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The Impact of Kenosis on the Transformational Authentic Leader

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Abstract Leaders are often appraised on the results achieved rather than the degree to which such leaders make sacrifices. This inter-textual analysis of Philippians 2 hymn and several related pericopes from the gospels and epistles provide a relational connection between self-emptying acts of humility and True Leadership. A key relationship for the forms of moral leadership is *kenosis* or self-emptying sacrifice, particularly in correspondence with transformational and authentic leadership. The desirable outcome of a kenotic approach to leadership is reconciliation of relationships between the leader and their followers and benefactors. The value of kenosis is punctuated when a leader has an awareness of self along with an awareness of others in a way that reveals their authenticity as it simultaneously cultivates genuine reconciliation.

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In the preceding chapters, examples of authentic leadership have been reviewed by examining the lives of Moses and Jethro; it is time to consider another aspect to continue to illuminate our understanding of True Leadership. This illumination comes forth by the exploration of how the concept and application of *kenosis*, or *self-emptying*, is supported as a component of True Leadership used within authentic leadership as well as transformational, authentic, and servant leaders. In efforts to deepen our understanding of True Leadership, the concept of kenosis, in addition to answering the question of how kenosis can engage with other forms of moral leadership, is explored. Although various definitions of kenosis are reviewed, for the purpose of this study, kenosis can be defined when an individual working out of humility empties, hides, or limits one's form (Gavrilyuk, 2005; Haught, 2005; Stening, 2006). The question thus becomes, *why would an individual, in particular a leader, participate in acts of kenosis?* The general purpose of kenosis is examined, illustrated, and revealed to be ultimately for the sake of reconciliation between individuals, in this case between leader and follower.

The concept of reconciliation seems to follow the business negotiation principle that a relationship can be enriched when the focus shifts to be concentrated on *interests* rather than on *positions* (Fisher & Ury, 1981). The design of reconciliation seems to support the consideration that a relationship with people should be revered as the highest priority (Pfeffer, 1998). For authentic leaders to experience reconciliation, a transformation of a leader's form might need to occur. Kenosis seems to be the proverbial place where leadership and reconciliation meet. However, regarding the appearance of a leader's form, Miller (1995) explained, "leadership is not as it *appears* but as it *performs*" (p. 8). 1 Samuel 16:7 provides wisdom in regard to searching for leadership beyond appearance with, "But the Lord said to Samuel, 'do not look at his appearance or at his physical statue, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; a man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart'" (16:7, NKJV). This type of transformation of a leader's form

requires the emptying of self, also known as kenosis. Kenosis is further examined with the continued use of a biblical perspective to review places throughout scripture where Jesus serves as the example of an authentic and transformational leader to demonstrate the act of self-emptying.

Two techniques of scriptural analysis were applied in this chapter. The first technique used was inter-textual analysis. An inter-textual analysis compares what is said in one text with what appears in additional texts to provide deeper understanding of the concepts presented among the texts (Robbins, 1996). The second analysis that was applied was the socio-rhetorical analysis approach. The socio-rhetorical analysis allows researchers to focus on the relationship between the work and the author of the text to recognize the technique "requires an exploration of other texts, the object of the analysis is, nevertheless, to interpret aspects internal to the text under consideration" (Robbins, 1996, p. 96). The main text reviewed was Philippians 2; however, the intertexture was conducted on various scripture passages and academic articles to ensure a thorough inter-textual analysis. These tools were used to help consider the following questions: To what extent should an authentic leader practice kenosis? What are appropriate limits to this practice? Should authentic leaders practice the full extent of kenosis with every individual they encounter? Finally, various debates surrounding the issue of kenosis were reviewed to provide a historical framework for which this topic exists.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide clarity on the concept of kenosis. Additionally, it delves into the extent kenosis should be practiced, its purpose within interactions, its relationship with authentic leadership, its potential impact on transformational authentic leaders, and the conclusions derived from the results of this analysis. To start this discussion, it is critical to understand the concept of kenosis.

The Concept of Kenosis

The ideology of self-emptying, or *kenosis*, has been an issue of debate within circles of theology (Castelo, 2007; Gavrilyuk, 2005; Villafane, 2006). The debate comprises issues surrounding how far the impact of kenosis reaches, if it is truly indicative of the nature of Christ, and within

the context of how to imitate this behavior when following the leadership of Jesus Christ (Gorman 2009; Hamm, 2010). This concept has been proposed as a part of a proto-model of Christian leadership and was explored using the repetitive-progressive inner-textual analysis of Philippians 2 (Bekker, 2006; Robbins, 1996). However, further exploration is needed to determine how kenosis is supported as a component of other forms of leadership through additional passages of scripture along with pertinent academic articles written on this subject.

There are various theologies surrounding the concept of kenosis. Below are several examples of the issues that comprise the debates surrounding the concept. These examples are meant to provide a background of the ideologies found in current literature about this topic. Hamm's (2010) understanding of the Philippians hymn was it provided "the foundational model of how God the Father saves by revealing the divine nature in the self-emptying and self-humiliation of Jesus in the incarnation and in his obedient life, death, and resurrection" (p. 453). Brierley (2009) explained there have been four broad historical phases of the exploration of kenosis that included (1) an attempt to explain how the divine word became human, (2) discussion surrounding the hiding of the divine nature when Christ took on human nature, (3) the translation of the incarnation and the divine nature in and of itself, and (4) the application of kenosis as a model to follow by all humanity. Brierley argued that kenosis has been a long-standing virtue because as an ethic, it is "essential to divinity, and thus to the cosmos" (2009, p. 72).

Gavrilyuk (2005) expanded upon Bulgakov's three main aspects of kenotic thought, which included, "God's self-emptying as a feature of the inner life of the Trinity, creation as a kenotic act, and the incarnation as the kenosis par excellence" (p. 253). Therefore, the debates surround what purpose the concept of kenosis plays in philosophical understanding. Does it serve to better understand the nature of the Trinity or to provide clarity regarding creation or to serve as the ultimate example for mankind through the incarnation of Christ? Some protestant theologians of the twentieth century, who were learners of kenosis, limited the concept to particular events like Christ's suffering, humiliation, and death (2005). However, Bulgakov proposed kenosis had a broader impact and could be seen in all areas of Christ's life (Gavrilyuk, 2005). One way to

explore this argument is to review other passages of scripture illuminating the life of Christ to see if kenosis is found outside of situations where Christ is suffering, being humiliated, or experiencing death.

Gavrilyuk (2005) questioned what was it God was emptying Himself of. Gavrilyuk explained Bulgakov pointed to the fact it was not for the purpose of hiding His divine nature, as Clare of Assisi posed (Karecki, 2008). Bulgakov interpreted Philippians 2:7 as indicative of the fact Christ, being fully God while being fully human, did not empty Himself of His *divine nature* but rather emptied Himself of His *divine form* (Gavrilyuk, 2005). Another argument related to kenosis was if it was a demonstration of God succumbing to the limitations of His creation or something altogether different (Dawe, 1963; Stening, 2006). Stening (2006) argued, "for me this kenosis goes too far. While God in Christ did indeed endure the limitations of a human body…God the Father in heaven still reigned supreme" (p. 5). A different aspect of kenosis involves the act of creating beings outside of Himself while desiring a relationship with them. This was a humbling act in itself and enlarged God's greatness as a Creator (Haught, 2005; Stening, 2006). It is astounding to consider that "God demonstrates his own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8, NKJV). Therefore, this scripture conveys the Creator humbled Himself in loving the creation, even in the midst of rebellion and a breach of relationship.

In an interview between two academic scholars, one Buddhist and the other Catholic, the distinct approaches to self-emptying were evident (DeMartino & Kramer, 1998). Ultimately, the difference resided in the Christian belief is to self-empty but with a remainder for a need for God, whereas the Buddhist belief is that by one becoming nothing in turn also becomes all (1998). Therefore, when considering the difference kenosis has within Christian faith, apart from other religions, it can be concluded although there is an emptying out of oneself which allows openness for others, there is still a remaining factor for a need for God. In reference to Galatians 2:20, Paul said:

> I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. (NKJV)

Kramer provided clarity for this passage whereby kenosis was based on the Christian writings and ideologies of St. John, Deissmann, and Eliade (1998). DeMartino and Kramer (1998) explained:

> One could call this a union without identity in which soul is united with God through a coherence of spiritual discipline (self-power) and unconditioned Grace (Other power). This union does not imply … absorptionthere is always a living awareness of, indeed the necessity of, the Otherness of God. (p. 223)

DeMartino and Kramer (1998) further explained the definition of kenosis for the Christian is "self-abandonment into God" (p. 224). Baird (2007) explained, "the divine kenotic gesture is met by the human kenotic response of absolute exposure to the other" (p. 427). Perhaps this was evident in Paul's statements of emptying out of himself in Galatians 5:20 was actually a response to Christ's act of kenosis toward mankind.

Earlier, questions were presented regarding to what extent self-emptying was appropriate for a leader, and what boundaries might be needed, if any? Szabolcs (2003) presented a consideration in regard to *epoche* as an extreme type of kenosis. This type of kenosis suspends judgment for the purpose of creating a space within, to allow receptivity. However, Szabolcs (2003) cautioned, "we should regulate … this kind of self-emptying, because if we are empty, we do not have anything to share … epoche should endue the double nature of biblical kenosis … to be full and empty at the same time, fully divine and fully human" (p. 9).

A different approach was found in the writings of Hadewijch of Antwerp in the thirteenth century, whose language indicated she was a part of the upper class but chose to live a life of poverty and contemplation (Hadewijch, 2000). Hadewijch exhorted with "give yourself completely in abandonment to God, to become what he is. For the honor of Love, renounce yourself as far as you can" (p. 201). Perhaps reviewing additional passages of scripture will inform as to what extent self-emptying is demonstrated in scripture, how leaders can emulate this practice, and, most importantly, what is the true intent for acts of kenosis?

The Transforming Power of Kenosis: Reconciliation

Szabolcs (2003) identified four passages, in addition to Philippians 2:6–11, where the term *emptying out* was used, which included (a) Romans 4:14, (b) 1 Corinthians 1:17, (c) 1 Corinthians 9:15, and (d) 2 Corinthians 9:3. Each provided a different perspective on the definition of emptying. In Romans 4:14, the term has a meaning of making faith void, or null, when individuals try to lean upon the law rather than in Christ (2003). 1 Corinthians 1:17 references how Paul's concern it is Christ's power that saves, and if Paul should boast of power then the cross would be emptied of its power (2003). 1 Corinthians 9:15 refers to the emptiness with a meaning of depravity with, "for it would be better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void" (NKJV). 2 Corinthians 9:3 "speaks about the fear that the boasting of Paul with the congregation might prove to have been empty" (Szabolcs, 2003, p. 9). These are important passages in understanding various uses in scripture for the term *emptying out*. Additional passages provided greater clarification on kenosis included the temptation of Christ detailed in Matthew 4, and the explanation of Christ becoming as His brothers in Hebrews 2:5–18. The inter-textual analysis using both cultural and social inter-textual approaches continued as these passages were interpreted in conjunction with the understanding of Philippians 2:6–11 (Robbins, 1996).

Matthew 4 explains Christ was literally carried to the place of temptation by Satan (Matthew 4:8). Gill (2010) explained Christ was carried in the air by Satan, an example of truly emptying or limiting Himself of His strength and power to crush Satan (Romans 16:20). Matthew 4:2 explained Jesus fasted and as Wesley (1754–1765) pointed out, He therefore was physically hungry and therefore ready for the first temptation. Jesus explained His strength in John 6:35 and said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (NKJV). Therefore, the originator of that which causes hunger and thirst to be quenched, allowed His very body to be hungry for the sake of translating Himself into a form that humans could relate with (Hebrews 2). In Hebrews 2:18, an explanation of the rationale of

this temptation was presented with "For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted" (NKJV).

The passage in Hebrews 2:18 correlates with what was found in Philippians 2:7, which says, "but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men" (NKJV). Perhaps this notion of a bondservant is rather a servant to human functions such as hunger, thirst, and requirements of sleep. Kenosis was clearly seen as Christ limited His own power for the purpose relating with His creation in a way that would allow a path to follow in times of being tempted. It was fitting Szabolcs presented kenosis was God translating Himself into terms humans could understand by becoming human and encountering human situations and fears (2005). The believers who received this message in Hebrews were dealing with the social pressures of disapproval from their neighbors (DeSilva, 2004). The author of Hebrews was attempting to aid these believers with reminders of the benefits of being connected and in relationship with Christ, as well as helping them walk through difficult situations (2004). This passage was found as a way to aid these believers to remembering Christ Himself went through times of disapproval (Luke 5:21). C.S. Lewis (1952) summed this up with, "God became a man to turn creatures into sons" (p. 182).

It was interesting to note that kenosis and clues to the purpose of this concept were discovered within classic literature. Bouchard (2005) performed an analysis of *King Lear*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *The King Is Alive* to determine when kenosis should be used. Bouchard (2005) saw evidence where King Lear explained the purpose of kenosis is for restoration whereby "we can see … how Kent, Edgar, the Fool, and Cordelia assume roles of inferior or foreign status out of compassion and loyalty … they respond to a crisis in which kingship and kinship are at an impasse" (p. 163). Colossians 1:16 explains: "For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him" (NKJV). Robertson (1960) pointed to Romans 8:29 and concluded, Jesus is "the author of salvation, the leader of the sons of God, the Elder Brother of us all" (p. 1). Therefore, what was found in Hebrews 2:7 was astonishing. Strong evidence of kenosis was apparent in this passage where it speaks of the place of

humans: "You have made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, and set him over the works of our hands" (NKJV). Then, specific to understanding Christ's role, Hebrews 2 continues in verse 9 with: "But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, *by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone*" (NKJV). Therefore, for Christ to come in the form less than His own creation of angels was significant in the journey to find additional scriptural support of kenosis. In the search for the boundaries of kenosis for a leader, reflection upon the purpose of these acts of kenosis requires further exploration. In each instance, it is for the glory of God for the purpose of salvation and reconciliation of the relationship between man and God. The purpose was made clear in Hebrews 2:17: "Therefore*, in all things He had to be made like His brethren*, that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest in the things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people" (NKJV). This verse supported Bulgakov's assertion that kenosis touched all elements of Christ's life, and was not limited to only suffering, humiliation, and death (Gavrilyuk, 2005). Robertson (1960) further stated Jesus "lived his human life in order to be able to be a sympathizing and effective leader in the work of salvation" (p. 1). Therefore, perhaps an appropriate conclusion for the Christian leader might be to follow in the steps of kenosis when what is at stake is the reconciliation of the follower to the greater mission. If there is a breach in the relationship, perhaps this is when there should be a call for limiting, emptying out, or opening oneself to others, as a Christian leader, for connectivity with Father God or His mission.

Additional passages that supported the concept of kenosis were found in the Philippians 2 hymn explained, and seemed to support, the lessening of an individual before experiencing the joy of victory, such as those found in John 12:24 and Matthew 16:26 (Szabolcs, 2003, p. 10). Szabolcs (2003) explained John 12:24 demonstrated the "grain of wheat must fall into the ground and die if it is to produce any fruit … Matthew 16:26 to lose our life in order to find it" (p. 10). It appeared these passages supported the consideration there was greatness in lowering one's position for the greater purpose of reconciliation. As Szabolcs (2003) continued, "this is not talking about the dying for the other as the final good. This is

a death in the hope of a resurrection" (p. 10). Therefore, this act of kenosis was for the sole purpose of ultimate reconciliation through the resurrection. Szabolcs (2003) concluded, "the way God chose to engage in dialogue with humankind was kenosis, and we are challenged to follow Christ's footsteps" (p. 10). Scriptural support for this conclusion was found in John 14:15 where Jesus explained if His followers love them, they will obey Him and also in the instruction to "pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14, NKJV). Alongside these verses was Paul's example of meeting individuals wherever they were culturally for the sake of Christ, "and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law" (1 Corinthians 9:20, NKJV). Therefore, it can be understood the ultimate purpose of kenosis was always for the reconciliation of the relationship.

The Impact of Kenosis on Authentic Leadership

To apply kenosis to authentic leadership, there were two aspects to consider. The first consideration was the ultimate purpose of kenosis is for the sake of reconciliation of a relationship. The second was kenosis, at times, requires the leader to be true to oneself by being true to the mission of relationship. There may also be times that involve the consideration of the values of another individual. An example of this second consideration of another's values was found scripturally in 1 Corinthians 9:20 where Paul explained he connected with others based on their values so that he might be able to share the good news of Christ with them. This mentality of being aware of others' values, and even aware of one's own value, as it related to staying loyal to the mission, seemed to fit very well with the themes of authentic leadership. To make the connection of how kenosis fits within authentic leadership, it seemed appropriate to consider how authentic leaders have been defined. Avolio, Luthans, and Walumbwa (2004) stated authentic leaders are

those who are *deeply aware* of how they think and behave and are perceived by others as *being aware of their own and others' values/moral perspectives*, knowledge, and strengths; *aware of the context in which they operate*; and who are confident, hopeful, optimistic, *resilient*, and of high moral character. (p. 4)

Luthans and Avolio (2003) explained authentic leadership as a "process that draws from both positive psychological capacities and a highly developed organizational context, which results in both greater *self-awareness* and *self-regulated* positive behaviors on the part of leaders and associates, fostering positive self-development" (p. 243). The two definitions seemed to indicate a leader is both self-aware and aware of others' values. When kenosis is applied, it allows the leader to be aware of what needs to be emptied to pursue reconciliation for the greater mission. Perhaps, the self-awareness of an authentic leader coupled with the awareness of the values and feelings of others might allow for greater knowledge of what needs to be emptied out or reduced. Perhaps, this would be in a form such as pride, arrogance, superior ability that causes others to feel intimidated, educational achievements, or cultural norms. Remaining cognizant of the understanding authentic leaders have an awareness of others seems to be a critical element to comprehending the impact kenosis has upon the authentic leader.

Two aspects of Shamir and Eilam's (2005) definition of authentic leadership were the authentic leader works out of personal values, and they do not yield to the expectations of others. Alternatively, Henderson and Hoy (1983) classified a leader being *inauthentic* when they yielded to the expectations of the leadership role rather than bringing their own thoughts and emotions to the role. It seems an authentic leader might have an easier time practicing kenosis since they know what they are about, which lessens the possibility of peer pressure or the expectations of others, causing them to lose sight of who they are regardless of their form. In other words, if authentic leaders empty themselves out of position, title, or a superior form, they are still aware of their identity and thus their purpose. Examples were demonstrated by Christ being continuously self-aware of His identify and purpose and His unwavering

commitment to the integrity of His mission, regardless of critiques in passages such as Luke 2:41–50 and John 14:6.

In Luke 2:41–50, Jesus explained to His earthly parents He had a mission to be about His Heavenly Father's business and He never lost sight of that mission, regardless of His age or what activity His earthly family was involved in. In John 14:6, Jesus explained His purpose in the midst of practicing kenosis in human form: "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me'" (NKJV). Therefore, it seems authentic leaders are able to draw upon the ability to be self-aware and aware of others to equip them to practice kenosis in that they know which areas to empty out. Hence, they can pinpoint how others are feeling, and what others value, while remaining cognizant of the mission at hand.

The Impact of Kenosis on Transformational Authentic Leaders

The *transformational authentic leader* incorporates ideals from transformational leadership as well as authentic leadership. Burns (1978) explained transformational leadership helps to raise the awareness of the follower to identify with the overall mission. Bass (1985, 1996) outlined the reasons transformational leaders are able to motivate followers, which included "(1) making them more aware of the importance of task outcomes, (2) inducing them to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the organization or team, and (3) activating their higher-order needs" (Yukl, 2013, p. 322). Authentic leadership leads to greater *self-awareness*, as well as more awareness of the values, knowledge, and perspectives of others (Avolio, Luthans, & Walumbwa, 2004). Thus, the transformational authentic leader is able to evaluate the psychological environment using the knowledge of awareness of their own values in addition to those of others. Once the transformational authentic leader is able to take an assessment of what followers really need and desire at a deeper level, they are able to build upon that knowledge by connecting those needs and desires to the overall mission. Therefore, the operational definition of a transformational authentic leader is a leader that is able to acknowledge

the importance of the individual's values and help the follower to see either how those values might need to be shifted to support the importance of the mission or how transcending their self-interest to support the mission they actually are able to achieve a higher-order need.

Perhaps, to best understand a transformational authentic leader, it would be helpful to consider what could occur when a leader is an authentic leader but does not demonstrate transformational leadership. Eagly and Karau (2002) explained sometimes a leader can experience authenticity but has an inability to help the follower connect with that authenticity. The leader, although authentic, does not evoke the follower to render trust in the leader. Establishing trust is a critical aspect for a leader of a global team to consider (Marquardt & Horvath, 2001). Trust is the reason an authentic leader who practices transformational leadership is effective. The transformational authentic leader seems to be able to evoke trust through connecting followers with the leader's authenticity. This understanding then leads to the consideration about where kenosis fits into the life of the transformational authentic leader. When the overall mission is reconciliation, the transformational authentic leader is able to aid followers to acknowledge their own values and perspectives, and also transcend their own self-interest for the sake of upholding morals such as unity. This type of leadership was demonstrated with the exhortation to the Church of Ephesus from Paul who stated: "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called … bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1, 2b–3, NKJV). It was observed in this verse Paul led in a transformational way while raising the consciousness of the believers in Ephesus toward keeping the overall mission of unity. In addition, he engaged with their values that came forth from being called by Christ to walk in a way of love. Reflection on a different portion of Hebrews 2:17 shows: "Therefore, in all things He had to be made like His brethren, *that He might be a merciful and faithful High Priest* in the things pertaining to God, *to make propitiation for the sins of the people*" (NKJV). This passage offered evidence of Christ's example of transformational authentic leadership through kenosis. It was His sincere awareness of the need for a High Priest for mankind that works together with His ability to empty Himself out to

come in human form, which in turn allowed for His followers to transcend self-interest for the sake of unity. Further support of this example was provided in Ephesians 2:14–18:

> For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and *has broken down the middle wall of separation*, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that it, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, *thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God* in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. For *through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father*. (NKJV)

Therefore, the purpose of using kenosis for a transformational authentic leader is to build awareness in a way that advances the overall mission, which is ultimately the reconciliation between individuals.

Concluding Thoughts

In considering (1) the concept of kenosis, (2) to what extent it should be used, (3) how it applies within authentic leadership, and (4) how the transformational authentic leader can make use of it, the appropriate conclusion seems to be kenosis should be used when the reconciliation of a relationship is at stake. When a leader desires to follow in the footsteps of Christ, and there is a breach of relationship, the situation calls for limiting, emptying out, and opening oneself up to others for connectivity with Father God and His mission of unity. Kenosis seems to fit within the life of a transformational authentic leader. This type of leader appears to able to utilize the ability to be aware of others' values and needs to inspire followers to shift their focus toward the overall mission. In so doing, this leader is likely to meet more of the higher-order needs of the follower. To some degree, the transformational authentic leader has an advantage on knowing how to apply kenosis because of the ability to be aware of what areas in oneself that need to be emptied based on the needs and values of the other party to reconcile the relationship.

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