

## 'Are Pastors Human?' Sociological and Theological Reflections on Ministerial Identity in Contemporary Africa

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The title for this article comes from a fascinating little book I read a number of years ago.<sup>1</sup> At the time, I was wrestling with issues that dealt with the wider scope of theological anthropology; specifically, how we (as evangelicals) have allowed Jesus' humanity to assume a limited or narrowly defined role in our doctrinal development, and more so, how this has affected how we think about *our* humanity. Since then, I have reflected upon its importance for ministerial training in Africa, especially in view of some of the sociological and theological presuppositions that I believe lie implicit behind how church members think about pastors. The problem is essentially this. People view the pastor as some kind of 'super human'. Sometimes this appears through expecting the pastor to have all the biblical answers, and thus able to discern the mind of God. Alternatively, people may assume that their minister has a higher degree of sinless perfection: not encumbered by temptations that face 'ordinary' humans. Still another possibility involves where parishioners believe that the pastor should always be 'spiritual' (read, serious), and thus never laugh, play, exercise or relax. In these instances, the pastor's calling sets him or her *apart* from the people.

In the case where the pastor inevitably falls short of these standards, whether struggling to provide a relevant answer to the problem of evil, or revealing some moral imperfection such as uncontrolled anger or jealousy, the result is disastrous. The pastor quickly loses spiritual credibility and the people are deprived a role model (even though it was nothing but a 'straw man'). This may be one of the contributing factors why clergy spend so little time in any given congregation: moving from one church to another,

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<sup>1</sup> Nigel M. de S. Cameron, *Are Christians Human?: an exploration of true spirituality*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Cantilever Books, 1988).

distancing themselves from the people, and/or seeking more education. Yet, even when the pastor is particularly adept at hiding his or her weaknesses, the congregation often find it difficult (if not impossible) to relate with someone portraying such high moral ideals. A young man once shared with me some sexual struggles he was facing. When I asked if he had shared these things with his pastor, he told me, 'He wouldn't understand; he doesn't struggle with such things'. This perspective leads to incessant guilt and spiritual defeat; as well as the lack of any real mentoring in how to overcome sin, or deal with issues related to forgiveness and/or regret. The pastor stands distant from the people, not as one of them.

Before proceeding further, I am aware at this point that some would advocate elements of this spiritual distancing, arguing persuasively (as they have done with me) that clear divisions between leader and follower are essential if the pastor is going to maintain spiritual authority. People believe that distance (whether physical, social, spiritual or ontological) is necessary for effective leadership. Yet, it seems to me that the underlying presuppositions for this argument need rethinking. What is the nature of pastoral authority if distance is the primary means for upholding and maintaining its efficacy? Does this not say more about the pastor's own insecurity, or the people's need for a transcendent leader? More in line with this article, if spiritual authority demands this kind of distance, what does this mean for how we think of our own personhood?; and/or, the humanity of Christ?

This article attempts to counter some of these objections by calling pastors back to their own humanity as foundational to their ministerial 'calling'. Jesus Christ provides the model for joining spiritual power with humanity, and calls us to embrace His life as the pathway for discovering our own personhood (and subsequently, our authority in a broken world).<sup>2</sup> Hence, our humanity is not something we need to deny or overcome in order to be shepherds for the people of God, but represents the very means for accomplishing our spiritual mandate within the world.

### **Antecedents to the Problem: Sacralisation and Deification in Africa**

In order to understand the roots of the problem, it is necessary to explore some of the socio-cultural and theological antecedents that have contributed

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<sup>2</sup> Some readers are likely to see similarities with a previous article appearing in this journal, entitled 'The Image of God in Leadership', *AJET* 23:1, 2004. This article builds upon many of those earlier ruminations, but hopefully with greater clarity and building upon specific points of ecclesiastical concern.

to the quandary particular to the Church in Africa. We should at once acknowledge that the issues are likely to appear dissimilar with those found in the West, and have varying manifestations depending upon the context (urban or rural) and ecclesiastical tradition: with some churches prone to accentuate the pastor's authority and others elevating the role of the educated lay leader. I am not proposing that every church may struggle with these issues in the same ways, but merely want to identify some of the contributing factors to the elevated humanity or 'distance' often experienced between clergy and laity. Individual churches can thereby discern the ways these are (or, are not) relevant within their ecclesiastical traditions and reasons for their particular manifestation(s). I will explore the various nuances by using two interrelated but distinct concepts: sacralisation and deification.

### *Sacralisation*

There are many possible meanings to this concept. As implied by the word, an extra endowment of sacred power becomes associated with a person or thing, whether: (1) intended for a particular purpose over a specific period of time; (2) inculcated within a person as a permanent aspect of their being; or, (3) perceived as self-evident by the masses. In the case of the latter two, sacralisation elevates a person (or thing) in terms of being or essence: creating tiers of importance (or, personhood). A pastor is 'set apart' for the ministry of the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and people perceive him or her as residing closer to God, and/or manifesting higher degrees of glory. A young man announces to his parents that he has been 'called' by God. He goes away to theological college, graduates, and returns to the community a new man, with heightened spiritual powers. Even his parents treat him differently. In each of these illustrations, spiritual power promotes the person in terms of their identity: making them 'extra' human.

In order to trace some of the sources of sacralisation within Africa it is necessary to begin by looking at 'traditional' understandings of the cosmos. The basic premise common to many African societies is that humans derive their essence (famously conceived by Tempels as 'life force'<sup>3</sup>) from proximity to the Creator. God gives His power to humans, which then relates to life. With these powers, humans have responsibility to care for the entire cosmos: providing harmony and integration within the whole. Nearness to God provides the source of identity, which then relates to responsibility within the cosmos. However, since human communities are commonly

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<sup>3</sup> Placides Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy* (Paris: Presence Africaine, 1959).

pictured within a hierarchy, those people nearer the top (closer to God) are often perceived as having greater powers, and hence: 'more' personhood. The particular shapes and forms of this may differ from society to society, with some displaying the 'sacred Kingship' model such as the Akan of Ghana or Shillunk of Sudan;<sup>4</sup> and others the 'sacred elder' model, evidenced by the Agikuyu and Akamba of Kenya. Ruth Lucier describes the significance of the hierarchy for how leaders within these communities relate with power. She says, 'It graphically depicts that some ontological types, namely, the more highly placed ones, have increasing greater power and authority. And the apex may certainly connote the glorious, concentrated power of the High God'.<sup>5</sup> Mbiti refers to the belief held by some African societies that the leader comes directly from God, and therefore manifests such an identity to the community: carrying names such as 'child of God' or 'son of God'.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, by being a little 'nearer' to God and manifesting greater degrees of being, the leader embodies the collective identity of the people.<sup>7</sup>

To what extent do these ideas continue to inform modern church praxis? It may be impossible to tell. Traditions are never static, and require a certain amount of reinterpretation in various contexts (and over time) to maintain any relevancy. Another way of saying this is that any tradition that is not re-interpreted risks becoming antiquated and useless to a society that is itself constantly undergoing change. We can only look for instances where power relates to nearness with God, or where people perceive the leader to have greater human identity.

Kwame Bediako argues this point for understanding political practices across the continent.<sup>8</sup> He contends that any diagnosis of the modern political process in Africa should pay closer attention to the traditional antecedents of power than blaming imported Western democracies for abuse and corruption

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<sup>4</sup> See E. Evans Pritchard, 'The Divine Kingship of the Shillunk of the Nilotic Sudan', in *Social Anthropology and Other Essays* (New York: The Free Press of Glenscoe, 1962).

<sup>5</sup> Ruth M. Lucier, 'Dynamics of Hierarchy in African Thought', *Listening: Journal of Religion and Culture* 24:1 (1989), pp. 29-40: p. 32.

<sup>6</sup> John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, (London: Heinemann Press, 1969), p. 162.

<sup>7</sup> See John V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision: Christian Presence amid African Religion* (London: SCM, 1963), pp. 135ff.

<sup>8</sup> Kwame Bediako, 'Unmasking the Powers: Christianity, Authority, and Desacralization in Modern African Politics', In J. Wiffe (ed.) *Christianity and Democracy in Global Context* (Boulder CO: Westview Press, 1993): pp. 207-229.

associated with leadership.<sup>9</sup> He uses the Akan of Ghana as his point of departure. Traditional rulers, Bediako argues, received their authority from the ancestors, providing fluid interactions between spirit and human communities. However, this nearness to the divine may leave little room for anyone to question the leader's directives.

By thus presuming the authority of rulers to be that of ancestors, African tradition makes every challenge to political authority an attack upon the sacral authority of ancestors, on whose goodwill and favor the community's continuance and prosperity are held to depend.<sup>10</sup>

In other words, if the leader is closer (ontologically, if not in other ways) to the source of divine power, then any claim against that authority amounts to a direct attack against the spirit world, or more significantly, in contemporary societies, against God. Bediako contends that African societies have utilised 'sacralisation' as a means of stifling political opposition, or defending one-party systems of governance. African societies, he maintains, need to retain their spiritual foundations but in ways that resist the dangerous allures associated with sacralisation.<sup>11</sup>

To the extent that Lucier, Mbiti and Bediako are right, and that power relates to nearness to the divine, we must then trace this correlation to discern its contemporary relevancy within our local contexts. Beginning at the political level, many rulers in Africa utilise 'spiritual' power as a convenient tool for staking claim to political legitimacy: creating the impression that the leader (whether Presidential or other) has access to spiritual blessings. Célistin Monga says, 'In Africa, the politics of God is above all a vehicle for reconstructing reality, a means of legitimating power that stems from brute force rather than the ballot box, a way of polishing up the tarnished image of the most brutal regime'.<sup>12</sup> What Mongo describes in pejorative terms might have many different manifestations. It may occur through nearness with the ancestors: whether by associating power with prominent families that have historical ties to leadership (at the clan, tribe, or national level); or, through naming a child after a famous local leader. Even in Christian contexts,

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid. p. 213.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p. 214.

<sup>11</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), p. 246.

<sup>12</sup> Célistin Monga, *The Anthropology of Anger: Civil Society and Democracy in Africa*. Translated by Linda L. Flecker and Célistin Monga (London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1996), p. 135.

continuity of leadership along family lines remains a prominent feature defining *how* leaders are chosen in ecclesiastical contexts.

One of the defining characteristics of sacralisation is that power is associated with nearness to the divine. Because African societies are frequently understood in terms of hierarchy, this means that there are select people who reside closer to God and mediate His blessings to the rest of the community (alternatively, using these same powers to abuse or manipulate others). Paul Gifford contends that African societies follow a neo-patrimonial system of authority, where power resides within a person rather than an office.<sup>13</sup> (In contradistinction with Western societies that operate on 'rational-legal' authority, where power relates to structures, not people). The 'big man' in African politics embodies power within himself, which then serves as a tap for others to receive its flow. Gifford explains,

Here lower in the hierarchy are not subordinate officials with defined powers and functions of their own, but retainers whose position depends on a leader to whom they owe allegiance. The system is held together by loyalty or kinship ties rather than by a hierarchy of administrative grades and functions.<sup>14</sup>

Neo-patrimonialism provides an underlying basis for dependency scenarios so common on the continent. This helps explain the common problems of corruption, tribalism, and political jockeying that have become ubiquitous features. Political leaders such as Mugambe fight incessantly to retain their political power despite global opposition; while others, like the late Julius Nyerere of Tanzania continued to exert significant influence even after stepping down from office (in contrast to Western states where a former President has limited influence). Power is thus an attribute of a person, which then relates to the rest of the community.

Because of fluid relationships between the 'sacred' and 'secular', state leaders often try and supplement their powers by associating with ancestors, God or nebulous spiritual forces: showing people that they have blessings from the divine. In contemporary African contexts, this usually has strong Christian manifestations. Presidential candidates will often quote Scripture verses, visit various evangelical churches, plead the case for biblical morality, and/or cosy up to prominent Christian leaders. Pentecostal churches are particularly prone to reinterpreting spiritual powers into contemporary

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<sup>13</sup> Paul Gifford, *African Christianity: Its Public Role* (London: Hurst and Company, 1998), pp. 5ff.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

contexts. One of the leading Pentecostal Bishops in Kenya recently came to the defence of the President, quipping regarding his detractors: 'Those opposed to your leadership might not even get eternal life'.<sup>15</sup> Thus, when the Bishop utters these statements, he is doing more than making some casual moral judgement on the opposition; he is essentially creating a form of reality where political leaders participate with God's power (sometimes regardless of their faith convictions or moral standing in the community). Similar sentiments carry over to the role of pastors in the churches. Many Pentecostal churches have a singular chair atop the podium reserved for the 'man of God'. When the preacher is introduced, the entire congregation stands to their feet as the pastor approaches the pulpit, resembling what reformed congregations often do during the reading of God's Word. A leading Kenyan televangelist admonishes his congregation: 'sit at the feet of preachers' and 'don't treat them as ordinary people'. Divine power establishes the pastor above and/or distanced from others.

These comments are not intended as a sweeping polemic against Pentecostal churches; for, admittedly, their theology of the Spirit does offer some deterrent against sacralisation through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within all believers. Non-Pentecostal churches may be equally guilty of elevating the 'man of God' and/or relying upon the pastor to fulfil all duties and functions within the church, thus providing different faces to sacralisation. On one occasion, I was introduced to a pastor in a mission-founded church. I referred to him as pastor. He quickly (and adamantly) corrected me, saying, 'I am not a pastor, I am a Reverend': indicating he was 'more than just a pastor', and thus occupying a higher status (perhaps residing nearer to God).

A few other examples might demonstrate different appearances of this within contemporary society. I was talking with some members of the Kenyan Commission for Higher Education, when the Permanent Secretary of Education arrived in his vehicle. All conversations immediately stopped and the various members of the Commission literally ran to meet the vehicle and shake hands with the Secretary. For the rest of the day, they were continually jockeying to get as close to his person as possible. On another occasion, I was speaking at the Graduation Ceremonies of a nearby Bible College, along with two Members of Parliament. The various speeches over-extended into the time for my talk, and one of the MP's leaned over and apologised that he needed to leave immediately for a pressing engagement. As he stood up to

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<sup>15</sup> Mugo Njeru, *Daily Nation*, Monday, October 30, 2006.

make his departure, more than three quarters of the congregation left with him, crowding to get as close to his vehicle, and eventually disbanding altogether. Leaders use this reality to accentuate their powers; either by moving constantly from one community to another, giving brief speeches and providing omnipresence to their authority (as was the case for the former President of Kenya, Hon. Daniel Arap Moi);<sup>16</sup> or, by withholding their presence to accentuate their appeal. One of the leading Pentecostal personalities in Kenya often arrives at his church on Sunday morning in the middle of the worship service. He enters from behind a curtain, just in time for the sermon, and leaves in the same manner. The stealth of his movements contributes to his overall mystique, giving the impression that distant power carries greater association with the divine (often mirroring the transcendence of God). All of the leaders in the previous examples mix Christian language into their socio-political discourses, trying to give the impression that they stand on the side of God; or, imbibe His blessings.

These examples attempt to communicate the various 'faces' of sacralisation on the continent. Sometimes, divine power is readily observable as in the case of Pentecostal authority; other times, it has been 'secularised' or lies implicit behind what Gifford calls 'neo-patrimonialism'. In some instances, it might be more 'traditional' and relate to associations with ancestors; but in other cases, Christianity provides distinct forms through nearness with God and/or the Holy Spirit. The common characteristics associating these as types of sacralisation relate to instances where the leader: (1) displays greater proximity with the divine; (2) manifests increased power by virtue of nearness to the ancestors or God; (3) maintains heightened forms of personhood (implied or perceived by the people); or (4) embodies the identity of the people. Recently, one of the largest denominations in Kenya held their church elections. There were strongly contested battles for influential leadership posts taking place all throughout the country, from local to national levels. I asked one student to give me his appraisal on the situation; specifically, why was it so hard for someone to step down from office after he had held a certain post. His response was insightful: 'The pastor fears that he will become less of a person'. Power relates with being.

### *Deification*

While the issues related to sacralisation require an excursions into traditional African societies, the problems concerning deification have

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<sup>16</sup> See Angelique Haugerud, *The Culture and Politics in Modern Kenya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).



origins in the Christian faith, with further alterations coming from the history of Western evangelicalism. The Judeo-Christian faith has long suffered tendencies to elevate humans as 'god-like', beginning from the distortion of the creaturely good offered to humans in the Garden of Eden. God entrusts humans with the wonderful gift of being image bearers within a world defined by His nature. Adam and Eve disregarded their humanity by devaluing the gift: wanting to become 'like God' rather than be the 'image of God'. In the end, by wanting to become more, they became less. This is a valuable lesson that runs through the scope of salvation history and should in and of itself be sufficient cause for pastors to beware.

These issues would reappear in subsequent generations, whether through efforts to build a tower 'that reaches to the heavens' (Gen 11:4); implicit behind Korah's opposition to Moses' spiritual authority (Num 16); or by establishing a divine-like King over the people of Israel (ultimately rejecting God's theocracy). Humans are rarely satisfied with their gift of personhood and always seem to want something 'more' or 'higher' for themselves: something less human and more like God.

With the Incarnation, God re-extends His gift of personhood into the world. The temptations experienced by Jesus show that Satan understood the threat posed from this humanity. It is noteworthy that at no point does Satan try and dissuade Jesus from revealing Himself as God, and actually encourages Him to do so: tempting Christ to take 'short cuts' around His humanity; whether satisfying hunger by changing stones into bread; publicly displaying spiritual authority over angels; or claiming sovereignty over the nations – albeit by bending the knee to spurious powers. Might we witness in these temptations a renewal of what occurred in the Garden of Eden: where Satan offers something seemingly 'greater' in exchange for that which is truly glorious: the image of God in humanity? John would later advance a similar argument by telling believers how to live in the world amidst rival powers. He says, 'This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ *came in the flesh* (italics mine) is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God' (1 Jn 4:2-3). Even in the first generation of believers, the humanity of Christ was critical for discerning truth from falsehood.

In every ensuing generation, these temptations fall afresh upon spiritual leaders. Satan is completely unoriginal. The forms and appearances may change, but the underlying deceit remains the same. Christian leaders are continually enticed to deny their own humanity over-and-against the alluring promise of being more than human, 'like God' or imbibing some special

form of deity within their person. People in Lystra believed that Paul and Barnabas were gods, based upon miracles they were performing. The missionaries' response was informative: 'Men, why are you doing this? We too are only men, human like you' (Acts 14:15).

Paul and Barnabas' rejoinder raises the question whether being 'only human' is something to be despised or celebrated. People tend to use these words when they want to communicate something sinful or lowly about humanity, and never when they want to espouse its virtues. We endure our humanity like an unwelcome visitor: acting cordial on the surface but deep down wanting it to make it go away.

This was largely the attitude of the Gnostics in the first and second centuries. They viewed all of creation as intrinsically evil, and the goal of human existence to escape or transcend the corruption of the flesh by attaining higher degrees of spiritual knowledge (gnosis). This led to a dualism between material and spiritual realms. The early church father, Irenaeus, defended Christianity against these teachings, arguing in *Against Heresies* that redemption requires a new conception of humanity. Gnostic dualism and especially the way it conceptualises the material world, Irenaeus would argue, threatens the very core of Christianity by undermining the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, and thus, devaluing redemption. All tendencies to elevate humans as more than humans, or denying the material world any redemptive potential were viewed by Irenaeus as direct assaults against Christ, and hence, salvation. In one particularly moving account, he envisions God reaching out to humans through creation, wrapping them in a divine embrace through the arms of the Son and Spirit. He says,

For by the hands of the Father, that is, by the Son and the Holy Spirit, man, and not [merely] a part of man, was made in the likeness of God. Now the soul and the spirit are certainly a part of the man, but certainly not the man; for the perfect man consists in the comingling and the union of the soul receiving the spirit of the Father, and the admixture of that fleshly nature which was moulded after the image of God.<sup>17</sup>

Irenaeus envisions humanity as glorious, yet without undermining the fundamental distinction between Creator and creation. Redemption relates to *all* aspects of humanity because of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. Vinoth

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<sup>17</sup> St. Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies*, translated and annotated by Dominic J. Unger, with further revisions by John J. Dillon (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), 5.6.1.

Ramachandra likewise echoes Irenaeus' sentiments, declaring: 'Our humanity is not something that comes between us and God. On the contrary, it is precisely in our humanity that we are called to be bearers of the divine glory, the means by which God is made known',<sup>18</sup>

These comments are particularly critical in light of propensities within Western evangelicalism<sup>19</sup> to elevate supernatural elements of the Christian faith (often at the expense of the natural). A historical excursus into how this came about lies outside the parameters of this article, but it may be sufficient to state that with the rise of the Enlightenment, emphasis shifted from ecclesiastical powers to a focus upon the natural world (inclusive of industrialisation, the scientific method and elevated importance given to human reason). Evangelicals reacted against many of these 'secularising' currents by over-emphasising the 'supernatural' as a defence against the 'modernistic' influences they saw taking place within their Western societies. Hence, they defended the divine origins of Scripture, emphasised Jesus' deity, and promoted the 'supernatural calling' of pastors and missionaries. Each of these reflects cardinal affirmations of evangelical doctrine, but the manner in which they promoted these supernatural elements had a secondary effect of creating wider dichotomy between the two realms, and inadvertently, some might argue, advancing the secularisation of society and leaving evangelical faith ill-equipped to integrate itself with more 'worldly' or human affairs. This represents one facet of the heritage given to the Africans by Western missions.

Early missionaries found within African rural communities a spirituality they found lacking in Western societies (even if the relationship between the sacred and secular was more nuanced than they might have perceived). The movement toward Africa was both an escape and a promise. As liberal forms of Christianity threatened certain evangelical convictions, the missionaries hoped that they could start afresh within rural Africa and correct many of the problems that had afflicted the West. Thus, they imported doctrinal characteristics to the Africans that maintained the centrality of supernatural elements of the Christian faith, and with commensurate apologetic postures for guarding the Gospel against 'modernising' or 'secularising' influences.

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<sup>18</sup> Vinoth Ramachandra, *The Recovery of Mission: Beyond the Pluralist Paradigm* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), p. 252.

<sup>19</sup> I place myself inextricably within this tradition, and offer this critique as a way of making my own faith tradition, stronger, more integrated and with greater relevancy for contemporary needs.

This briefly defines the theological heritage of many evangelical, mission-founded churches in Africa. My point is not to question the legitimacy of this Christian heritage, to criticise the early missionaries, or to imply passivity amongst the Africans in the face of global flows of religious meaning. Missions-founded churches are undoubtedly one of the most important faces of Christianity on the continent. Their strong emphasis upon Biblical preaching, catechism, Sunday School teaching, theological education, apologetics, and evangelism represent integral affirmations of the Christian faith. What is more, even though many of the early missionaries elevated 'supernatural' aspects of evangelical teaching, this did not keep them from advancing into primary and secondary school education, medical work, and other development projects. If we critique these churches, it should not be on the basis that they neglected physical realities or were too spiritually-minded.

Despite the enduring legacy of mission-founded church, the 'supernaturalising' of the Christian faith and apologetic nature of belief have led to some tendencies described by Nigel Cameron as, 'silent distortions',<sup>20</sup> where certain aspects of doctrine receive extra weight in sermons or teachings compared with others that garner less attention. This can lead to lop-sided caricatures of Christian confession. While devoting most of their theological energies to those areas related to the greatest amount of theological opposition (mainly Bibliology and Soteriology), these churches have sometimes left other areas relatively undeveloped. This may be due in part to the fact that such areas are seemingly uncontested by Western, liberal Christianity; unrelated to apologetic concerns; or, very simply, that they perhaps appear to undermine supernatural commitments. This article does not challenge the legitimacy of apologetic belief, or supernatural affirmations of faith, only the motivations for it, and how these things orient our overall theological perspectives. In no way am I saying that *less* attention should be given to cardinal doctrines of evangelical convictions, such as Bibliology or Soteriology, only that *more* theological energies need to be given to those areas which appear less supernatural. For, it is precisely within these seemingly 'silent distortions' that we may find valuable resources for articulating and applying the Christian faith in relevant and meaningful ways. I will explore these dynamics by looking at a number of issues arising from our 'supernatural' predilections of evangelical belief.

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<sup>20</sup> Cameron, *Are Christians Human?* p. 4.

*Pastoral 'calling'*

The first of these relates what we mean (implicitly and explicitly) by 'pastoral calling'. A fuller treatment of the relationship between clergy and laity exceeds the purposes of this article, and would require an excursus through salvation history, the early church, and then show how these distinctions have appeared afresh in every generation. In his *Appeal to the German Nobility*, Martin Luther sought to clarify the relationship between clergy and laity in terms of function and status. He states, 'All Christians truly belong to the spiritual estate, and there is no difference among them apart from their office'. Later, however, he highlights differences: 'All are of the spiritual estate, and all are truly priests, bishops, and popes, although they are not the same in terms of their individual work'.<sup>21</sup> Luther challenges a 'two-tier' conception of spirituality, where Roman Catholicism (and to a degree churches from many different traditions) posit ontological distinctions between clergy and laity, with priests serving as the instrumental conduits for the people's salvation.

Some could argue that various churches on the continent have created their own 'two-tier' notion of spirituality, by drawing distinctions (and distance) between 'divinely-called' pastors and 'ordinary' people (laity). The concept of 'calling' originated in the Keswick Piety movement of the nineteenth century.<sup>22</sup> Early missionaries coming to Africa were required to give clear evidence of their 'calling' in order to be accepted by faith-based missions societies. Though never intending to communicate linkages between 'calling' and spiritual power, this has sometimes been the effect, and may be one of the inadvertent legacies passed on by missionaries to Africans; or, it may reflect how Africans have interpreted missionary teaching. In many of our contemporary contexts, pastors, by virtue of their divine appointment, are viewed as more spiritual or residing closer to God. The majority of Bible Colleges in Africa require applicants to express their 'calling' as a requirement for admission. Appellations such as 'evangelist', 'pastor', 'missionary', 'Reverend' or 'Bishop' (sometimes, even 'Apostle' or 'Prophet') all carry connotations of spiritual authority. When conflicts arise, the pastor may remind the congregation of his or her 'calling'. Alternatively,

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<sup>21</sup> *Appeal to the German Nobility* (1520).

<sup>22</sup> This was one of the points made by Steve Morad; see, *The Founding Principles of the Africa Inland Mission and their interaction with the African context in Kenya from 1895 to 1939: a study of a faith mission*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Edinburgh, 1997, p. 63.

the use of Greek or theological language may give the impression that the minister possesses special spiritual knowledge which can only be accessed by those who have been 'called'. As a theologian, I would never want to question the importance of utilising biblical languages in order to interpret the text of Scriptures, or how theological insights contribute to the formation of the 'People of God'. I merely want to raise awareness for *how* we use these tools vis-à-vis the people in our congregation. Do we employ our biblical tools in order to feed God's people, or elevate our own status? Do our theological insights contribute to the growth of people in Christ-likeness, or serve to remind people of our own value, importance, or nearness to God?

The issue at hand is not whether we should speak about 'calling', but what precisely we mean by it. Greater theological reflection should be given to *how* we use these concepts, *how* our people understand them, and *what* meanings we associate with 'pastor', 'reverend' or 'man of God'. For example, does 'calling' elevate the pastor as nearer to God; or in greater accessibility to His powers? Is distance necessary between the pastor and laity? Or, what do we mean by such gradients such as exist between 'pastors' and 'Reverends'? Is the former of less value than the latter? Furthermore, we need to probe the extent to which 'Reverends' invariably distance themselves from the people. Why do we infrequently see them visiting people in their homes, undertaking evangelism, or riding public service vehicles?

Many of these issues are compounded by 'secularising' trends that we see in our modern societies, where an educated lay person with his or her 'secular' degrees and titles increasingly asserts authority in the churches. In one church, a pastor was relegated to serving as the assistant chairman of the local church council because an elder had his PhD and was not able to abide a 'poorly trained' pastor being the chairman. When pastors experience these tensions, they sometimes resort to over-emphasising their spiritual credentials, creating greater contrasts between themselves and the people.

Theologians in Africa need to take up such issues in order to 'unpack' the meanings that we give to spiritual designations, and create ways of articulating ministerial identity so that our 'powers' are more accessible for the growth of our congregants.

### *The Deity of Christ*

Another place where this supernaturalism affects our understanding of ministerial identity is in the Person of Jesus Christ. During the nineteenth and early twentieth century, enlightenment influences were affecting how some Western theologians were talking about Christ. Miracles and other aspects of

His life that appeared to resist human reason and scientific principles underwent a series of reformulations by certain 'liberal' theologians, who sought to explain, rationalise or 'demythologise' Jesus into modern sensibilities. Evangelicals mounted a counterattack against these efforts by vigorously articulating the case for Jesus' deity. It is important to add that much of this took place during the beginning of the twentieth century at the time when the early missionaries were beginning their work, thus imparting to the Africans a heritage of defending and upholding the deity of Jesus Christ.

Historically, evangelical theology maintains the importance of the dual nature of Christ. Most would cite the hypostatic union and recite key affirmations from the Council of Chalcedon (451 AD) for expressing the ways that human and divine natures unite within the Person of Christ. However, differences sometimes exist between confessional declarations and implicitly held theologies. Christians may profess one thing, but demonstrate another by how they act or talk about God. The catechism of an evangelical church in Africa asks the questions, 'If Jesus Christ is the Son of God, how did He become man?' and the answer states, 'Jesus Christ the Son of God became man by receiving a truly human body, being born of the Virgin Mary by the power of the Holy Spirit'. Yet this answer (understood by what it states and does not state) implies that Jesus was fully human in terms of His body, but not in other facets of His being; where perhaps the divine subsumed the mind, will, and emotions into itself. This belief suggests that only Jesus' body was human. The early church likewise confronted these issues, and the previous example bears striking similarity with the argument forwarded by Appolinarius, bishop of Laodicea, who taught that Jesus had a human body, but that his mind, emotions and spirit were wholly divine. The Church rejected this belief at the Council of Alexandria (362 A.D.) and Council of Constantinople (381 A.D.).

I usually ask my students how many times they have heard a sermon on Jesus' deity, and they frequently recall many instances; alternatively, I ask them when they have heard a pastor preach on Jesus' humanity, and rarely (if ever) can anyone remember such an occasion. Can it be that we devalue the importance of Jesus' humanity; or, are afraid that any reference to His personhood amounts to an indirect attack on His deity; or, just do not understand how important the Chalcedonic confession of faith is to our theological presuppositions?

One of the dangers of holding such an asymmetrical view of Christ's nature is how it affects our understanding of salvation. The question can be

asked, 'What part of humanity needs redeeming?' Does evangelism merely save our 'souls', as we sometimes imply? The danger with this conclusion is that we make salvation merely a ticket to heaven, rather than an entire transformation of God's creaturely good. The writer of Hebrews defends Jesus' humanity as it pertains to salvation, by stating: 'For this reason he had to be made like his brothers *in every way* (emphasis mine), in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people' (2:17). By overemphasising the spiritual aspects of Jesus' humanity, we may end up neglecting other features most important to the people in our churches: including their minds, bodies, physical realities, and emotions.

There is a second concern. If we understand Jesus primarily as God, and we as humans (especially pastors) endeavour to emulate Christ, then we follow a standard that is impossible to attain. We can never be God. Our only options are: (1) admit defeat, making Christ's nature inaccessible and unattainable to us on this earth; or (2) elevate our nature to divine-like status, in order to show continuity between our identity and that of Christ's (with the understanding that these things are reserved only for the 'man of God'). Christians are representatives of Christ on earth. But if this standard is deprived of its human element, we find ourselves with little option but to try to become a little 'more' like God. Nigel Cameron says it this way:

The 'supernaturalising' of Jesus has helped lead to the supernaturalising of the Christian life. Our dissatisfaction with Jesus' humanity has led to a dissatisfaction with our own, for we have moved from a superhuman image of Jesus to a superhuman image of what is both required of the Christian and possible for him.<sup>23</sup>

Humanity becomes the enemy of godliness: something that we need to overcome in order to become like Christ. This belief represents a form of neo-gnosticism that could be affecting how we think about pastors. If Jesus is the ideal, and we present Him as a superhuman, then what does this mean for ministerial identity? The result can only be incessant spiritual defeat or a masquerade in which pastors present themselves as 'more like Christ' – and hence, less like humans. In either case, humanity becomes something to be denied or overcome at any expense. This leads pastors upon an endless pursuit of being more like Christ, but where the particular characteristics amount to a virtual *coup d'e tats* of their own humanity. The sinful nature is

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<sup>23</sup> Cameron, *Are Christians Human?*, p. 15.



confused with the gift of humanity, thus bringing down both with one fell swoop.

### *The Scope of Salvation*

Let me return to an earlier point that needs a bit more clarification. I asked in the last section how our relative 'silence' regarding the humanity of Jesus Christ affects our understanding of salvation. The implication was that this kind of thinking leads to a 'ticket-like' conception of the Christian faith, where receiving Jesus Christ as Lord relates only to our 'soul' (often conceived as just a part of our overall being). Irenaeus was quite adamant on these points, holding that Jesus Christ 'recapitulates' or 'sums up' all of salvation history within Himself: becoming what we are so that we could be who He is. We do not become God, but we receive the gift of Jesus Christ. In the words of the Apostle Paul, 'we are saved through his life!' (Rom 5:10)

What does this mean for how we communicate the Gospel of Jesus Christ into other people's lives? When we preach Christ for salvation, are we thinking of the entire humanity of our congregants: minds, affections, souls, relationships and bodies (amongst others)? When we do door-to-door evangelism, are we seeing these people according to the glorious and comprehensive beauty of image-bearers? Charles Malik, the former Ambassador of the United Nations spoke at the occasion of the opening of the Billy Graham Center in Wheaton, USA. He raised similar issues for how Christians conceptualise the Gospel: 'The problem is not only to win souls but to save minds', he says. 'If you win the whole world and lose the mind of the world, you will soon discover you have not won the world. Indeed it may turn out that you have actually lost the world'.<sup>24</sup> Malik's comments can certainly apply to emotions, interrelationships, ethnicities, human imagination, and how we relate to our bodies. If the Incarnation of Jesus Christ is comprehensive, the affect of salvation must also be comprehensive: transforming all aspects of our being into Christ's nature. If we offer anything less to our congregants, we are cheapening salvation. This does not mean that we 'image' His sinless perfection (this side of heaven). But the gift of Jesus' humanity does come equipped with resurrection power for the purposes of growing in Christ-likeness, and thus growing in our humanity.

Finally, if we are serious about these things, and that Jesus offers an entire human life, we must allow Christ's humanity to affect aspects of our being that we typically relegate as carnal; including: affections, emotions,

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<sup>24</sup> Charles Malik, *The Two Tasks* (Westchester, IL: Cornerstone Books, 1980).

play, humour and even pleasure. One of my students was serving in a town setting. He enjoyed the regular practice of jogging for physical exercise. One day, a member of the church pulled him aside and politely informed him that such activities were not suitable for his spiritual 'calling'. The implication, of course, is that pastors do spiritual things and 'ordinary' people do ordinary things. At another Bible College, students cannot play games such as football or volleyball, since they are training for the Lord's work. Pastors may feel uncomfortable laughing with community members, wearing jeans, or working in their gardens. Such activities may appear too 'secular' or 'worldly'.

These examples have the opposite affect of what they intend; rather than elevating the 'calling' of the pastor, they demean his or her personhood. The cumulative effect of these distortions is that we fail to see the glorious and eternal picture of God's pleasure for (and in) humanity. We parade around in our communities looking melancholy and glum – perhaps to show others how truly spiritual we are. This makes salvation small, confined only to 'spiritual' aspects of our being. We are unsuccessful in integrating these things into our worship of God. What is more, we abdicate our responsibility for role modelling emotions and/or laughter in front of our congregants, accentuating the perception that we are 'too spiritual', 'too distant', or worse, that people who laugh, play, or feel things deeply may not be worthy of salvation.

Of course, the reason we designate emotions, pleasures, and play 'carnal' is that we typically *only* understand them from within the ways sin distorts them in our lives. We associate pleasures with forbidden delights, believing the lie that began in the Garden of Eden that God is somehow withholding His goodness from us.

God has something better for our humanity: more wondrous, glorious – even, pleasure-filled. That which Adam and Eve rejected in Genesis, is re-offered in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. We need a new understanding of human life, inclusive of its abundance (Jn 10:10); we need a theology of life. This does not mean that sin will simply go away (this side of glory), or that we can condone our sinfulness by appealing to our humanity. In fact, I am saying just the opposite. The exalted Christ is still a man, when He appears, 'we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is' (1 Jn 3:2). Another way of saying this is as we grow in Christ-likeness, we become more real: more fully human.

## Theological Explorations into Pastoral Identity

In this final section, I want to pursue some of these former points with greater ambition, trying to untangle the various pieces of this sociological and theological morass, and propose a way forward. Firstly, I would like to reiterate that sociological and theological forces have combined within contemporary African society to advance a view of ministerial identity where it resides closer to God (or Christ) than anything possible for the laity. There are many different shapes and forms that this can take. Sometimes it is challenging to discern the particular motivations for these sacralising or deifying tendencies; whether they come from cultural, religious, or a combination of sources.

In all of these cases, nearness to God relates to increased personhood. Since power within African cosmology relates fundamentally to identity, the 'calling' of the pastor tends to come with commensurate powers, which means heightened aspects of personhood. This leads to the common perception (whether real or imagined) of pastors occupying a higher degree of spirituality by virtue of their proximity to Christ or supernatural 'calling'. Furthermore, if our evangelical doctrines of Christ's Personhood carry predispositions toward His deity, then pastoral identity may follow these 'supernaturalising' tendencies as well.

It becomes easy to see how traditions and evangelical teachings overlap, potentially intertwining with one another. We rarely receive motivation or impetus from one source; and in the case where cultural and theological resources agree, or share certain similarities, the combined force can be significant. One possible means for untangling this predicament is by strengthening our theological resources by paying closer attention to the areas that we have neglected. Specifically, by following the pathway established by Irenaeus (in the face of Gnosticism) and offering a reformulation of humanity for how we understand ministerial identity. I will endeavour to do this through the 'image of God' concept found in Genesis, and subsequently reiterated by the Apostle Paul.

### *The Image of God and Power*

The 'story' of salvation history begins with the creation of an integrative cosmos where God gives priority to humans, as His image-bearers (Gen 1:26-27), but in ways not impinging upon His sovereignty. Instead of juxtaposing God from humans, the image of God moves to reveal the divine within creation, set within discourses of power. Borrowing from the traditions of

African religion, this refers to relatedness and source of power proceeding from God, while providing the context for articulating (or, representing) these powers on the earth. Therefore, to speak of the image of God is at once to acknowledge its associations and webs of interaction. In the verses that flow from Gen 1:26-27 this becomes apparent. God blesses Adam and Eve and commands them to 'be fruitful and multiply', 'fill the earth and subdue it' and 'rule over' the creatures (v. 28). He offers the entire world as a gift (v. 29-30) and proclaims all of it 'very good'. We might speculate whether the goodness refers to the individual properties of creation (as might be understood from within a Western, context) or the cohesion and webs of interaction connecting everything together (more representative of an African cosmos). Certainly, both need affirming: God gives life and provides the means of growing in this life by connecting His image with power.

When sin enters the story, it does more than affect the individual properties of creation, but distorts the cohesion, the dignity, and most strategically, the ontological and existential representations of power within the cosmos. Humans are set against God, each other, and nature. They misappropriate the power by misrepresenting the nature of the power. In wanting to become 'like God', they become significantly less than God created them to be; scorning the gift and thus abusing the power. Domination, exploitation, sacralisation, and oppression become the common themes of power in human communities. Fear, insecurity and self-abasement follow, where humanity twists and contorts through the rejection of the gift of the image of God.

The Incarnation of Jesus Christ reveals the climax of the story of salvation history, where Christ not only embodies this image with clarity and precision, but re-extends it to humanity (2 Cor. 4:4; Col 1:15). In the new, redeemed image of God, we see more than an isolated, sterilised picture of Jesus as God; rather, we behold a real human life inclusive of all its powers. Jesus lived in dependence upon the power of the Holy Spirit to 'sanctify' all of humanity, inclusive of the webs of interaction and association. *Precisely because* the 'Father had put all things under his power' (Jn 13:3) Christ was free to serve humans, by extending to them the full scope of His humanity. The life and death of Christ flow together in seamless unity, introducing 'new' powers into the world through quietness, sacrifice, love, and submission. These are not powers as we might understand evolved cultural, structural or epistemological forms of organisation, but as Miroslav Volf says, 'spaces' woven into the 'networks of power in which the truth of Christ

– which is always a truth about power – can be lived out'.<sup>25</sup> This makes little sense unless it is understood from within the redeemed image of God: re-establishing God's beauty within the world through generative power relationships. The resurrection of Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:11), allows the localised, culturally-embedded, Christ to be universalised (through time and space) in the glorified Person of Jesus Christ, and seen in its earthly form through the People of God. The Apostle Paul talks about the 'renewed image' (Col 3:10) or 'conformed likeness' (Rom 8:29) of Christ that 'will also give life' to humans (Rom 8:11). The image of God is a central motif of salvation history that enables us to connect power with life, and orient it according to God's purposes within the created world. Power, thus, is *from life* (Christ's) and it is *for life* (ours). Let me draw some implications that directly relate to ministerial identity.

### *The Image of God for Ministerial Identity*

This immediately means that all notions of gradated importance of being, whether conceived along ethnic, age, gender, socio-economic, political, or spiritual categories are nothing more than distortions of the creaturely good offered to humanity, and thus in one sense or another attacks against God's very nature. In more direct terms, if certain humans have greater 'beingness' than others, and God's image is always completely integrated as it pertains to Himself, than promotion of some persons over-and-against others brings the entire image crashing down upon itself. However, equality of being (in the image of God) does not mean sameness. If we react against elevated leadership by dragging pastors down from their exalted positions, we should not be guilty of doing so on account that all humans are the same.<sup>26</sup> Luther attempted to weave his way through these realities by differentiating between 'status' and 'function'; yet, since these issues are not easily separated within African worldviews, it may be that other resources are needed in order to contextualise the issues on the continent.

Honour and respect are important values on the continent. Children are taught from an early age to treat older people with special importance; older

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<sup>25</sup> Miroslav Volf, 'Theology, Meaning and Power', In Miroslav Volf, Carmen Krieg and Thomas Kucharz (eds.) *The Future of Theology: Essays in Honor of Jurgen Moltmann* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing House, 1996), pp. 98-113: pp. 109-110.

<sup>26</sup> Usually, this reaction against increased ecclesiastical authority has strong countermeasures that correspond to secularising trends, where educated laity often fills the void by nature of their 'professionalism', wealth, or business acumen.

people sit in seats on honour; dignitaries are accorded special privileges. Honour can be a very creational and growth-inspiring attribute, or, it can lead to fear, insecurity, and ontological distinctions placed between humans. Culture can never be the judge of Gospel-realities. I am aware that the issues presented in this article often appear to clash with African culture (both ethnic and ecclesiastical). Christ redeems and transforms cultures, making them more representative of true human beauty. Therefore, the task is to de-sacralise and re-humanise pastors, without destroying the healthy values of honour and respect seen everywhere on the continent.

Jesus accepted people's honour, but He also assumed the position of the slave to wash the disciples' feet (Jn 13), and later submitting to death on the cross. The Apostle Paul allowed people to give him due respect for his age, education or missionary credentials, but he also became a tent-maker, working with dead animal skins (unthinkable for Jewish people), so that he would not become too dependent upon the financial resources of the people he was called to serve. In both instances, honour is given; honour is received.

The confessional articulation of Jesus Christ in Philippians 2:5-11 provides one of the most poignant pictures of honour in the New Testament. Paul begins by stating that, *precisely because Jesus was in the very nature God* (v. 6),<sup>27</sup> He 'made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant [slave], being made in human likeness' (v.7). The passage continues to expound on the nature of this humiliation: 'becoming obedient to death – even death on a cross! (v. 8) The final picture concludes honorifically with doxology that ascribes authority and praise (from every part of the created order) to Christ. Respect and honour are implicit within every part of this early prayer. Honour his given; honour is received.

The life and teachings of Jesus challenged the actions and 'way of thinking' inherent within the religious authorities of first century Judaism. He did not dismantle the system, but sought a new framework for how shepherds viewed themselves, and interacted with their people. I am merely reaffirming the same truths for today. We do not need to challenge and destroy the ecclesiastical structures of our denominations, but renew the way we think about pastoral authority, and especially as it relates to how we interact with our people. I would like to propose a paradigm where pastors (even reverends) occupy the central axis within the entire congregation – rather

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<sup>27</sup> I am indebted to my former Professor, Dr. Gerald Hawthorne, for this insight; see Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary, no 43 (Waco, Tx: Word Books, 1983), p. 85.

than the apex of a hierarchy. Pastor and laity interconnect in terms of a shared humanity in God's image, interdependent gifts of the Spirit, and eternal inheritance.

One way to rescue the abuse of power is by nurturing it theologically from within creation, and attaching it exclusively with life. This is where I begin to define pastoral ministry, arguing that it must find its abode within the deep recesses of humanity. Since God became human, there are no longer hierarchies of ontology (such that we find in African cosmologies), but integrated webs of power and being. Jesus shares this fully with us, and the Holy Spirit occupies the 'spaces' between humans (much as Bonhoeffer suggests). No distances exist between people, only interconnections through the Holy Spirit. The confluence of persons (within faith communities) becomes the primary seat of ministerial leadership: amongst people, not over them; indwelling their humanity, not espousing higher planes of spirituality. This means there are still valid reasons for talking about 'calling', but instead of lifting ministers over the people they nurture others from within their shared humanities. Since 'the Word became flesh', pastors need not escape their own humanity in order to lead God's people. It is precisely from the resources of their humanity that they demonstrate ministerial authority.

The problem is not with power, but how sin corrupts the parts (identities) and the 'spaces' that exist within the created order. In order to restore the balance, more effort (not less) should be given to power, and particularly so from a theological perspective where it is rooted within life (creation), and purposed for the growth of others. The image of God in Christ brings redemption to the parts and the 'spaces'; the entities and the power relationships; the persons and the ways that they interact together. Power unites; causes growth; brings healing.

Pastors learn to look for the beauty of God's image, found within the diversity of their members (not on the basis of their socio-economic realities). Parishioners are representations of Jesus' identity on earth, not just people who occupy space on a certain pew. This means the leader must be open (vulnerable) to the followers; to learn from them not just minister to them. Congregants are not 'followers' in the managerial sense, viewed for what they *do* or *accomplish* within the overall organisation. They are glory-bearers and therefore to be treated with infinite respect. Paul expresses the interconnectedness of humans in Romans 12, where in the middle of a discourse related to the Body of Jesus Christ, he declares: 'each member belongs to all the others' (12:5). 'Belonging' is a rich African concept and one that needs re-incorporation into Christian communities (inclusive of the

pastor) for faithful imaging of God on this earth. In other words, to be the ministerial leader is not to be isolated pertaining to social, physical, or spiritual categories, but intentionally open to the 'other'. This involves admitting weakness, exposing vulnerabilities, and embracing interdependency. One of my students told me about a time when he was feeling particularly weak, perhaps due to a sickness of some kind. He stood before the congregants in order to preach, and told them to pray for his strength. At the end of the sermon, a pastor scolded him, saying, 'Don't ever tell anyone that you are weak!' This perspective assumes that weakness is a bad thing; not suitable for pastoral authority. However, it is exactly in our weaknesses that we depend upon the Holy Spirit, and reach out to others for their gifts.

Leaders integrate the members (and their powers) together 'so that the body of Christ may be built up' and 'grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ' (Eph. 4:13, 16). The pastor does not occupy the highest seat at the top of a pyramid, but the middle axis within a dynamic organism. Nearness replaces distance; immanence for transcendence; humanity for the supernatural. Power relates to life, and extends through the pastor to the broader congregation: nurturing, loving, breathing words of life into broken and brittle human fibres. As Paul tells the church in Corinth, 'For even if I boast somewhat freely about the authority the Lord gave us for building you up rather than pulling you down, I will not be ashamed of it' (2 Cor. 10:8).

Certain elements of 'distance' between leaders and followers may continue to be a part of our cultures, insofar as they express healthy and creational aspects of honour and respect (given and received). People will not interact with the Principal of a Bible College, or Bishop of a church in the same way they treat friends or colleagues, but this should not indicate that the Principal or Bishop is more important, occupies a closer position to God, or has more personhood.

No human can have 'greater powers' within the image of God without fundamentally affecting the whole: essentially making us less than who we were created to be. Hero worship, representative leaders, charismatic personalities, and/or the 'big man' of African politics can all have the same cumulative affect of distorting humans into some aberration of creaturely good. Jesus alone is the consummate image of God; humans are the image of God 'derivatively'<sup>28</sup> as they relate to Christ and depend upon him for their

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<sup>28</sup> Ian A. McFarland, *The Divine Image: Envisioning the Invisible God* (Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 2005), p. 4.



identity and expression of personhood. We need the full resources of the Body of Christ to accomplish this. In this way, the corporate image of God participates in the life of the divine community precisely because of its many human expressions, which then, together, more faithfully 'images' God on earth.

### Conclusion

Discourses related to power have a tendency of reverting to abuse or domination on the continent, significantly affecting any natural linkages between power and humanity. Unless you happen to be among the few who are 'in power' and therefore privileged with its excesses, power tends to feel dehumanising. Leadership studies often attempt to correct these problems by harnessing the powers, or providing better structures to guard against their abuse. We have moved into an era obsessed with managerialism and professionalism on the continent, as if these are a panacea for all our problems. While possibly mitigating some of the extreme instances of domination or abuse, managerialism alone will hardly affect the underlying problems. Becoming more professional does not mean that the abuses will stop, or that we purge ourselves of misguided identity.

The other common answer is for leaders to tout 'servant leadership', which has become especially convenient within Christian circles for 'business-as-usual' under the glossy veneer of doing it for Christ. Many leaders justify their behaviour on account that they are serving others, and have been 'called' by God to this position. The honorific titles given to ecclesiastical leaders in our churches often carry little or no notions of submission, sacrifice, and dependence upon others; instead, these ascriptions have become associated with elevated, spiritualised positions. Elders want to be called pastors; pastors, reverends; and reverends, Bishops. These words which have traditionally carried strong service-oriented connotations, now seem to indicate different levels of personhood, setting ministers 'apart' (meaning higher) than others. We erect ever-new hierarchies, with pastors stumbling over one another (sometimes, painfully) to reach greater heights.

This article suggests that pastors need to return to their ministerial 'calling' by embracing their own humanity. Being 'set apart' does not mean being apart; nor does it mean that pastors are more like God and less like humans. These are distortions which have slowly worked their way into our thinking, whether from cultural or theological sources. It is through our humanity that we learn to love, weep, rejoice, laugh, and serve. The moment we distance ourselves from others, we separate our primary powers from the

community, and decrease our efficacy. The pastor's own humanity mediates the entire process, by loving, serving, submitting, rejoicing, and listening. In sharing in the weaknesses of the people, a new power enters into the community: one that carries with it the power of our crucified Lord. Yet being human does not mean that we parade our weaknesses before others in sensational ways, whether looking for pity or abdicating our responsibility for godliness. Humanity can never be an escape from Christ-likeness; instead, it represents the very pathway we must follow.

The image of God provides pastors with a solution to this problem. They do not need to escape themselves, or strain to achieve higher spiritual natures in order to minister to the people of God. Many pastors live under a multitude of pretensions. They live lives of duplicity, feeling obligated to uphold this masquerade at any expense: certainly at the cost of their credibility. In the end, however, they become less than God created them to be: sterile, inflexible, serious and sometimes painful caricatures of humanity. They often have few real friends, face loneliness on a daily basis, and live continually under the fear that someone will see through their façade. Jesus alone represents the entire people of God; He alone is the consummate image bearer. We all represent Him derivatively, and in incomplete ways. Alone, we can offer nothing but our own limited image – beautiful though it may be. Together, we grow closer to reflecting a more accurate, more comprehensive, resemblance. The pastor receives the 'calling' to stand amidst others and coordinate the powers of the people of God; to integrate them together, as it were, so that together we may 'image' the various refractions of Jesus Christ on this broken earth.

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