry. The culmination of this article is the compilation of a Manifesto as a normative theological foundation for sports ministry leaders.

## 2. The Scriptural/theological context

### *Background*

Seeking a normative theological foundation for sports ministry is a relatively new field. As Tucker and Woodbridge (2012:16) have shown, sports ministry has burgeoned as a movement since the 1950s, firstly in the West, and, more recently, in developing contexts. However, most authors on the subject acknowledge that the sports ministry movement has developed without a 'clearly articulated theology of sport' (Mathisen, 2008:34). Given the lack of historical writing and of reflection on the subject of sport and leisure, one must agree with Shafer (2012:105) that Christian leaders and theologians have simply not deemed it a subject worthy of serious theological reflection and discourse (Treat, 2015:392). This has resulted in, 'a uninformed, folk-style amalgamation of ... biblical metaphors, athletic anecdotes or quotes, and pop psychology' (White, 2011:7) disguising itself as a theology of sport. The outcome of "uninformed" theology has been a hotchpotch of theological views concerning sport, from those who consider it "of the devil", to those who justify it simply because the Apostle Paul said that "physical training is of some value" (1 Timothy 4:8). However, as Christianity has begun to focus more attention on sport over the past two centuries (Shafer, 2012:96), it is surprising that greater attention has not been given to the development of a theological foundation (Ladd & Mathisen, 1999:214). In the 1990s, Higgs (1995:288) gave the stinging criticism that the trademark of the sports ministry movement is 'anti-intellectualism'. Weir (2011:1) expresses concern that sports ministry continues to grow 'without an underlying theology or redemptive critique of it'. It is generally true that historically the church and theologians have been largely silent regarding sporting competition (Weir, 2008:2). Yet, given the role of sport in the world today, it is clearly a subject that 'merits serious theological reflection' (Shafer, 2012:2) and the church needs to move from a 'negligent attitude' (Shafer, 2012:96) towards meaningful engagement. Weigand (2011:172), in his examination of the church's attitude towards sport in South Africa, expresses concern that this process has not taken place and is largely the reason behind the slow adoption of sports ministry by the church in South Africa.

Linville (2014:371) argues that although sports ministry itself can no longer be considered a new phenomenon, it needs to be 're-envisioned through solid theological truths and biblically based philosophical principles'. He goes on to underline that the methodological models of sports ministry need to be based on a solid biblical and theological foundation (Linville, 2014:373).

An additional challenge is that there is certainly disparity between the 'normative values of evangelical Christianity' and the 'normative values and expectations of the dominant sport culture' (Weir, 2008:2). Therefore, the normative theological task serves a dual function of not only to develop a theological foundation for the development of sports ministry (Linville, 2007:42), but also to lead to an examination and critique of contemporary sports culture. This approach should give consideration to sports ethics and seek to provide models of best practice for sports ministry leaders.

In seeking to answer Osmer's (2008:29) question 'what ought to be going on', the normative task seeks to address the challenge of the dearth of theological engagement with sport, and provide a scriptural foundation that can be applied theologically to the various paradigms and methods that sports ministry leaders utilise. This article builds upon much of the good work that has been done in this regard over the past 30 years, as sports ministry focused organisations and networks, such as the International Sports Coalition, have encouraged the development of theologically based sports ministry. However, Linville (2014:371) argues that the sports ministry movement is showing signs of fatigue which can be correlated to the lack of a solid practical theological foundation. Developing a normative scriptural foundation will seek to address these challenges and move towards providing theological and scriptural interpretation, which in turn will provide a foundation for equipping leaders for effective and sustainable sports ministry.

### **3. Scripture in the normative task**

Osmer (2008:135) defines the normative task of Practical Theology as involving 'prophetic discernment'. He goes on to state:

Prophetic discernment is the task of listening to this Word and interpreting it in ways that address particular social conditions, events, and decisions before congregations today. Such discernment is a matter of divine disclosure and theological interpretations in the face of popular or official theologies that may be leading the world toward disaster.

The key purpose of this article, therefore, is to approach and 'listen' to Scripture in such a way that it enables prophetic discernment in the application to equip leaders for effective and sustainable sports ministry. One of the potential challenges when addressing Scripture as normative for sports ministry is that the Bible itself does not provide clear teaching on whether sport or competition, 'are ordained or not ordained, approved or commanded or not commanded by God' (Linville, 2007:25). Oswald (2003:34) calls this the 'silence of Scripture' but maintains that the silence of Scripture is an argument for Christian engagement in sport because it is not specifically condemned (Oswald, 2003:34). Following a discussion on the silence of Scripture, Tucker (2011:99) concludes:

The danger with focusing on the silence of Scripture as an argument for sports ministry is that it is open to abuse. In particular, verses must not be taken out of context and twisted to condone actions and attitudes within sport that are ungodly. The role sport plays in society, and the Christian attitude towards sport, need to constantly be tested against the whole testimony of Scripture.

This reality is that the church has historically held varying views on the biblical and theological merits of sport (Shafer, 2012:96). Wiegand (2011:162) underlines that the Bible has no didactic commands or teaching with regards to sport or sports ministry. However, this does not in itself mean the Scriptures cannot provide a normative foundation for sports ministry leadership as, quite clearly, there are many cultural activities and missional strategies in the 21st Century that are not mentioned in Scripture (e.g. showing evangelical films). The key approach of this article is, therefore, to apply theological reflection on what God has revealed in Scripture, and apply it to sport ministry praxis (White, 2011:13).

This article is written in the belief of the sufficiency of Scripture as containing 'all the words of God we need for salvation, for trusting him perfectly, and for obeying Him perfectly' (Grudem, 1994:127). Scripture contains 'all we need for faith and life' (Peppler, 2000:43) and provides the normative foundation for Jesus Christ's life and ministry (Milne, 1993:2000). However, it is recognised that applying Scripture as normative into the context of sports ministry leadership is an interpretive task. Bennett (2016:3) argues that practical theology requires 'thoughtful, persuasive and hermeneutically sophisticated use of the Bible'. This necessitates engagement with what Bennett (2016:5) terms 'both poles of the interpretive task – modern context and ancient text'. This article will move between both poles through a summary exegesis of key scriptural texts and theological application to the context of sports ministry leadership, therefore entering 'the hermeneutical circle of text and life' (Bennett, 2016:10).

Van der Walt (2007) and Newbigin (1989) have provided helpful guidance into the approach that this article has taken. Van der Walt (2007:27) begins with the premise that God has revealed himself in history through the facts that have been recorded in the Bible. However, these are not just historical documents, but God 'still has a message for our times'. Van der Walt (2007:28) proposes a process of interpretation that he calls 'history of revelation' to ensure that the interpreter does not take shortcuts in the hermeneutical task:

Firstly, go back in history to the situation as it was at the time of the passage that you are studying, and ask yourself: What was God's message with what happened, to the people of those days? Secondly, then – and only then! – return to today, and ask yourself: What does God want to say to us, here and now, in our present times and circumstances?

Likewise, Newbigin (1989:8) challenges interpreters of Scripture to acknowledge their presuppositions and admit that interpretation cannot be done in isolation from church tradition; indeed, the 'study of Scripture takes place within the continuing tradition of interpretation' (Newbigin, 1989:53). Therefore, it is critical that the normative task seeks to appropriate Scripture in a way that facilitates application into the context that sports ministry leaders operate. Newbigin (1989:98) summarises it thus:

The important thing in the use of the Bible is not to understand the text but to understand the world through the text ... What is required ... is that one lives in the text and from that position tries to understand what is happening in the world now.

## **Five relevant passages of Scripture which may be used as guiding principles for a Manifesto**

What is presented here is a summary of a full exegesis that was conducted by Tucker (2016) of five passages of Scripture that contribute towards the Scriptural Manifesto for sports ministry leaders presented below. This article will focus on three primary elements of the exegesis, namely, a) why the passage was chosen, b) the relevance of the passage for sports ministry leaders today, and c) basic theological principles that can be derived from the pericope.

The passages of Scripture chosen for this study were selected on the basis of the following criteria:

- They have been highlighted by contemporary sports ministry authors as providing a biblical foundation or mandate for sports ministry.

- They make a significant contribution towards a theological foundation for sports ministry in the 21st Century.
- They provide complimentary insights to the other passages that have been chosen.
- They each fall within a different genre of Scripture (i.e. Pentateuch, Prophets, Gospels, Epistles) thus giving a sweep through the whole of Bible history.

The five passages of Scripture that have been chosen because they comply with one or more of the above criteria are: Genesis 1:26-28, Isaiah 61:1-3, Matthew 28:18-20, Romans 12:1-2 and 1 Corinthians 9:19-27.

## **Genesis 1:26-28**

### **Why the passage was chosen?**

Stuart Weir (2000:24) states that “The starting point for any theology of sport is ‘Who is God and what does he do?’” Genesis, as the book of origins, is therefore the correct place to start when seeking to provide a biblical/theological foundation for sports ministry (Weir, 2008:5). Together with Weir (2000), McCown and Gin (2003), Daniels and Weir (2004), White (2011), Treat (2015), the normative foundation proposed in this article begins with key principles drawn from examining the Creation account. This article specifically focuses on the pericope of Genesis 1:26-28, which presents the account of God creating humanity, and highlights God’s initial intent regarding the nature of His relationship with humankind, and the responsibility given to humanity as stewards of creation (McCown & Gin, 2003:36).

### **The relevance of the passage for sports ministry leaders today**

Although God did not create sport, Genesis 1:26-28 affirms that God did create human beings with a capacity to invent games and for play, and gives a foundation and framework for the role of sport in human society (Weir, 2008:5). It is ultimately through the lens of the work of Christ on the cross that all Christians can truly understand Genesis 1:26-28 and apply the pericope to the function and role of leadership in sports ministry. Creator God has redeemed humanity through Jesus Christ, restoring the broken relationship which is apprehended through faith and trust. Therefore, the Gospel message finds its foundation and origin in Genesis 1 (Brueggemann, 1982:26), and the mandate to be God’s co-workers is fulfilled through Christians being co-heirs with Christ and God’s ambassadors to the world (2 Corinthians 5:20).



Understanding humanity's origins has implication for both moral conduct and ethical concerns. The apostle Paul demonstrates that our call to holiness is directly linked to being created in God's image (see Eph. 4:24; Col.3:10). Therefore, as contemporary Christians uphold the doctrine of *imago Dei*, they will not only be able to affirm mankind's place in the created order (Simango, 2006:1), but also find the necessary motivation and spiritual authority to grow in righteousness and holiness. This in turn will have an ethical outworking. Choong (2008:30) identifies that, 'Humanity in the *Imago Dei* is not to be dehumanised or brutalised for the sake of economic expedience, self-preservation and self-glorification ... or by following the philosophy of survival of the fittest'. Rather, those who have experienced the re-creating power of Christ, should seek to be good stewards of the world's resources, recognising that all humanity is equal, and seeking justice for all (Gregory, 2003:19). Any human activity that degrades the dignity of the *imago Dei* should be regarded as contrary to God's will and wholeheartedly condemned by Christians (Drane, 1987:252). White (2011:121) makes this application directly to the ethical basis for sports ministry when he states,

Sport as a human performance derives its meaning from the fact that this embodied and physical activity is upheld by God through his creational laws. Athletes as human beings are created by God, who gives them a reality of their own with powers specific to human reality. Since these delegated powers are from God himself, it is reasonable to infer that they are ordered and structured for good ends.

Genesis 1:26-28 also gives Christians engaged in sport a sense of purpose, as stewards within the created order of sport. Paul states in Ephesians 2:10 (NIV) that 'we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do'. Therefore, as Christians discover and fulfil their purpose, they experience the joy of living a life worthy of the Lord, bearing fruit, and growing in the knowledge of God (see Colossians 1:10; Choong, 2008:39). When applied to sport, this provides a fresh perspective focused on seeking to please God in and through the activity of sport (Daniels & Weir, 2004:8).

Tyler (2003:64) gives the following summary of the importance of this pericope for Christians today:

To know that we bear the image of God is revolutionary! It is transforming truth. We could never know it for sure without revelation, although we might suspect that the profound differences between ourselves and animals must have an explanation! This truth should affect every aspect of our lives and every area of thought.

### **Basic theological principles that can be derived from the pericope**

In summary, it can be stated that the following theological principles that emerged from Genesis 1:26-27 can be utilised to provide a scriptural/theological foundation for leaders in sports ministry:

- God intentionally created human beings as the pinnacle of His creation. The origin of humanity is with God who invites us to live in relationship with Him which requires a response of faith and trust, demonstrated in worship and obedience. Ultimately, engagement in sport should be a medium through which one's relationship with God is demonstrated and developed.
- Being made in the image of God is a revolutionary theology that gives sports ministry leaders dignity and worth, but also moral and ethical responsibility. Sports ministry leaders acknowledge that the gift and talent of sport comes with a responsibility to discern and exercise God's purpose in the world.
- God has entrusted mankind with the task of stewarding the world. Sports ministry leaders, in dependence upon God, must provide proactive stewardship within the created order of sport, seeking to redeem it to God's original intent. The mandate to 'rule' provides human beings with a purpose that enables them to find fulfilment and joy through serving the Lord in His world.

### **Isaiah 61:1-3**

#### **Why the passage was chosen?**

Isaiah 61:1-3 was chosen as a representative pericope to provide a contribution from the Old Testament prophets that was written in the expectation of the redemptive work of God's chosen Messiah. The prophetic literature of the Old Testament is rarely referred to in sports ministry writing, and therefore this exegesis contributes fresh material to a biblical/theological foundation. Additionally, Isaiah 61:1-3 contributes as an important passage of Scripture because, (a) Jesus Christ quoted this passage at the commencement of his public ministry (Luke 4:18-19); (b) it provides an eschatological perspective to underscore the important theme of the redemptive work of sport; (c) it provides a framework for the social transformative work of sports ministry – an emphasis that came through in several of the interviews contained in chapter 2.

#### **The relevance of the passage for sports ministry leaders today**

The redemptive history outlined in this pericope has deep implications for the equipping of leaders for effective sports ministry. Christians can

correctly identify this passage of Scripture as foundational in understanding and applying the work of Christ and in defining the redemptive power of the Gospel. Webb (1996:33) has correctly identified a gospel movement in the book of Isaiah which requires a 'great missionary movement of gospel proclamation and invitation'. Isaiah 61:1-3 is a clear mandate for gospel proclamation, to expound the call of redemption, justice and righteousness to all peoples and to make God's glory known among the nations (see also Isaiah 66:19-21). This pericope presents a holistic presentation of the Gospel that challenges sports ministry leaders to recognise their task as moving beyond merely presenting a message, but seeking to partake in the 'cosmic' scope of Christ's redemption, 'bringing reconciliation to both individuals and systems' (Corbett & Fikkert, 2012:79). The task of redemption is therefore to join God in His mission of seeking the 'annulment of sin and the effort toward the progressive removal of its effects everywhere' (Wolters, 2005:83), which includes the world of sport.

The Israelite readers were assured that the building work would be completed because of God's redemptive work; that they would no longer live in shame, but would bring glory to God in Zion (see 61:7). In the same way, Isaiah 61:1-3 is a call for leaders who engage in sports ministry to become oaks of righteousness and to embark on faith-filled, 'Spirit-empowered preaching of the gospel' (Webb, 1996:235), a work that has eternal consequences within God's plan of salvation for the whole world (Wolters, 2005:131). This proclamation should be integrated with justice for the oppressed and reflect God's priority for the poor, the true inauguration of the year of Jubilee. The implication is that there may be much in the contemporary world of sport that oppresses the poor, keeps people in bondage, and needs redemption (Weir, 2008:2). Rather than moving away from these challenges, Christian sports ministry leaders need to recognise a Christ-centred mandate to engage in ways that 'bring redemption to the sports person and sports culture' (Linville, 2014:2198).

### **Basic theological principles that can be derived from the pericope**

In summary, it can be stated that the following theological principles emerged from Isaiah 61:1-3:

- Sports ministry leaders are called to become part of God's redemptive mission through Spirit-anointed proclamation of the good news of God's redemptive plans.
- Sports ministry leaders have a mandate to proclaim the Gospel which includes a priority to seek justice for the poor, the marginalised and those in both physical and spiritual captivity.

- Sports ministry leaders should be seeking a two-fold fruitfulness from their Spirit-empowered redemptive proclamation: the moving of God's people towards righteousness which in turn results in the glorification of God.

## **Matthew 28:18-20**

### **Why the passage was chosen?**

Matthew 28:18-20, known as the Great Commission (Mahloko, 2015:24), has been defined by Garner (2003:18) as the 'driving force' that 'defines God's mission' for those involved in sports ministry. By this phrase, Garner is correctly ascribing a foundational status to this passage of Scripture in any biblical basis for sports ministry. Indeed, Wiegand (2011:155) includes the Great Commission within his definition of sports ministry, highlighting the goal of sports ministry which includes the 'specific intention to ultimately win them [people within a sport context] over for Christ'.

Matthew 28:18-20 provides integral direction and motivation for sports ministry leaders. In particular, this passage provides a missional approach that should help sports ministry leaders to focus on following Jesus Christ's instruction to raise disciples in and through sport.

### **The relevance of the passage for sports ministry leaders today**

Although the Great Commission was delivered by Jesus Christ to just eleven people, it is clear that they were serving as representatives of all who would become followers of Christ, 'in perpetuity until Jesus returns' (Turner, 2008:691). Additionally, the apostles are viewed not just as representatives of believers, but of the entire church called to baptise and teach new disciples that were entering Christian fellowship expressed through local churches (Turner, 2008:690). Contemporary sports ministry leaders, as members of Jesus Christ's church, therefore continue the legacy of the Great Commission. Mahloko (2015:22) is correct in stating that The Great Commission calls the contemporary church to a 'missionary vision' and 'provides the paradigm for the ministry of the local church'.

The central application of Matthew 28:18-20 for sports ministry leaders today is to recognise their role and function as being shaped by the Great Commission and defined by the call to be disciple-makers. Therefore, leaders in the 21st century church need to recognise that one of their primary functions is to train and mobilise believers to be reproducing disciples for Jesus Christ, not just in their own neighbourhood, but by going to all nations

(Adu, 2014:88). The call to 'make disciples of all nations' should also shape the nature of contemporary mission through sports. Mahloko (2015:26) again makes a very important point that a disciple is not just someone who attends church, but someone who follows Jesus Christ's commands 'without compromise'. And one of Jesus Christ's commands is to 'go and make disciples of all nations'!

The mandate of the Great Commission is to 'Go and make disciples of all nations' (Mt. 28:19-20). To make disciples of all nations, the church needs to multiply biblical disciples who are willing to be and to make other disciples.

Just as the Commission to the eleven is the same Commission to the church today, so contemporary sports ministry leaders can take great encouragement that Jesus Christ's promise still stands, that He is with them just as He was with the eleven, and will be with each subsequent generation until the end of the age (Hagner, 1995:889).

### **Basic theological principles that can be derived from the pericope**

In summary, it can be stated that the following theological principles emerged from Matthew 28:18-20:

- Sports ministry leaders must focus on Jesus Christ. The Great Commission is central to developing a Christocentric theology. Jesus Christ is presented as victorious over death, having been given all authority 'in heaven and on earth', and commissions His followers to mission. He is also the focus of mission as followers baptise disciples into His name and teach them to obey His commands. Jesus Christ also sustains the church throughout history and will return at the end of the age. Therefore, any theological system that is not centred on the Deity, Lordship and Sovereignty of Jesus Christ, is to be rejected.
- Sports ministry leadership should develop cross-cultural mission. The Great Commission provides clarity and definition to God's eternal redemptive plan. The church is called to reach all Nations with the Gospel. God's desire is equal for all people, and the message of salvation is to reach to the ends of the earth.
- Sports ministry leaders should develop disciples. The goal of mission is that people will learn to live in obedience to Jesus Christ. Through understanding His teachings, they will be able to love God (expressed through faith, worship and obedience), and love their neighbour as themselves (Matt. 22:37ff).

## **Romans 12:1-2**

### **Why the passage was chosen?**

Daniels and Weir (2004:34) cite Romans 12:1-2 as critical for a Christian understanding of how a sportsperson is to utilise his or her talent in God's service. Tucker (2009:98) terms this the 'sacrifice principle' for sports ministry. Weir (2000:31) argues that this passage demonstrates that participation in sport can provide an avenue of worship to God. This exegesis of Romans 12:1-2 explores these themes and derives theological principles that can be applied to leaders engaging in sports ministry.

### **The relevance of the passage for sports ministry leaders today**

This passage is extremely relevant for sports ministry leaders who need to heed the teaching and apply it, as God's Word, within their context (Moo, 1996:22).

The first application that one must make is that this passage debunks any form of contemporary dualism that exists within the church's attitudes towards sport. Although Paul wrote in a context of prevailing Greek dualism that viewed the spirit/mind as of greater value than the physical/body (Stott, 1994:322), he clearly teaches an integrated body/mind theology in which the whole person is engaged in worshipping God (Dunn, 1988:714). This, therefore, means that the notion of a mind/body, or sacred/secular, divide is an unbiblical separation. God's intention for Christians throughout history has been for them to present themselves completely as an offering to God; in the home, in the market-place (Stott, 1994:321); on the sports field and in the gym. In fact, one can conclude with Wright (2002:705), that the presentation of the body in worship is exactly the thing that thinking/rational Christians should do.

The second application of this pericope is that Christians should learn to live in the tension of being both citizens of this age and of the age to come. Willard (2002:170) argues that there must be a 'total yielding' that 'breaks all conformity with worldly life ... and transforms us into conformity with the age to come'. God's ongoing transformative work renews the mind of Christians so that they can live in a way that pleases Him, while remaining in the world. In so doing, they influence the world for good, rather than the other way around.

Christians need to recognise and acknowledge that there is a prevalent worldly system which is under the control of Satan (Hale, 2007:572), and which is contrary to the will of God. This also applies to the world of sport. Christian sports ministry leaders need to examine their own hearts and minds to ensure that they are not being conformed to the patterns of this

world. Rather, through the transformation of the mind, they will increasingly be able to test and approve God's pleasing will, learning to apply God's ethical standards in the world of sport.

Thirdly, just as the early church was distinctive from the prevailing religions in their different approaches to worship (as Dunn, 1988:710), those engaged in sports ministry should not conform to patterns of conduct that are contrary to the Gospel (and akin to idolatry), but should apply their renewed minds, recognising that they are ultimately seeking to worship God in all their activity, including sport (Moo, 1996:754). Indeed, given that Paul highlights the important role of the body in worship, Christians engaged in sport may have a distinct advantage because, as Wright (2002:704) states, Christian worship has 'an emphatically bodily character'.

### **Basic theological principles that can be derived from the pericope**

In equipping sports ministry leaders for effective and sustainable sports ministry, the following theological principles can be derived from Romans 12:1-2:

- Sports ministry leaders respond to God's mercy through offering their bodies in worship. This act should not be compartmentalised as a religious/spiritual function of life. Rather, it includes all that a Christian is and does in his or her service to God.
- Sports ministry leaders must resist conformity to the world and allow God to continue a process of transformation which restores the *imago Dei* in them.
- God desires to reveal his will to Christian leaders of sports ministry. The ability to discern God's will, is proportional to not conforming to the pattern of the world, but having one's mind renewed through God's transforming power.

## **1 Corinthians 9:19-27**

### **Why the passage was chosen?**

The final exegesis examines another text within another epistle of the Apostle Paul. The same exegetical approach is followed, but special note is given that this passage contains a sporting metaphor, one of a number the Apostle used in his writings (e.g. see Gal. 2:2; 5:7; 1 Tim. 4:8; 2 Tim. 4:7). It is, therefore, not surprising that the passages containing sporting metaphors receive a lot of attention by authors seeking to develop a theological foundation for sports ministry. Opinion is mixed on whether Paul's utilisation of these metaphors meant he approved of sports (e.g. see Linville, 2007:31; Garland, 2003:439;

Shafer, 2012:99). What can be confirmed is that Paul found sport a valuable metaphor for the Christian faith, and the exegete needs to look at the deeper principles that can be gleaned from these passages containing sporting metaphors. This exegesis of 1 Corinthians 9:19-27 therefore follows the example of Oswald (2003:32) who looks beyond the metaphor itself, and recognises the 'principle of liberty' which Paul expounds and is applicable to Christians engaging in contemporary sports ministry.

### **The relevance of the passage for sports ministry leaders today**

The relevance of this passage for sports ministry leaders is far beyond the fact that Paul utilises sporting metaphors. It could be argued that Paul is giving some level of endorsement to sport because of the positive aspects he identifies, such as persevering towards a goal, that are 'compatible with Christianity' (Reavely, 1992:7). But it can equally be argued that Paul is making the comparison between something he considers somewhat foolish in the light of eternal matters (Tucker, 2011:114). The reality is that Paul does not make a qualitative judgement on the activity of sport itself. However, the ministry principles that emerges from this passage is eminently applicable to sports ministry leaders today.

#### *a. Servant leadership*

This passage provides a foundation for Christian leaders to be servant leaders (Meekins, 2015:99). It is clear that Paul was following Jesus Christ's example (e.g. Mark 10:45) and setting an example for today's readers to follow (1 Cor. 11:1). This approach to leadership is counter-cultural. Sports ministry leaders should not be seeking position, popularity or power. Rather they should be prioritising the Gospel, and willing to do whatever it takes to win people to Jesus Christ. Paul's leadership was not from above people, but from below (Garland, 2003:429). He made the necessary sacrifices to break down cultural barriers that might prevent people from being introduced to Jesus Christ. This approach to servant leadership means that sports ministry leaders should prioritise the conditions of the poor and disenfranchised, focusing on the transformation of their situation (Mamiru, 2012:30). Hays (1997:157) terms this 'downward mobility'. This is counter to the prevalent sporting culture that acclaims fame and fortune. The sports ministry leader, as a servant to all, should be willing to forego privilege in order to identify with the marginalised.



*b. Method of evangelism*

Paul's ministry philosophy provides sports ministry leaders with a strong mandate to utilise the vehicle of sport to proclaim the Gospel. It is not difficult to imagine that Paul, in the sports-mad culture of the 21st Century, would include sport within his instruction to become 'all things to all people'. His model of ministry is eminently incarnational (Garland, 2003:429) with a strong emphasis on going to people rather than expecting them to come to him (Sampley, 2002:911). This again follows the example of Jesus Christ's incarnation who 'became flesh and made his dwelling among us' (John 1:14). This also demonstrates that the medium of sport is a vehicle through which relationships can be built which can lead to Christ-centred conversations. However, for Paul, the method is not an end in itself. Therefore, the contemporary Christian leader cannot see the engagement in sport as the final goal. Rather, there is a prize beyond the participation in sport, which is the expansion of God's Kingdom (Reavely, 1992:7).

*c. Self-discipline*

Servant leaders engaging in incarnational evangelism will require exceptional self-discipline. Sports ministry leaders should understand the requirements of discipline not just as observers of sport, but through their own experience. However, Paul is not advocating 'discipline for discipline's sake' (Garland, 2003:443). Rather, as seen above, the self-denial which Paul exemplifies, is for the sake of winning others for Jesus Christ. Contemporary leaders need to develop the resolve of Paul who endured through incredible 'physical privations ... so that he can then win others over to Christ' (Garland, 2003:443).

**Basic theological principles that can be derived from the pericope**

In equipping sports ministry leaders for effective and sustainable sports ministry, the following theological principles can be derived from 1 Corinthians 9:19-27 which reflects Paul's ministry philosophy:

- Sports ministry leadership is counter-cultural. Christians must be willing to be self-sacrificial and actively downwardly mobile for the sake of sharing the love of Jesus Christ.
- Sports ministry leadership is eminently incarnational. Self-denial does not have the purpose of reaching some higher spiritual plane, but rather the distinct purpose of reaching non-believers wherever they are.

- Sports ministry leadership crosses socio-economic boundaries. Just as Paul identifies with people from different faiths, backgrounds and social standing, so Christians should not allow culture or economics to be a barrier to presenting the Gospel.
- Sports ministry leadership requires perseverance and endurance. If an athlete endures incredible personal and physical privations to obtain a temporary prize, how much more should Christians be self-disciplined and determined to fulfil their calling to make Jesus Christ known to other people.
- Sports ministry leadership is goal-oriented. The Bible reveals that there is a prize awaiting all believers. This provides motivation to persevere through the challenges and sacrifices that come with being a minister of the Gospel.

#### **4. A proposed normative Manifesto for sports ministry leaders**

What follows is a manifesto for sports ministry leaders that provides them with a normative theological foundation that will equip them for sustainable sports ministry.

##### **A. *From Genesis 1:26-28***

- Sports ministry leaders engage in sport as a medium through which one's relationship with God is demonstrated and developed. God intentionally created human beings as the pinnacle of His creation. The origin of humanity is the responsibility of God who invites us to live in relationship with Him which requires a response of faith and trust, demonstrated in worship and obedience.
- Sports ministry leaders recognise that the gift and talent of sport comes with a responsibility to discern and exercise God's purpose in the world. Being made in the image of God is a revolutionary theology that gives sports ministry leaders dignity and worth, but also moral and ethical responsibility.
- Sports ministry leaders, in dependence upon God, must provide proactive stewardship within the created order of sport, seeking to redeem it to God's original intent. The mandate to 'rule' provides human beings with a purpose that enables them to find fulfilment and joy through serving the Lord in His world.

**B. *From Isaiah 61:1-3***

- Sports ministry leaders are called to become part of God's redemptive mission through Spirit-anointed proclamation of the good news of God's redemptive plans.
- Sports ministry leaders have a mandate to proclaim the Gospel which includes a priority to seek justice for the poor, the marginalised and those in both physical and spiritual captivity.
- Sports ministry leaders should be seeking a two-fold fruitfulness from their Spirit-empowered redemptive proclamation: the moving of God's people towards righteousness which in turn results in the glorification of God.

**C. *From Matthew 28:18-20***

- Sports ministry leaders must focus on Jesus Christ. The Great Commission is central to developing a Christocentric theology. Jesus Christ is presented as victorious over death, having been given all authority 'in heaven and on earth', and commissions His followers to the mission of making disciples. He is also the focus of mission as followers baptise disciples into His name and teach them to obey His commands.
- Sports ministry leadership should develop cross-cultural mission. The Great Commission provides clarity and definition to God's eternal redemptive plan. The church is called to reach all Nations with the Gospel. God's desire is equal for all people, and the message of salvation is to reach to the ends of the earth.
- Sports ministry leaders should develop disciples. The goal of mission is that people will learn to live in obedience to Jesus Christ. Through understanding His teachings, they will be able to love God (expressed through faith, worship and obedience), and love their neighbour as themselves (Matt. 22:37ff).

**D. *From Romans 12:1-2***

- Sports ministry leaders respond to God's mercy through offering their bodies in worship. This is not compartmentalised as a religious/spiritual function of life. Rather, it includes all a Christian is and does in his service to God.
- Sports ministry leaders must resist conformity to the world and allow God to continue the process of transformation which restores the imago Dei in them.

- Sports ministry leaders should constantly be seeking to discern God's will for their lives and ministry. The ability to discern God's will, is proportional to the degree of not conforming to the pattern of the world, and having one's mind renewed through God's transforming power.

#### ***E. From 1 Corinthians 9:19-27***

- Sports ministry leadership is counter-cultural. Christians must be willing to be self-sacrificial and to be actively 'downwardly mobile' for the sake of sharing the love of Jesus Christ.
- Sports ministry leadership is eminently incarnational. Self-denial does not have the purpose of reaching some higher spiritual plane, but rather the distinct purpose of reaching non-believers wherever they are.
- Sports ministry leadership crosses socio-economic boundaries. Just as Paul identified with people from different faiths, backgrounds and social standing, so Christians should not allow culture or economics to be a barrier to their presenting of the Gospel.
- Sports ministry leadership requires perseverance and endurance. If an athlete endures incredible personal and physical privations to obtain a temporary prize, how much more should Christians be self-disciplined and determined to fulfil their calling to make Jesus Christ known to others?
- Sports ministry leadership is goal-oriented. The Bible reveals that there is a prize awaiting all believers. This provides motivation to persevere through the challenges and sacrifices that accompany being a minister of the Gospel.

## **5. Conclusion**

This article has provided a normative theological foundation as a Manifesto for sports ministry leaders. The normative task has sought to answer the question "what ought to be going on?" through the exegesis of five passages of Scripture, and the discernment of principles which formed the Manifesto presented above. The importance of this task is the contribution it makes towards leaders developing effective and sustainable sports ministry upon a strong theological foundation. The Manifesto also provides a foundation for ethical reflection and developing models of best practice in relation to Christian leaders' engagement in sport and sports ministry.

## Bibliography

- ADU, E. 2014. Pastoral leadership among African-led Pentecostal churches in the context of British society. Potchefstroom: North-West University. (Thesis: PhD).
- BENNETT, Z. 2016. *Using the Bible in practical theology: historical and contemporary perspectives*. New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.
- BRUEGGEMANN, W. 1982. *Genesis: interpretation, a bible commentary for teaching and preaching*. Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press.
- CHOONG, C.P.L. 2008. Imago Dei and its significance for pastoral leadership effectiveness in a global society. Potchefstroom: North West University. (Thesis: PhD).
- CORBETT, S. & FIKKERT, B. 2012. *When helping hurts*. Chicago, IL: Moody.
- DANIELS, G. & WEIR, J.S. 2004. *Born to play*. Bicester: Frampton House.
- DRANE, J.W. 1987. *Introducing the Old Testament*. Oxford: Lion.
- DUNN, D.G. 1988. *Word biblical commentary: vol. 38A, Romans 9-16*. Dallas, TX: Word Publisher.
- GARLAND, D.E. 2003. *1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
- GARNER, J. 2003. Introduction to recreation and sports ministry. (In: Garner, J., Ed. *Recreation and sports ministry: impacting postmodern culture*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman. p. 1-24).
- GREGORY, T. 2003. *Mission Now*. Waynesboro GA: Authentic Lifestyle.
- GRUDEM, W. 1994. *Systematic theology*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press.
- HAGNER, D.A. 1995. *Word biblical commentary: vol. 33b, Matthew 14-28*. Dallas, TX: Word Books Publisher.
- HALE, T. 2007. *The applied New Testament commentary*. Colorado Springs, CO: David Cook.
- HAYS, R.B. 1997. *First Corinthians*. Louisville, KY: John Knox Press.
- HIGGS, R.J. 1995. *God in the stadium: sports and religion in America*. Lexington, KY: The University press of Kentucky.
- LADD, T. & MATHISEN, J.A. 1999. *Muscular Christianity: evangelical Protestants and the development of American sport*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books.
- LINVILLE, G. 2007. Does sports ministry aid local church evangelism? Ashland, OH: Ashland Theological Seminary. (Thesis: PhD).

- LINVILLE, G. 2014. *Christmanship: a theology of competition, sport and sports ministry* [Kindle edition]. Available: <http://www.amazon.com>.
- MAHLOKO, M.A. 2015. Strategies to turn around decline in local churches: a case of an African Methodist episcopal (AME) local church. Vaal Triangle: North-West University. (Thesis: Master's).
- MAMIRU, B.S. 2012. Emerging leaders initiative: a manual for developing transformational leaders in the Ethiopian context. Seattle, WA: Bakke University. (Thesis: PhD).
- MATHISEN, J. 2008. A brief history of Christianity and sport. (In: Dearnoff II, D. & White, J., Eds. *The image of God in the human body: essays on Christianity and sports*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press. p. 9-41).
- MCCOWN, L. & GIN, V.J. 2003. *Focus on sport in ministry*. Marietta, GA: 360° Sports.
- MILNE, B. 1993. *The message of John: here is your King!* Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press.
- MEEKINS, D.J. 2015. 'iSeminary': Christian theological and leadership development in the online environment. Potchefstroom: North-West University. (Thesis: PhD).
- MOO, D.J. 1996. *The epistle to the Romans*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- NEWBIGIN, L. 1989. *The gospel in a pluralist society*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- OLDEWAGE, H.E. 2014. Fostering koinonia: a critical evaluation of the value of digital social networks in urban congregations. Potchefstroom: North-West University. (Thesis: PhD).
- OSMER, R.R. 2008. *Practical theology: an introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- OSWALD, R. 2003. Biblical foundations of sports ministry. (In: Garner, G., Ed. *Recreation and sports ministry: impacting post-modern culture*. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman. p. 25-36).
- PEPPLER, C. 2000. The doctrine of revelation. Johannesburg, South African Theological Seminary. (Study guide THE3122).
- REAVELY, R.S. 1992. A theology of competition. Portland, OR: Western Seminary. (Thesis: Masters).
- SAMPLEY, J.P. 2002. 2 Corinthians. (In: Keck, L., Ed. *The new interpreter's Bible*, volume X: Acts; introduction to epistolary literature; Romans; 1 Corinthians. Nashville, TN: Abingdon. p. 773-912).

- SHAFER, M.R. 2012. A Christian theology of sport and the ethics of doping. Durham: Durham University. (Thesis: PhD).
- SIMANGO, D. 2006. The image of God (Gen 1:26-27) in the Pentateuch: A biblical-theological approach. Potchefstroom: North-West University. (Thesis - Masters).
- SMITH, K.G. 2010. Review of Richard Osmer, Practical Theology: an introduction. Unpublished article. Available: <https://www.sats.edu.za/review-richard-osmer-practical-theology/>
- STOTT, J. 1994. *The message of Romans: God's good news for the world*. Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press.
- TREAT, J.R. 2015. More than a game: a theology of sport. *Themelios*, 40(3):392-403.
- TUCKER, T. 2009. Biblical principles for sports ministry. Johannesburg: South African Theological Seminary (CYM 1128).
- TUCKER, T. 2011. A strategy for the development of a sustainable sports ministry using mission outreach through soccer in selected churches in Tshwane. Johannesburg: South African Theological Seminary. (Thesis: Masters).
- TUCKER, T. 2016. The equipping of leaders for effective and sustainable sports ministry in the South African context. Potchefstroom: North-West University. (Unpublished Thesis: PhD).
- TUCKER, T. & WOODBRIDGE, N.B. 2012. Motivational factors for a sports ministry: a case study of churches in Pretoria. *HTS: Theological Studies*, 68(2):16-23.
- TURNER, D. L. 2008. *Matthew*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic.
- TYLER, D. 2003. *Creation: chance or design?* Darlington: Evangelical Press.
- VAN DER WALT, T. 2007. *The Messiah has come!: a guide in the Gospels for serious students of the Bible*. Potchefstroom: Potchefstroom Theological Publications.
- WEBB, B. 1996. *The message of Isaiah: on eagles' wings*. Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press.
- WEIR, J.S. 2000. *What the book says about sport*. Oxford: Bible Reading Fellowship.

- WEIR, J.S. 2008. Competition as relationship: sport as a mutual quest towards excellence. (In: Deardorff II, D. & White, J., Eds. *The image of God in the human body: essays on Christianity and sports*. Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press). [https://www.veritesport.org/downloads/theology\\_of\\_sport/Competition\\_as\\_Relationship.pdf](https://www.veritesport.org/downloads/theology_of_sport/Competition_as_Relationship.pdf) Date of access: 17 Jun. 20115.
- WEIR, J.S. 2011. *Theology of sport, historical review*. [http://www.veritesport.org/downloads/Theology\\_of\\_Sport\\_An\\_historical\\_review.pdf](http://www.veritesport.org/downloads/Theology_of_Sport_An_historical_review.pdf) Date of access: 17 Jun. 2015.
- WHITE, J.B. 2011. *Sport and Christian ethics: towards a theological ethic for sport*. Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh (Thesis: PHD).
- WIEGAND, H.J. 2011. A model for promoting evangelism through sports and recreation ministry: specifically the South African Dutch Reformed church. Johannesburg: South African Theological Seminary. (Thesis: Master's).
- WILLARD, D. 2002. *Renovation of the heart: putting on the character of Christ*. Colorado Springs, CO: Navpress.
- WOLTERS, A.M. 2005. *Creation regained: a biblical basis for a reformational worldview*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- WRIGHT, N.T. 2002. The letter to the Romans, introduction commentary and reflections. (In: Keck, L., Ed. *The new interpreter's Bible*, volume X: Acts; introduction to epistolary literature; Romans; 1 Corinthians. Nashville, TN: Abingdon. p. 395-707).