Turner, TA 2026, Review of *Church Administration: Towards the Mission of God*, R Davis & G Harold, *African Theological Journal for Church and Society*, vol. 7, no. 3 pp. 296-299

Review

Davis, Ronnie and Godfrey Harold, *Church Administration: Towards the Mission of God.* Niamey: AXIS Resources, 2026. ISBN 9798996454013, 253 pp.

Reviewed by Timothy A. Turner[1]

Ronnie Davis and Godfrey Harold argue that church administration belongs to theology before it belongs to management (9-10). Writing for pastors and church leaders in sub-Saharan Africa, Davis and Harold define the task of church administration as 'stewardship of God's resources for the faithful service of God's people rendered unto God and others on God's behalf to bring Him glory, build up His church, and reach the world in fulfillment of God's mission' (18). The volume joins the Africa Theology Series, which promises movement from doctrine through cultural implication to practical application (1-2).

The volume's first part builds a theology of church administration in three moves. First, a survey from creation to consummation presents administration as part of God's design, distorted by sin, and restored in Christ (25-35). Second, the authors argue that Paul's word for the Spirit-given gift of administration, *kubernesis*, compares an administrator to a ship's helmsman, who steers by Scripture's charts a ship that God owns and the Spirit powers (40-41). The church is then presented as an organised organism living by the Spirit yet structured by God (36-39). Finally, the authors argue that Jesus' servant leadership, driven by agape love, humility, and sacrificial action, surpasses

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Greenleaf's model[2], which the authors credit as a 'great secular companion to biblical servant leadership' (61).

The volume's second part attends to the practice of church administration. Chapter 5 recasts five management functions (planning, staffing, organising, leading, controlling), preferring management by mission to management by objectives (66, 73). Chapter 6, largely adapted from Sande[3] and Poirier[4], teaches peacemaking through four Gs, the PAUSE negotiation method, and a GOSPEL mediation model (103-128). Chapter 7 pairs African communal leadership, built on Ubuntu ('I am because we are'), with Christ's servanthood (131-140).

The volume also includes three appendices. The first compares leadership structures in African Traditional Religion, neo-Pentecostalism, Roman Catholicism, and Islam with Baptist practice (147-212). The second provides guidance for conducting a church business meeting (213-242), and the third outlines church budgeting processes (243-254).

The volume's scholarly foundation could engage organisational leadership literature more deeply. The eight characteristics of administration listed in chapter 1 rely on a single page of a single source (9-11). Additionally, though Davis and Harold articulate a sound theology of steward leadership a fuller engagement with stewardship theory would strengthen the volume. Interaction with Davis, Schoorman, and Donaldson's work on steward motivations[5] and Hernandez's work on stewardship as a leadership outcome[6]

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[2] Robert K. Greenleaf, 1970, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness*, Paulist Press, Mahwah, NJ.
[3] Sande, K., 2004, *The Peacemaker: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Personal Conflict* (3rd ed), Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI.
[4] Poirier, A., 2006, *The Peacemaking Pastor: A Biblical Guide to Resolving Church Conflict*, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, MI.
[5] Davis, J. H., Schoorman, F. D., & Donaldson, L 1997, 'Toward a Stewardship Theory of Management', *The Academy of Management Review* 22(1), 20-47. https://doi.org/10.2307/259223
[6] Hernandez, M., 2008, 'Promoting Stewardship Behavior in Organizations: A leadership model', *Journal of Business Ethics* 80(1), 121–128. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-007-9440-2

and the foundations of psychological ownership in stewardship[7] could provide empirical evidence for the book's assertions.

The volume pays disproportionate attention to conflict mediation (99-130). Five key management functions (planning, staffing, organising, leading, controlling) are covered in chapter 5, while an entire chapter of similar length, chapter 6, is devoted to conflict mediation. The chapter's examples, drawn from marriage, friendships (99), and questions about family estates (103), are not immediately relevant to issues of church administration. Guidance for budget disputes, leadership successions, and committee quarrels would be more relevant in a volume on church administration. Furthermore, the importance of peacemaking in and for other administrative functions, such as planning, staffing and evaluation, is not explained.

The volume promises application to the African context. Chapter 7 offers the book's most thoughtful engagement with the African context and acknowledges Africa's diversity (131-133). The chapter pictures village assemblies where anyone could speak up and feel heard (133) and calls African communal values the 'perfect soil' for biblical servant leadership (137). However, Appendix A notes that elder authority may limit young members' participation in traditional communities (159). The book does not reconcile these disparate pictures, although chapter 2 articulates helping every believer deploy gifts a key task of administration (38). Additional contextualisation challenges occur in chapter 5, which offers limited African applications of the book's five management functions. The chapter's illustrations come from an urban Nairobi church (92) and a Cape Town seminary course (95). While these examples offer an African perspective, the volume would benefit from additional application into rural or refugee contexts across sub-Saharan Africa.

A similar issue with contextualisation repeats in the appendices. Appendix B suggests announcing meetings through email and social media (216), displaying financial reports through visual PowerPoint software (229), and operating meetings by Robert's Rules of Order (235). Appendix C calls for one to three years of formal financial records, bank statements, accounting

[7] Hernandez, M., 2012, 'Toward an Understanding of the Psychology of Stewardship', *Academy of Management Review* 37(2), 172–193. https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2010.0363

software, percentage allocations, and reserves of three to six months (244-250). However, considering a refugee-formed congregation in northern Zambia, a poor church in rural Tanzania, or a village church plant in a remote region of sub-Saharan Africa reveals contexts in Africa that may lack electricity, internet connectivity, a formal bank account, salaried staff, surplus for reserves, and a formally trained treasurer. Many pastors in Africa will need to translate the advice of the book into their context unaided.

These limits qualify the book without cancelling its value. Its first part argues that administration serves God's mission, depends on the Spirit's gifts, and counts success in disciples made instead of efficiency achieved. Many pastors need that conviction before technique. The appendices show care for pastors who need practical help. Their gaps mark where other African scholarship can extend the book. *Church Administration* can be helpful textbook if teachers adopt part one as a theological foundation and pair part two with African studies of poor and displaced churches, such as Tagwirei on pastors sustained by congregational gifts, donors, and tent-making[8] and Nzayabino on refugee-established churches built on shared language and mutual aid.[9]

[8] Tagwirei, K., 2022, 'Sustaining pastoral work and welfare in Zimbabwe: Case study of pastors in Masvingo urban', *Verbum et Ecclesia* 43(1). https://doi.org/10.4102/ve.v43i1.2359

[9] Nzayabino, V., 2010, 'The role of refugee-established churches in integrating forced migrants: A case study of Word of Life Assembly in Yeoville, Johannesburg', *HTS Teologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 66(1), 1–9. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v66i1.290