

Understanding Authoritarianism in the World—and the Church

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Redeemer University • April 17, 2024
(sources and credits listed at the end)

pastorprofessor
EXCHANGE

Introduction

Spiritual leadership in an age of authoritarianism

Agenda

Our agenda is to **shed light** on leading as shepherds and elders in a fearsome age of **authoritarianism** by understanding the **mental and moral** aspects of God's created order that are **seed bed for both** godly and misdirected passions so that we can grasp the full meaning of **Christlike spiritual leadership**.

- 1 Samuel 8: the archetypal narrative
- implicit leadership theory, moral foundations theory, human fear
- implications for Christian and pastoral leaders

Ongoing research

- Lead Agata Mirowska (NEOMA, France)
- Rick Hackett (McMaster)
- Kristyn Scott (Toronto Metropolitan, joined after JBE study)
- Journal of Business Ethics
- 1,147 working North American adults
- Relationships unlikely to occur by chance



The Allure of Tyrannical Leaders: Moral Foundations, Belief in a Dangerous World, and Follower Gender

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Abstract

What explains followers' attraction to tyrannical leaders? They systematically coerce, belittle, and manipulate, often at the expense of subordinates' mental and physical well-being and their organization's long-term interests. To help address the question, we examine the tendencies of people who view the tyrannical leader prototype (characterized by domineering, pushy, manipulative, loud, conceited, and selfish traits) as a component of effective leadership (Epitropaki and Martin in *J Appl Psychol* 89:293–310, 2004; Foti et al. in *Leadersh Q* 23:702–717, 2012). Specifically, we apply moral and evolutionary psychology to propose and empirically test a mediation model in which belief in a dangerous world (Altemeyer in *Enemies of freedom: understanding right-wing authoritarianism*. Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 1988) links positively with endorsement of the tyrannical leader traits, as mediated through the binding components (loyalty, authority, and sanctity) of moral foundations theory (Graham et al. *J Pers Soc Psychol* 101:366–385, 2011). Regarding gender, our model proposes that the link between the binding foundations and tyrannical leadership endorsement is stronger among males than females. Our overall model was supported across two independent samples of working adults; we also anticipated and found a direct *negative* association between the individualizing moral foundations (care and harm) and endorsement of the tyrannical prototype. These findings provide insights into the circumstances under which tyrannical traits are viewed as part of effective leadership.

Keywords Moral foundations theory · Implicit leadership theory · Tyrannical leader prototype · Belief in a dangerous world · Follower gender · Destructive leadership

Introduction

What explains followers' attraction to a tyrannical leader? Tyrannical leaders systematically coerce, belittle, and manipulate their subordinates, often at the expense of their

followers' mental and physical well-being and their organization's long-term interests (Thoroughgood et al., 2018). Foti et al. (2012) found that 33% of those in their study endorsed leader profiles higher in tyranny than the prototypical socially desirable leader profile consisting of sensitive, intelligent, and dedicated attributes. To advance the literatures concerning followership and leadership, a better understanding is required concerning how and why some people endorse the tyrannical leader prototype (Epitropaki & Martin, 2004). Research of this kind has been called for (Ashforth, 1994), but has not been pursued; nonetheless, the issue is a crucial one given repeated historical experiences with organizations and societies that have welcomed tyrants with open arms despite their obvious dysfunctions (Sullivan, 2016).

One of the ways the attraction to tyranny has been addressed in the literature is through implicit leadership theory (ILT; Lord & Maher, 1991; Lord et al., 2020). Specifically, ILT-tyranny (defined by domineering, pushy, manipulative, loud, conceited, and selfish traits) is one of

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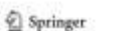
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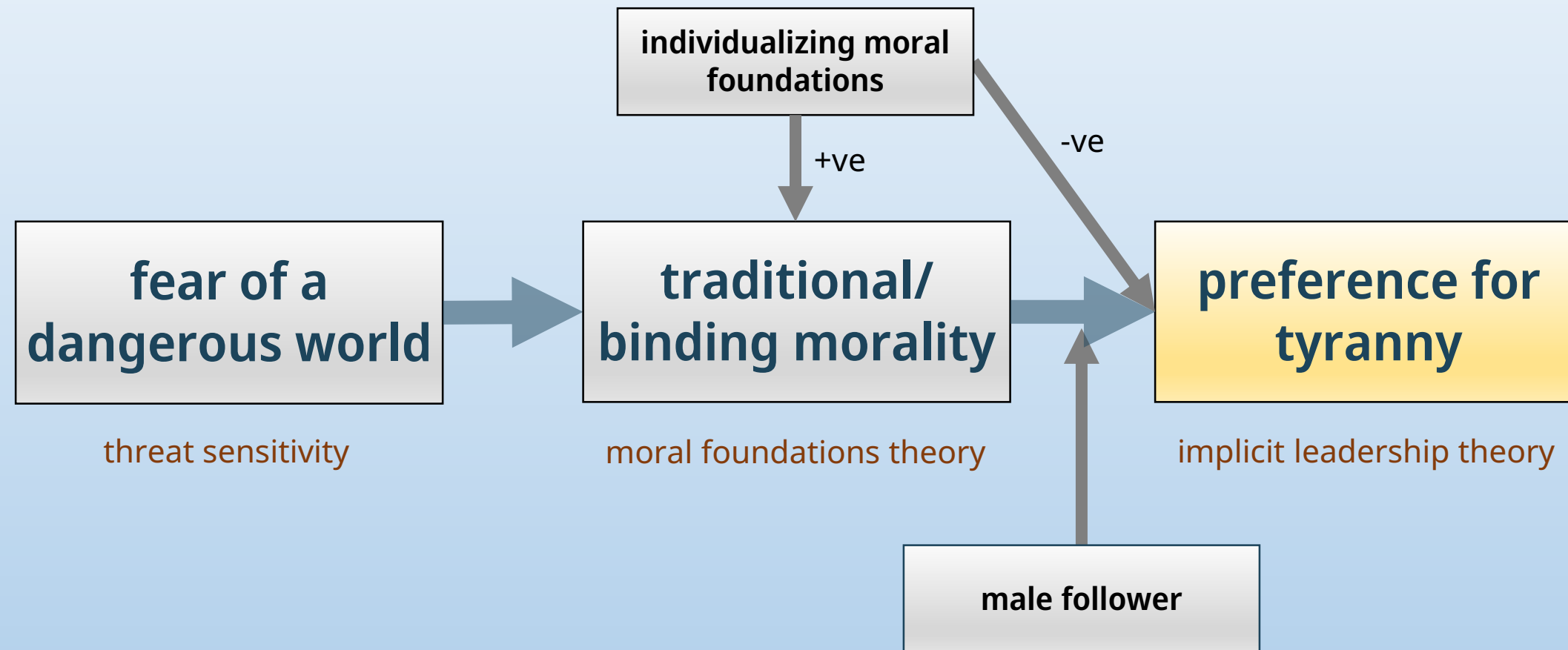
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The empirical model



Mirowska, Chiu, and Hackett (2022)

The challenge of authoritarianism

- “The rise of authoritarianism is a **global catastrophe** ... one of the largest—if not the largest—challenges facing humanity” (Kasparov & Halvorsen)
- 94 countries, or **53 percent** of the global population
- Death toll due to communist regimes **100 million people** (Satter)



The image shows a screenshot of a Wall Street Journal article. At the top, there is a navigation bar with a green 'H' logo, followed by links for 'Topics', 'Regions', 'Policy Centers', 'Research & Analysis', 'Events', 'Experts', and 'About'. There are also 'Subscribe' and 'Donate' buttons. Below the navigation bar, the article is identified as a 'COMMENTARY' dated 'Nov 6, 2017' from the 'Wall Street Journal'. The main title of the article is '100 Years of Communism—and 100 Million Dead'. Below the title, a sub-headline reads: 'The Bolshevik plague that began in Russia was the greatest catastrophe in human history'. The author's name, 'David Satter', is displayed next to a small circular profile picture. To the right of the text is a black and white photograph of a group of men, some wearing military caps and holding rifles, standing in front of a banner with Cyrillic text. At the bottom right of the image, a small caption reads: 'Bolshevik fighters pose with their guns in Petrograd, October 1917 (AFP/Getty Images)'.

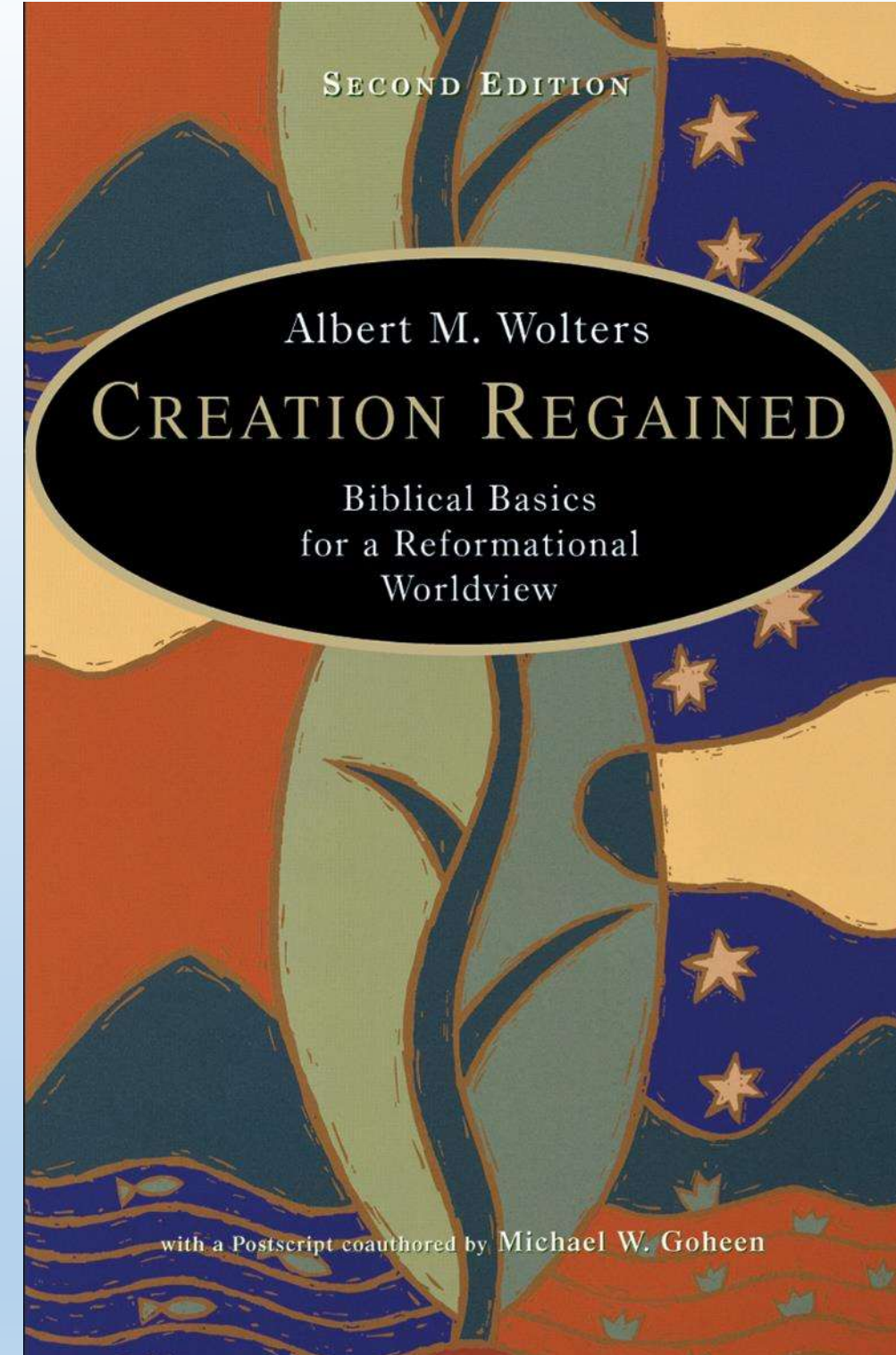
The challenge in churches



- Russian Orthodox Church declares “**holy war**”
- **Christian nationalism** in the U.S., Brazil, El Salvador, Italy, Poland, and Hungary
- **Devolution of religion into political identity** based on ethnic and racial heritage
- “Into this void steps **populism, nationalism, and authoritarianism**. These modern political forces offer **a new faith.**” (Fareed Zakaria)

Shedding a Reformed light

- Richard Mouw on political power
 - political engagement is **not a holy crusade**
 - it is cultivation of **virtue and civility**
 - it **blesses** the larger community
- Al Wolters: discernment of **creational revelation**
- Lydia Jaeger: science tells us **“how”** something fails



The light of scripture

- A paraphrase of 1 Samuel 8:1-22:

The Israelites become intolerant of seemingly **corrupt and weak** priestly mediators. Sensing a **deep insecurity** that they **don't measure up to other nations**, they demand a king to lead them. Despite being warned that he will **rob them of their rights** and **forcibly take their children and possessions** to be placed in the service of his own military and agricultural empire, the people's **impulsive desire** is to **seek after a champion** who will lead them to victory over their adversaries. In so doing, they **reject God as the king** that had once brought them out of Egypt and now keeps them safe to this day.

Some disclaimers



- Drawing from Donald Trump and MAGA (Make America Great Again)
- Not devaluing conservatism
- Not promoting Joe Biden
- Trump's tyrannical traits are extremely useful examples

**“A king to lead us and to
go out before us and fight our battles”**

Implicit leadership theory and the tyrannical prototype

Implicit leadership theory

- More than **forty years** of research
- People have **images** in their mind
- People **match the image with the leader**
- Leaders are **attributed abilities**

- People are **distant from reality**
- People are **poor information processors**
- **“Diabolically brilliant”** misinformation (Ressa)

DW IN FOCUS Russia's war in Ukraine BRICS Live TV

CULTURE | RUSSIAN FEDERATION

Why the cult of Josef Stalin is flourishing

Anastassia Boutsko
03/06/2023

The Russian state is promoting the Soviet dictator through new monuments, reversing the de-Stalinization process of the 1960s. Why would a country celebrate a mass murderer?

f t v



Joseph Stalin's body during the funeral service on March 9, 1953
Image: Nikolai Sitnikov/TASS/picture alliance

The leader prototypes

Sensitive
Intelligent
Dedicated
Dynamic
Masculine

Tyrannical

- loud
- conceited
- manipulative
- selfish
- pushy
- domineering

Epitropaki and Martin (2004)

The follower makes the leader



- **Loud:** talking over others in an uncivil manner
- **Conceited:** “nobody knows better than me”
- **Manipulative:** 30,000 untruths, denying the election
- **Selfish:** exploiting women, defrauding others
- **Pushy:** using office to influence officials
- **Domineering:** unprecedented turnover, dehumanizing migrants, targeting opponents, inciting murder, pardoning rioters

- These traits **deceive us** into thinking the leader is effective and are **passed down intergenerationally**

The problem of distance



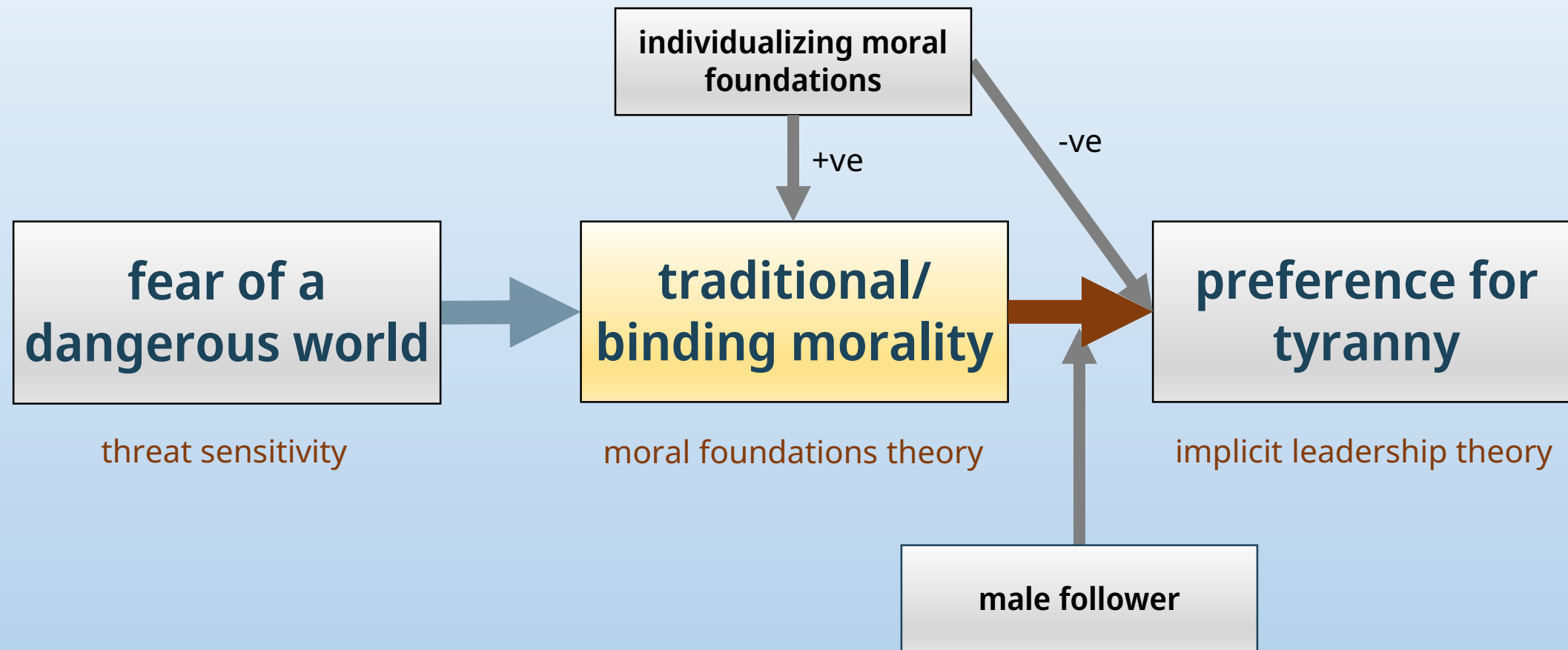
- People's desire is to **seek a champion**
- "I'd like to offer a definition of 'celebrity' as **social power without proximity**. We put celebrities on pedestals, from which they influence, inspire, entertain, and exhort us."
- "Yet the power differential is **on another level quite hidden**, making it more insidious. Andy Crouch notes, 'Celebrity combines the old distance of power with what seems like its exact opposite—extraordinary intimacy, or at least a **bewitching simulation of intimacy**'."

Beaty (2022)

“This is what the king who will reign over you
will claim as his rights””

Moral foundations theory and the binding foundations

The empirical model



Mirowska, Chiu, and Hackett (2022)

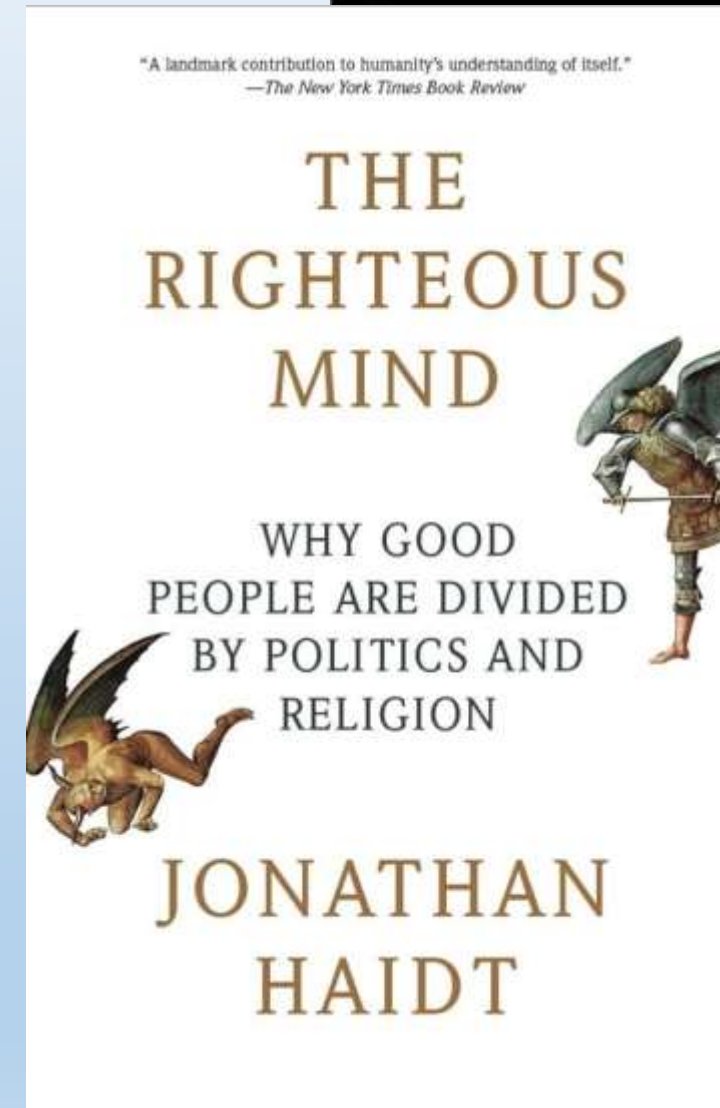
Moral foundations theory

- Moral intuitions are innate responses that are built into how our minds were created
- “Moral triggers” that are “tripped every day as we navigate life with others,” and that give us “the ability to recognize boundaries between what is good for our common life and what is not”

Haidt (2012); Bailey (2012)

Interpreting Your World

Five Lenses for Engaging Theology and Culture



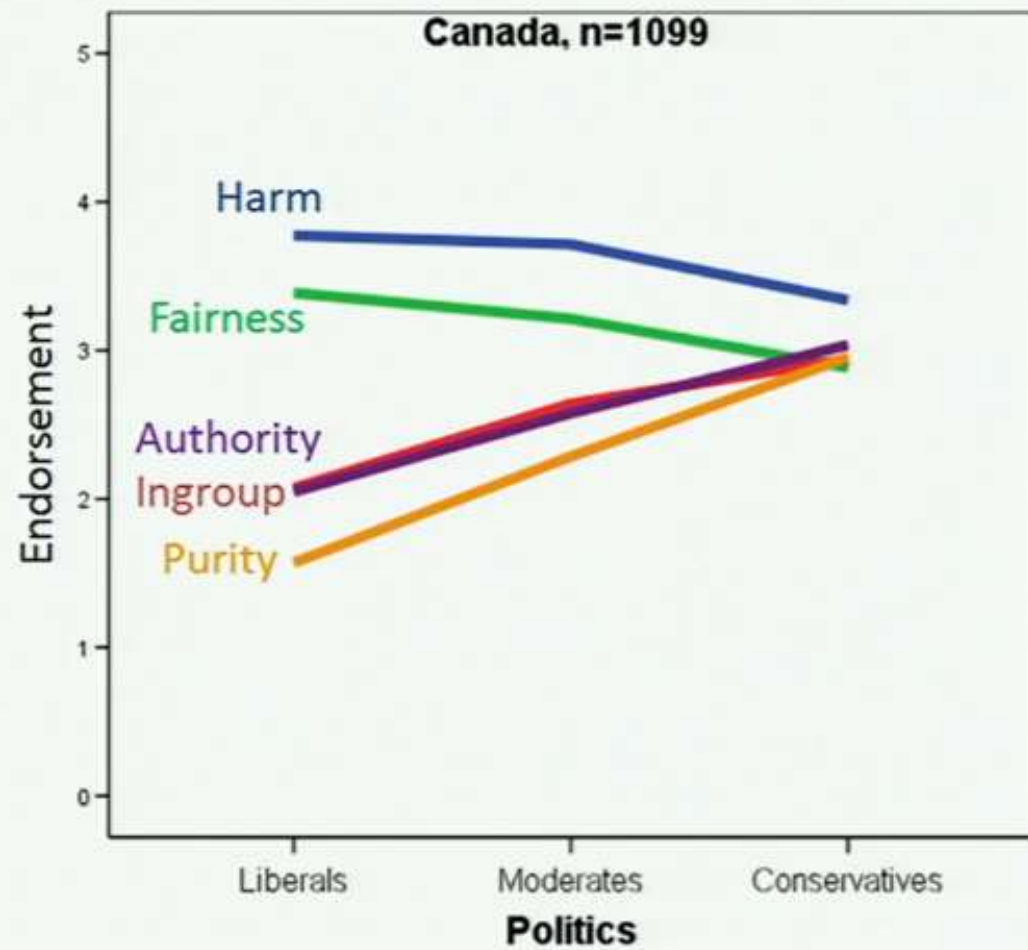
Moral foundations theory

- Individualizing foundations
 1. **Care**: being kind, empathizing with others' pain
 2. **Fairness**: being concerned for justice and rights
- Binding foundations
 3. **Loyalty**: giving yourself to the group
 4. **Authority**: submitting to power structures
 5. **Sanctity**: defines what is clean, natural, and safe; underlies religious notions of living in a less carnal way



Why we give up people's rights

Liberals 2 channels, Conservatives 5



- Traditional or high-binding people are high on all five foundations
- Protecting the group may mean violating people's well-being and rights
- High-binding people need to preserve the social order, suppress subversion, and protect from impurity
- Supposedly only a tyrannical leader will win and not back down

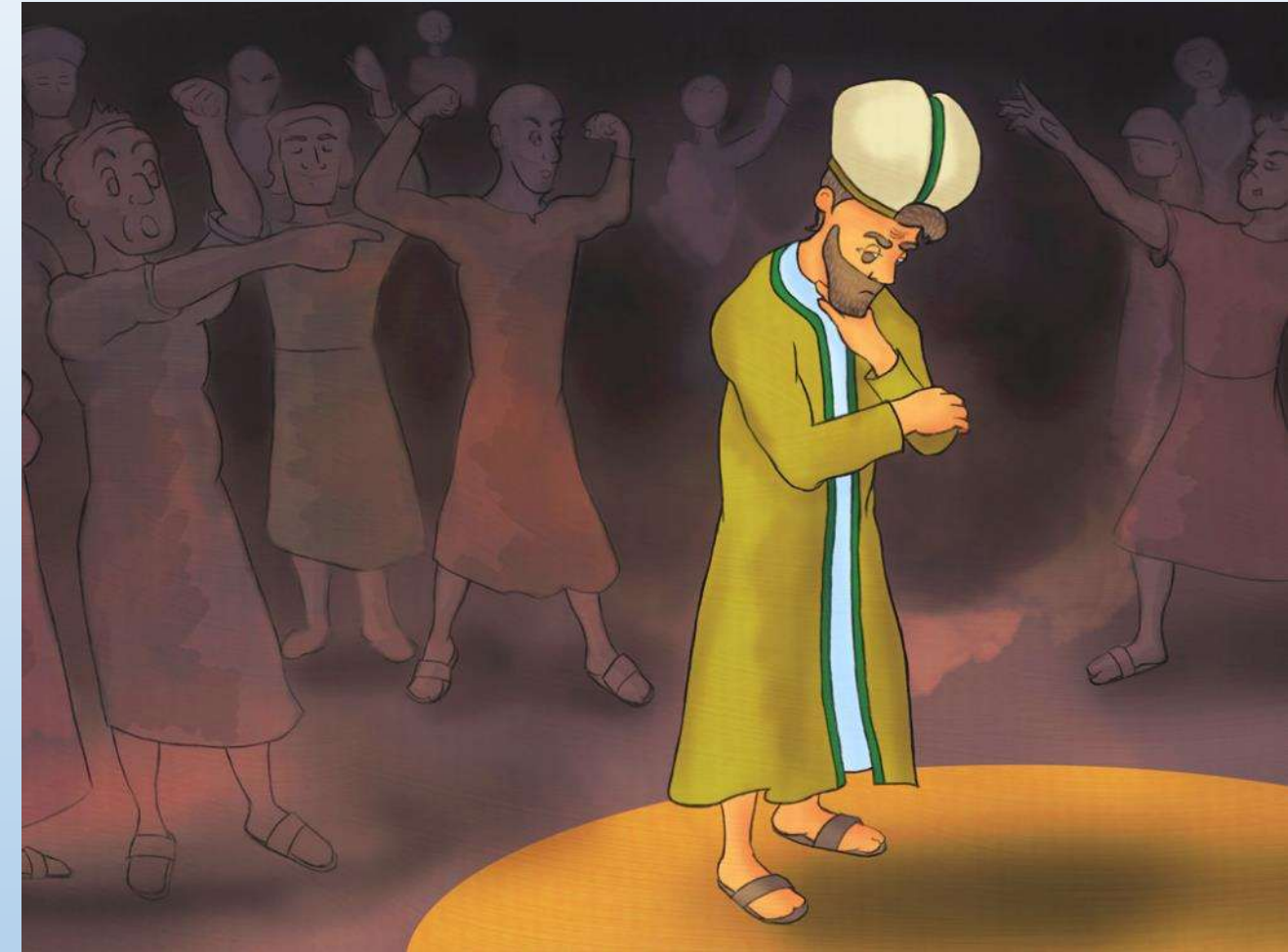
Haidt (TED Talk)

“Then we will be like **all the other nations**”

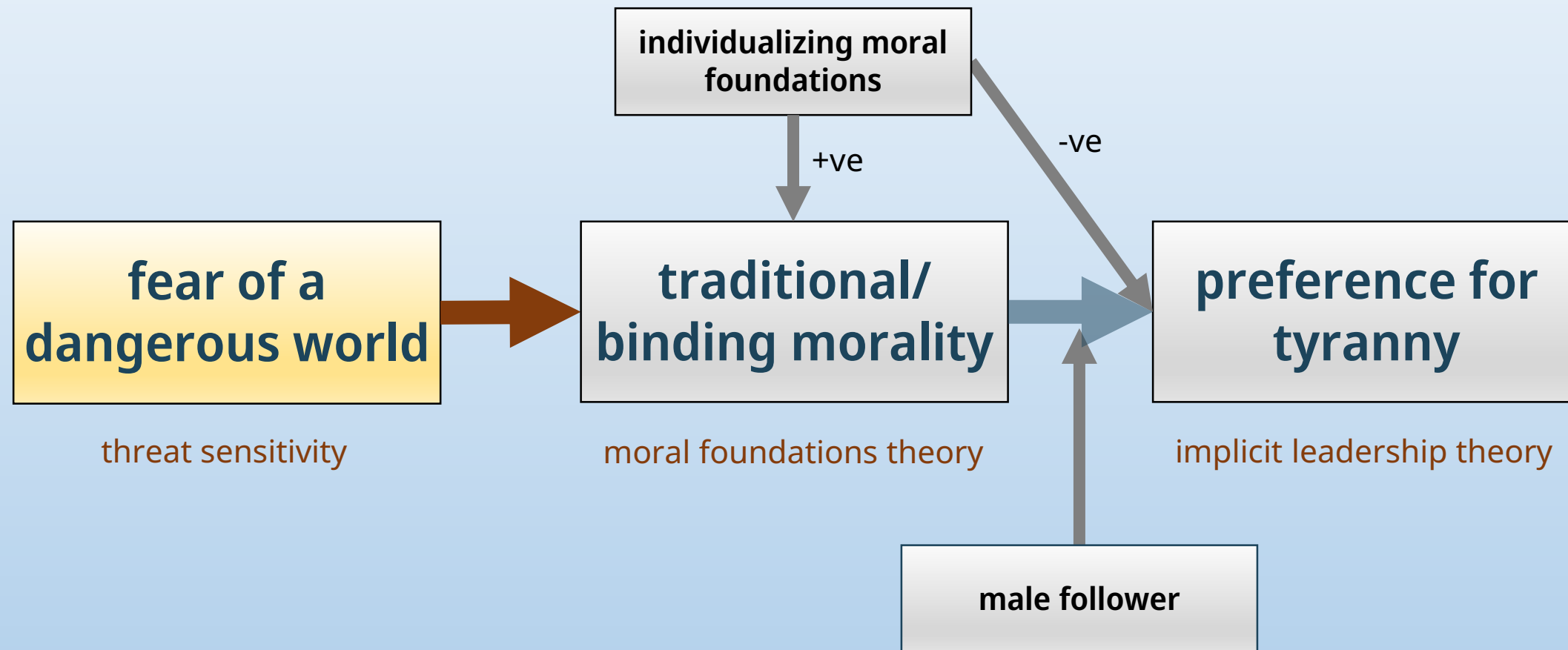
Threat sensitivity and fear of the world

Insecurity and inferiority

- Philistines had been subdued (1 Samuel 7)
- **Repentance** brought peace
- God was fighting their battles and was at their side
- Israel still felt **insecure and inferior**
- A king would make them feel powerful



The empirical model



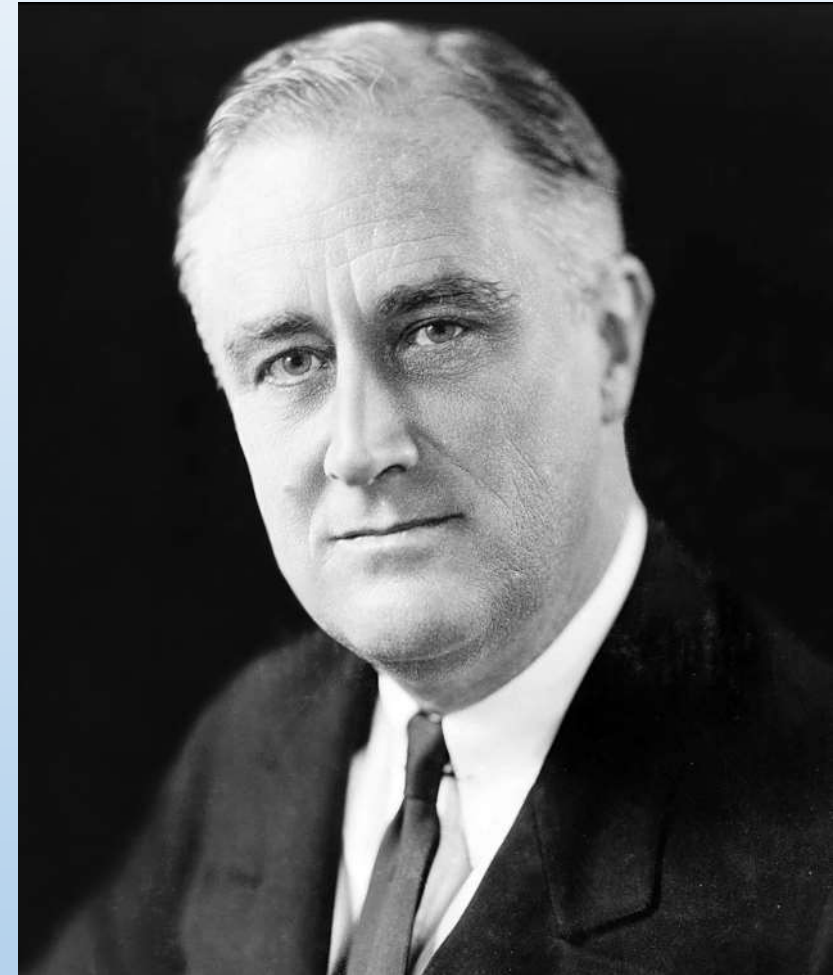
Mirowska, Chiu, and Hackett (2022)

The multiplicity of fear

Variable	Outcomes
Suggestion of mortality ¹	Conform to the majority view ² Become more politically or socially conservative ^{2,3} Support military aggression and restricted rights ³
Fear of disease ²	Become more prejudiced against outsiders ^{1,3} Want to punish social deviants ¹ Have desire for more children ¹ Have less desire for an attractive woman ¹
Belief in a dangerous world ³	Become less liberal in their sexuality ²

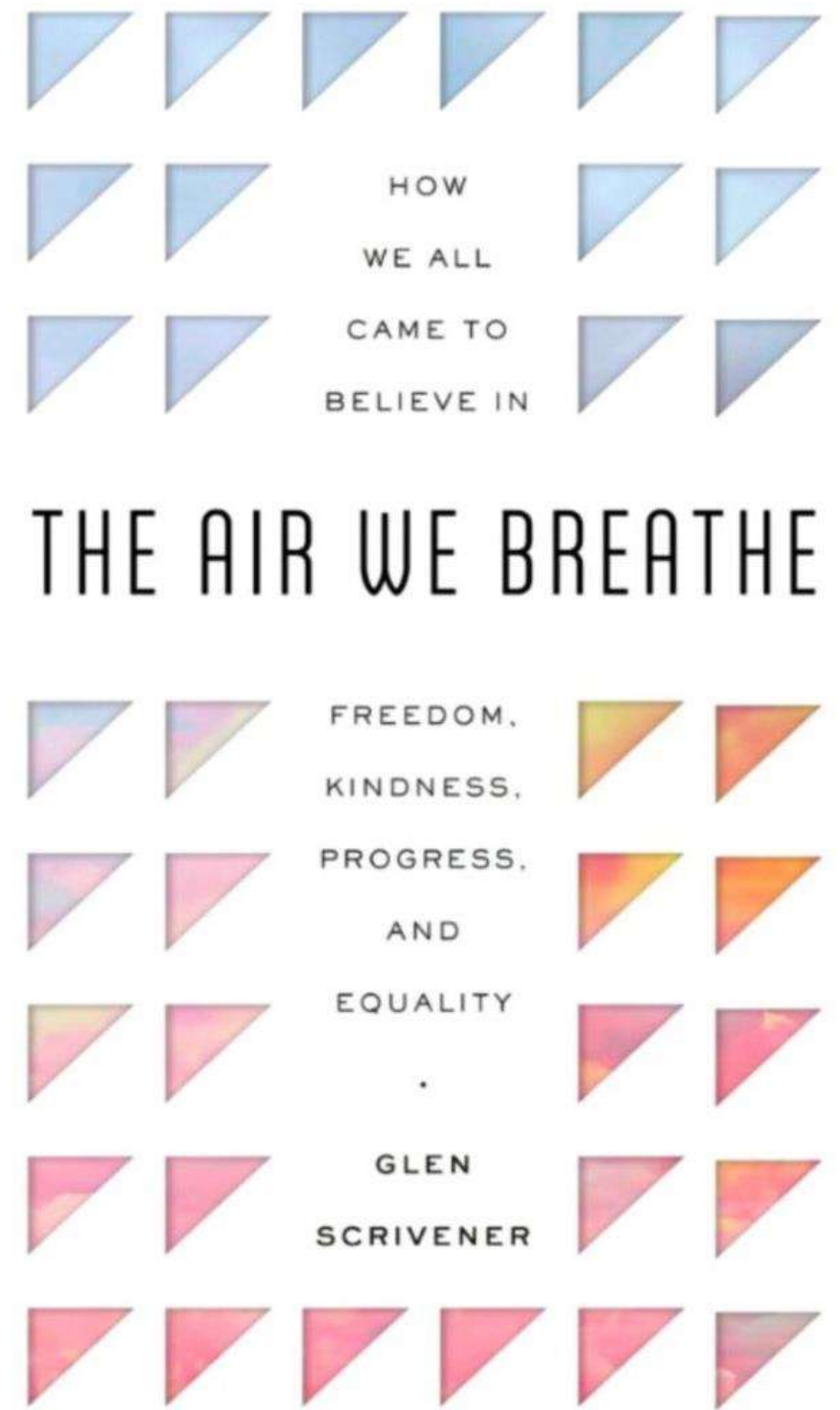
Fear itself

- “So, first of all, let me assert my firm belief that the only thing we have to fear is **fear itself—nameless, unreasoning, unjustified terror** which paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance.” (Franklin D. Roosevelt's First Inaugural Address, 1933)
- Without a **strongman king**, Israel could not be “great”
- The **Make-Israel-Great** campaign was the “first MAGA”



God is already great

- Israel already had *El Shaddai*
- God has *already shown us his common grace and greatness*
- “Equality, compassion, consent, enlightenment, science, freedom, and progress. None of these values are self-evident, nor are they widespread among the civilisations of the world. *So where did they come from, and how did they get to become ‘the air we breathe’? ... The one word answer is: Christianity.*”



Fearmongering works

- “Hungary’s way of life is under attack ... A Jewish billionaire plots to flood the country with a million Muslims. Perverts want to teach its children sexual deviance. The opposition are spoiling for war with Russia ... The only way to stay safe is to back Viktor Orban ... Mr Orban called it a triumph for ‘our brand of Christian democratic, conservative, patriotic politics’.”

Leaders | Imaginary hobgoblins

Fearmongering works. Fans of the truth should fear it

In Hungary, Russia, Pakistan and France, leaders lie to scare people into supporting them



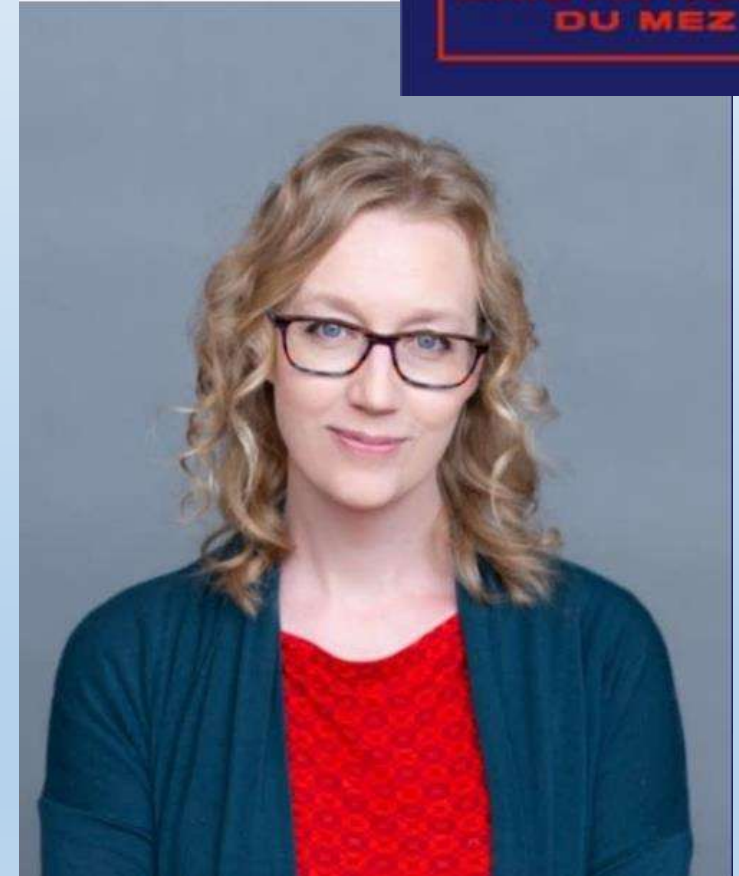
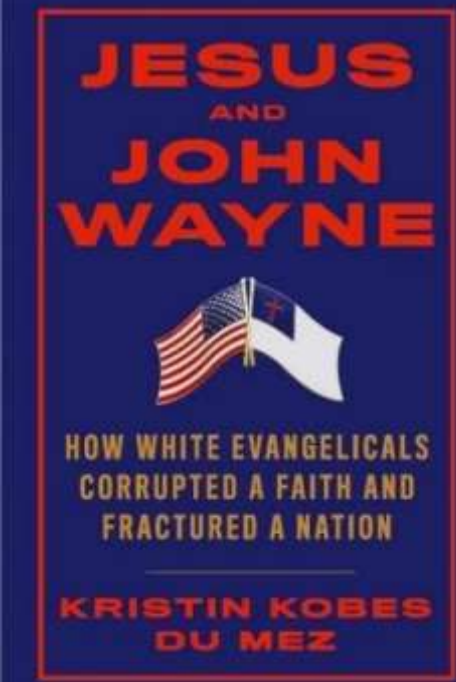
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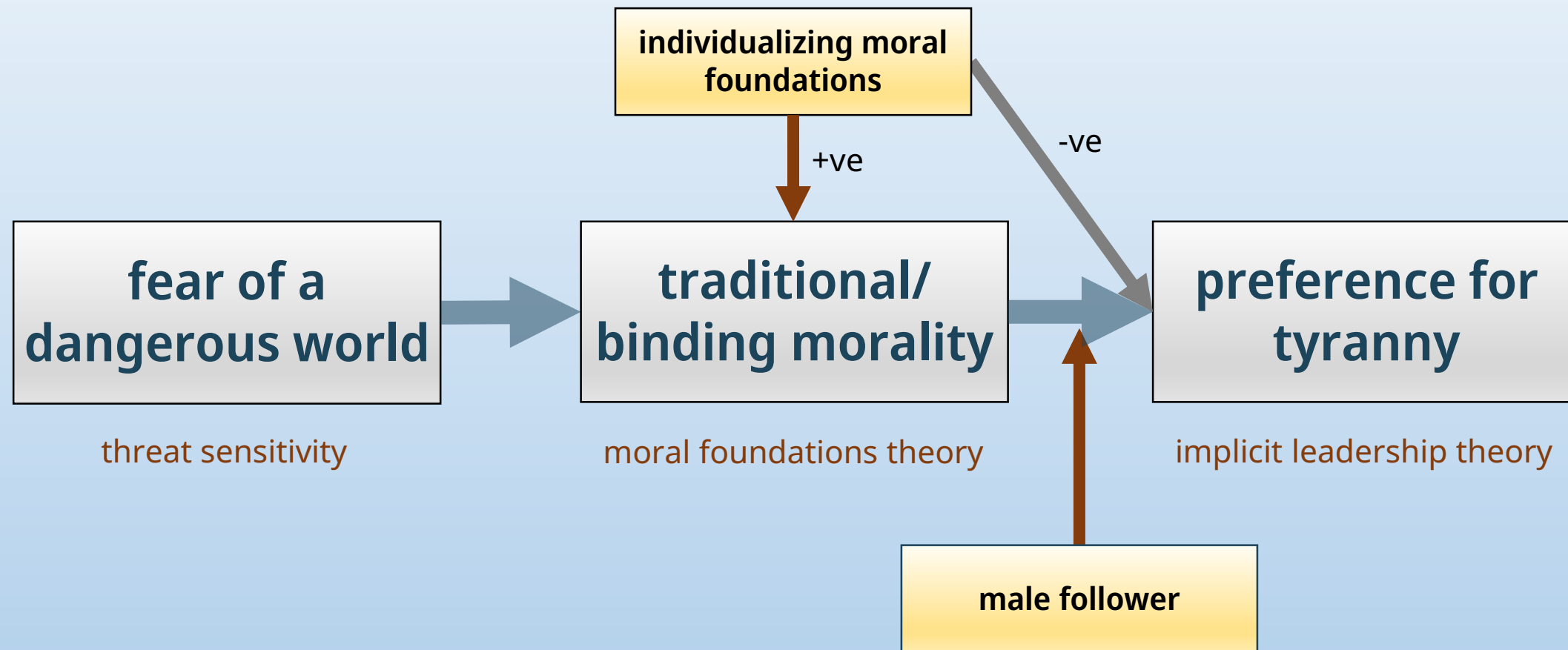
Fearmongering in churches

- “Driscoll thrived on manufacturing a sense of threat posed by outsiders ... A sense of physical threat dovetailed with religious and cultural hazards: unorthodox theology, Islam, ‘sexualized single women’ and ‘effeminate men’ all put the church and nation at risk ... By ratcheting up the sense of alarm, Driscoll justified his demands for discipline, control, and unquestioned power.”

Du Mez (2002)



The empirical model



Mirowska, Chiu, and Hackett (2022)

Pastoral implications

Spiritual leadership in an age of authoritarianism

Pastoral implications

1) We are always working with both the **light and dark side of humanity** when we lead. Human tendencies towards tyranny are not a matter of blatantly choosing evil, but of being **blind to misdirection** and its accumulated effects, including **moral disengagement**.



Pastoral implications



2) In his ministry, Jesus was noticeably **uninterested** in supporting a nationalistic campaign, binding people to religious tradition, or focusing on external enemies. He was most critical that faith was being **reduced to protective religious norms**.

Pastoral implications

3) Real leadership and discipleship happens on the ground, not from the stage. There is a reason that the church is called the Body of Christ. The idealizing of leadership, plain and simple, is idolatry.

NEW CANADIAN
EASTER POETRY
P.40

FELLOWSHIP SKILLS:
HOW TO LISTEN WELL
P.42

LEARNING HUMILITY
IN A GROUP HOME
P.46

STOP MAID FOR
MENTAL ILLNESS
P.36

Canada's Christian conversation

March / April 2023

FAITH TODAY



COVER STORY

Appreciating small churches

While they are the most common type of church across our nation, small churches are often missing from the larger conversations. A new study reveals just how much they have to offer. p.30

FaithToday.ca
PM 40069336

Pastoral implications



4) True shepherding is the **transformation of disappointments** founded in fear into godliness. Shouldering one's cross as a pastor means that you **bear the brunt of people's dashed expectations** to feed off a leader's dominant, superficial characteristics—authoritativeness, moralism, influence, success, and attractiveness.

Pastoral implications

5) Binding moral foundations found in pastoral language from the pulpit are both **subconscious and loaded** at the same time. Messages inevitably **shape the culture** of your congregation, and should **point to Christ and his love for the lost**, not to the leader.



Pastoral implications

- **Tyrannical tendencies** in preaching
 1. Loyalty: A pastor retells an instance when a member had approached him with concerns, and then later **uses the pulpit to call him out** and disapprove of his complaining.
 2. Authority: A pastor describes a time when he told a member that her prayers wouldn't be answered because of her insincerity, suggesting that **he has exclusive knowledge of God's mind**.
 3. Sanctity: A pastor frames everyday interactions with society **as spiritual warfare, which draws adversarial lines** between ingroups and outgroups and **dampens their missional outreach**.



Pastoral implications



6) The choice to emphasize the pastoral traits and church structures that foster rapid church growth and top-down leadership is not a benign, non-spiritual decision. They ultimately indicate a leaning toward the binding foundations and tyrannical appearances.

Pastoral implications



- **Two pivotal choices** of church planters
 1. **Choosing a strong leader** with an emphasis on church building and a consumerist experience at the expense of pastoral care
 2. **Choosing an elder-only model** with little congregational authority, putting aside church participation and accountability

Pastoral implications

7) **Real spiritual leadership** is not about being rewarded by God with sure success because we felt we obeyed him or did and said the "right things." **It is about grasping the messy and difficult totality of Christlikeness in today's world.**



Pastoral implications

- Ten leadership paradigms

1. Charismatic leadership
2. Transformational leadership
3. Moral character
4. Leader candour
5. Cultural leadership
6. Servant leadership
7. Subversive leadership
8. Leadership coaching
9. Mentoring
10. Stewardship



Real spiritual leadership

- “**Christian leadership** is understanding and internalizing the totality of Christ’s acts upon the world in various forms.”
- “For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, **so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.**” (1 Corinthians 2:3-5)



Q&A and group discussion

Thank you for enriching us all with your presence!

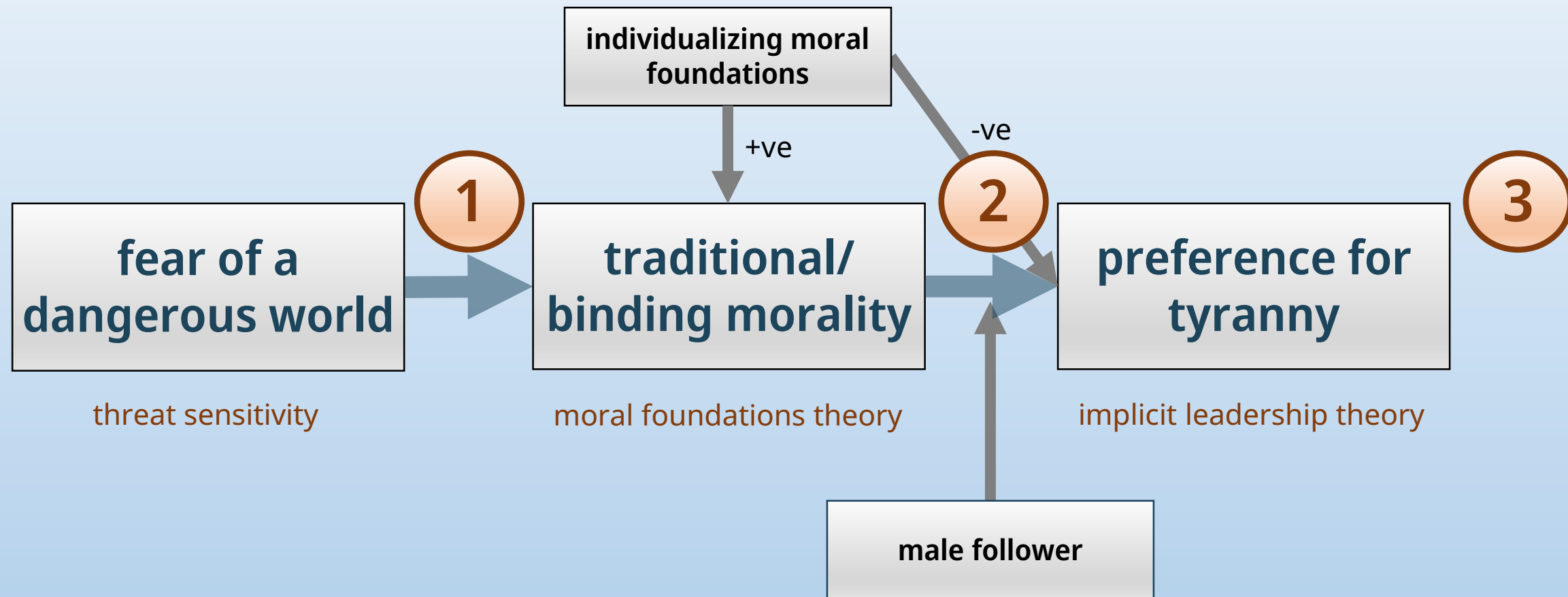
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Slides will be posted at <https://beliefsthatmatter.weebly.com/>

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EXCHANGE

The empirical model



Mirowska, Chiu, and Hackett (2022)

Discussion questions

1. In what ways are you seeing church members being driven by fear—of unorthodoxy, deviance, impurity, etc.—and expecting to shape the church's values and leadership expectations to address them?
2. In what ways are you seeing church members expecting leaders to exhibit certain dominant traits—to be a guardian, visionary, policer, etc.—as a way to actualize their desire for group loyalty, authority, and sanctity?
3. In what ways can your ministry be less about the appearance and impact of highly visible leaders and more about mentoring imperfect followers to share in the calling to Christlike congregational leadership?

Sources and credits

Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version.

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