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A Biblical and Theological Basis for Collaborative Ministry and Leadership

Andrew Dawswell notes that collaborative ministry is much discussed in the Church of England. It is usually seen as self evidently right, or as a pragmatic response to diminishing resources. In this article he considers the nature of ministry and leadership, collective and individual, as discussed in Old and New Testament scholarship, and in current theology influencing the development of ministry leadership teams.

In a very short space of time, the language of Collaborative Ministry and Leadership has gained a very wide hold over the church of England. In some contexts, this may mean very little. Both clergy and laity are still content for the vicar to control what goes on; incumbents simply know that they are expected to use the terminology of collaborative ministry at interview or work reviews. Amongst many other clergy and congregations the change is real. Sometimes it has come through existing structures and offices, with PCCs, churchwardens and readers developing more of a genuine say in the direction of church life and ministry. In other congregations, the desire to work more collaboratively has seen the introduction of ministry or leadership teams (MLTs), Ordained Local Ministry (OLMs) and other new forms of authorised local ministry.

However this move towards a more collaborative style of ministry has been accompanied by very few serious attempts to reflect biblically or theologically on what is happening. In most cases the rightness is simply presumed to be self evident; or justified by a very casual allusion to biblical teaching on the church as a body and the importance of every member ministry. It is often dogmatically asserted, for example, that genuine collaboration is very different from mere delegation, implying a very specific ideology of what true collaboration entails. However I have yet to find a thoroughgoing unpacking, let alone a serious justification, of this ideology.

Secular Use of Collaborative Terminology

The term 'collaborative ministry' appears to belong almost entirely to the religious sphere. In the secular world, however, 'collaborative leadership' is very much in vogue; although rather confusingly it appears to have developed two distinct meanings.

The first meaning is to describe a style of leadership which involves working in partnership with the representatives of a different organisation, in the furtherance of a goal which is of mutual interest.¹ However, though it appears to be considerably rarer, it is the second secular meaning of collaborative leadership which has clearly been picked up and used in church circles. One secular reference includes the following definition:

‘Collaborative leadership: a style of leadership where leaders view their roles primarily as convincing, catalyzing, and facilitating the work of others. Collaborative leadership focuses on bringing citizens together and helping them build trust and the skills for collaboration.’²

In either sense, collaborative leadership is clearly intended to be seen as self-evident good. In many instances this is doubtless true; and it could well be that this will include the sphere of the local church.

However, in any context the benefits of this particular style of leadership should surely need to be carefully argued, and not simply presumed. Furthermore in the sphere of Christian ministry and leadership, it will be important not only for the merits of collaborative leadership and ministry to be argued not only on empirical grounds, but also to be given a firm theological and biblical basis

Pragmatic Reasons for the Development of Collaborative Ministry and Leadership

One reason for the encouragement of collaborative ministry in many dioceses is undoubtedly pragmatic; it is hard to see how else to respond responsibly to the current state of the local church life. Though there are some churches which are notable exceptions, the fact is that most congregations are declining at the kind of rate that, if continued, will make it impossible for them to support a full-time stipendiary incumbent on a reasonable wage in the next generation. Inherited assets can provide only limited subsidies; and larger churches are rightly seeing the need to limit the amount of cross-subsidy that they can responsibly offer, without inhibiting their own effectiveness.³ In the short term, the sharing of professional ministry between two or more congregations is of course the most obvious option; and this is already well underway, especially in rural areas. However, if the underlying understanding of ministry as emanating primarily from a paid individual is not altered, then this strategy seems likely to see decline accelerate as each parish is able to call on less and less professional time.

Another alternative would be for the church nationally to concentrate resources on maintaining a smaller number of buildings and congregations. However, the responsibility for maintaining listed church buildings may not be easily shed; and where churches are closed, members often show a marked reluctance to transfer

1 See for example D.Chrislip & C.Larson, *Collaborative Leadership : How Citizens and Civic Leaders Can Make a Difference*, Jossey-Bass, San Fransisco 1994.

2 M.Hemmati, *Multi-Stakeholder, Processes for Governance and Sustainability*, Earthscan, London:2001, p 50.

3 B.Jackson, *Hope for the Church*, CHP, London 2002, ch 15.

their allegiance elsewhere. Even in urban areas, where there may still be a church within a mile of every dwelling, the closure of a church building, particularly if it must be left standing, can contribute significantly to the outsiders' perception of decline. This may indeed make it harder for the churches that are left to thrive.

For many smaller churches therefore, the local ministry movement seems to provide the only viable alternative. In some cases it might be hoped that the development of collaborative leadership and ministry would result in the re-energisation of church life and finances. However, even where numerical decline, sadly, continues, these developments can be seen as a responsible preparation for the future, seeking to re-invent the local church as an organisation that is primarily run by volunteers, and so can continue unburdened with the need to provide a professional stipend. This is of course a very difficult transition; but there is nothing inherent to the Christian faith about leaders being paid; and it is surely right for the church at a diocesan and national level to at least allow local churches the resources and the permission to attempt this transition.

A second pragmatic factor encouraging the development of collaborative ministry and leadership in local churches is a broader cultural shift, resulting in a far greater expectation for leaders to be accountable and responsive to the wishes of those whom they claim to represent and lead. This is seen both nationally and locally in the political sphere and in the provision of public services. Whatever the merits of their claims, most business too try to present themselves as accountable to their customers. And of course voluntary groups generally exhibit a high level of democracy.

Some especially charismatic church leaders seem able to buck this trend and to generate a large following despite being highly autocratic (perhaps, even in some cases because of it). However for the vast majority of clergy, in the absence of these exceptional gifts, members of the congregation seem far more likely to choose to invest their time and energy in building up the life of the church if they feel they are having a significant say in its direction.

Sometimes these pragmatic imperatives are explicitly owned in the literature. However most of the writing at least recognises the need to justify collaborative forms of ministry on biblical and theological grounds too; even if, as will be argued, these justifications are often a rather thin veneer concealing an underlying conviction that is simply presumed to be self-evident.

Greenwood's Trinitarian Approach

The most heavyweight and influential recent theology which touches significantly on this question has been produced by Robin Greenwood and is articulated in four published works: 'Transforming Priesthood', 'Practicing Community', 'The Ministry Team Handbook' and 'Transforming Church'. Greenwood's core thesis is to seek a trinitarian basis for the future of the church.

An ecclesiology for a church which is a sign and a foretaste of God's final ordering of all things in Christ will be informed and nurtured by a social trinitarianism⁴

4 R.Greenwood, *Transforming Priesthood*, SPCK, London 1994, p 86.

This leads to many conclusions with which the present writer would agree wholeheartedly. Greenwood is clear that the type of Anglicanism that sees church membership solely as a private means to securing God's blessing is a severe distortion. For a key part of the divine plan is the creation of a church community, as a reflection of the supremely relational nature of the trinity. Furthermore Greenwood offers a robust refutation of models of ministry which dominated the Church of England during the twentieth century, which saw the priest as possessing an ontological priority over the laity. Instead,

A church that echoes God's trinitarian life will be working towards modelling partnerships of many kinds – young and old, rich and poor, people of differing educational training, laity and ordained – accepting all, in their difference, having vitality and equal value.⁵

However, whilst Greenwood's exegesis of trinitarian theology undoubtedly provides an important basis for collaborative *ministry*, it is not at all clear that it provides a sufficient basis for collaborative *leadership*. In much of the literature, these two terms are presumed to be almost synonymous. Greenwood's choice of term 'ministry leadership team' (although very helpful in providing an umbrella description to cover a wide variety of teams) exemplifies the blurring of boundaries between two very different concepts. A church, or any other organisation, can be dictated to by an autocrat, yet at the same time exhibit a high degree of delegation of roles and responsibilities.

Even more importantly, if a truly biblical trinitarianism were applied to the relationship between clergy and laity, then the willing obedience of the son displayed in the garden of Gethsemane narrative or in John 6:38 would in fact offer considerable support to the 'father knows best' style of ministry. There are two reasons why Greenwood is not led in this direction. Firstly, the twentieth century Trinitarian theologians on whom he depends for his undergirding theology present a more equal version of the trinity than was produced by the patristic writers

By contrast the Cappadocians, for example, whilst firmly rejecting the subordination of most pre-Nicene theologians, nonetheless felt constrained by the biblical texts to present the distinction between the members of the trinity as more than just a matter of neutral difference, but also of order. Kelly's summary makes this clear:

While all subordinationism is excluded, the Father remains in the eyes of the Cappadocians the source, the fountain-head or principle of the Godhead...So Gregory of Nyssa...speaks of 'one and the same person (proswpon) of the Father, out of Whom the Son is begotten and the Spirit proceeds'⁶

This leads to the strong suspicion that the twentieth century trinitarian theology, upon which Greenwood's approach relies so heavily, is not always the fruit of detailed biblical exegesis; but is rather, at least in part, a reflection of a contemporary egalitarianism which is frightened of any notions of authority or individual leadership.

5 R.Greenwood, *The Ministry Team Handbook*, SPCK, London 2000, p 29.

6 J.N.D.Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, A & C Black, London 1974, p 265.

Furthermore Greenwood's style of argumentation from undergirding trinitarian principles into a 'trinitarian ecclesiology' seems at times to be so imprecise as to permit almost any conclusions to be reached.

But Christian belief in the Trinity means that differences must be accepted for what they are. Unity is not to be equated with the denial of difference or the reduction of them all to one, but speaks of the mutual intercommunion and interpenetration of elements of difference. How far contemporary Britain is from such a vision may be observed for example in terms of public architecture. We are surrounded by supermarkets, shopping malls, tourist information centres, schools, petrol stations, and restaurants more notable for their identity than their imaginative difference.⁷

There may be many reasons why the uniform architecture of petrol stations and supermarkets is a bad thing and the celebration of difference something to be encouraged; but it would surely be possible to sustain an identically opposite argument from the identity of the trinitarian persons.

This criticism of Greenwood's methodology does not wholly devalue Greenwood's conclusions about collaborative *ministry*. In this case there is plenty of other biblical material to support the idea; and the trinitarian analogy is merely adding weight to an already unanswerable case. In the case of his conclusions about *leadership*, however it is a different matter; and the present author would suggest that Greenwood's trinitarian thinking is danger of being little more than theological veneer to legitimate convictions which are, in fact, held on a rather different grounds.

Biblical Patterns of Ministry and Leadership

Other attempts at a theological undergirding of collaborative ministry and leadership draw helpfully on the many strands of New Testament thought that emphasise the principle that ministry belongs to the whole body of Christ. 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12:3-8 are particularly significant in correcting an understanding of Christian ministry which was almost exclusively focussed on the work of the ordained person, who in most local church contexts was an isolated individual. For writers of a more Catholic persuasion (or seeking to appeal to that constituency), 1 Corinthians 12:13 is seen as of central importance in the argument that baptism, rather than ordination, represents more fundamental commissioning for ministry. These texts are indeed supremely important to the life of the church. However the same point made in response to Greenwood surely applies here too: outlining the obvious biblical support for collaborative *ministry* represents only a small part of the case that needs to be made if collaborative *leadership* is to be advocated.

That there is a difference in these two concepts can be seen first in the closed nature of many of the current developments. This is most apparent where OLM's are chosen, but applies equally when an MLT (ministry leadership team) is formed;

⁷ R.Greenwood, *Transforming Priesthood*, pp 88-9.

as by definition there will be some church members who are not part of this grouping. However, if there has been a danger in the past that the ministry of the incumbent has been seen as coterminous with Christian ministry, it is surely just as much a danger the current developments might be seen to exclude the many church members who do not belong to their parish's MLT from exercising their God-given gifts in Christian ministry. A historical comparison may perhaps be made with the 4th century, where the delegation of ministry from the bishop to the elders may have appeared at face value to be a very positive move towards collaborative ministry. However, because the delegation did not extend any further, in the long run it brought about an even more restricted oligarchy than had previously prevailed.

Part of the reason why an MLT is a closed grouping is that its role (or that of an OLM) is likely to include at least some aspects of leadership and authority. This may be entirely legitimate. However, if anything, the body metaphor, as it is developed in 1Corinthians 12 and Romans 12:3-8 would suggest a single individual taking much of the decision making and co-ordination role, much as a single organ, the brain, does in the human body. The quest for a biblical undergirding for collaborative *leadership* therefore requires an exploration of models of leadership in scripture, despite this exercise being fraught with difficulties.

These difficulties are not however a result of the bible writer's indifference to this issue. On the contrary, as Croft helpfully points out the right ordering of ministry & leadership among the people of God is a central theme of the Old & New Testaments⁸. However some of the principles that the scriptures are most keen to stress – such as the ultimate leadership of God; or the servant nature of leadership, do not actually help to determine the rights and wrongs of individual or shared leadership. And even on a question as broad as this, there is a real difficulty in trying to deduce a coherent view from very diverse collection of data.

Eldership in the Old Testament

One line of enquiry often used to buttress the move towards more shared forms of leadership is to point to the pervasive biblical references to Elders⁹. This seems to be a fruitful line of enquiry, as even when the term 'eldership' is deliberately avoided today, there are strong parallels between MLT members and elders in the bible.

This is particularly true in regard to Eldership in the Old Testament; the first parallel being in regard to the plural nature of eldership. It is extremely striking that in the OT all but one reference is to the group as a corporate body.¹⁰ Significantly, the term is never formally defined in the biblical material, and undoubtedly the role of the elders varied considerably in different periods of Israel's history. Nonetheless both Bornkamm and Reviv see the eldership as an identifiable institution, rather than as a generic term for those who were considered to be of seniority and standing in the community.

8 S.Croft, *Ministry in Three Dimensions*, DLT, London 1991, pp 30-31.

9 e.g.C.Skelton, *Leadership Teams*, Grove, Cambridge 1999, pp 6ff.

10 The NIV has 131 OT references to elders, being the usual translation of the Hebrew 'zaqen'. The only one of these which is in the singular is Isaiah 3:2, which Reviv sees as referring to an old man, rather than to a member of the leadership institution.

The second parallel with MLT members today is the sense that, in the earlier part of Israel's history, the eldership is a ground level leadership. The elders represent the people; and to communicate with them is to communicate with the people.

The Biblical material suggests that role of OT eldership was at its strongest during the settlement of Israel before the ascent of the saviour-judges; then later in the immediate pre-monarchical period. According to the biblical accounts, the creation of the monarchy was at the elders' behest; although this did not prevent continual attempts to reassert their own leadership rights in both northern and southern kingdoms. Furthermore the resilience of the institution was demonstrated after the Assyrian conquest, when the collapse of the nation's other power structures enabled the elders to resume their earlier dominance.

To this straightforward reconstruction, Noth & Reviv add an important extra claim in regarding the elders of Israel as the foremost leaders in the pre-settlement Era. Noth indeed goes further in presenting the elders as the real leaders of the people in the departure from Egypt¹¹. The suggestion here is that the elders' actual role is obscured by the biblical historiographer's desire to present the Israelites as a united people, which is achieved by creating a towering role for Moses as their undisputed leader.

Reviv's argument is given detailed linguistic support, which the present author is not qualified to evaluate. However it is hard to see how such a reconstruction, even if accepted, can make a significant contribution to the theological debate about leadership. This is because the role of the elders is simply presumed from that in contemporary Ancient Near Eastern societies¹², and therefore is not accompanied by any divine approval or reprobation; on the contrary Reviv's methodology appears to preclude the possibility of such an evaluation being made.

By contrast an approach which accepts the Old Testament canon as scripture – whether or not it can be considered proven to be strictly historical – must surely record that God's leadership of his people in the Old Testament more often than not is presented as being mediated through a single individual. The pervasive presence of the eldership furthermore confirms that this is not because of the non-existence of more collaborative and democratic forms of leadership, but in spite of them. In the Exodus narratives for example, the elders' role is always subordinate to that of Moses; when they are granted formal roles it is as his subordinates and not his equals (Num 11:26ff). Similarly in the book of Judges, the people's prayers to God for help and salvation are seen as answered in the raising up of individual leaders, rather than in strengthening the existing corporate leadership structures (Judges 3:9).

The kingship represents the supreme example of the role of individual leaders in God's plans. 1 Samuel 8 taken on its own seems to suggest a strong divine hesitation over the institution of the monarchy. However, given the overwhelmingly

11 Noth's view is summarised in L.Coenen, 'Bishop, presbyter, elder', in C.Brown, ed, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology vol 1*, Zondervan, GrandRapids 1975, p194.

12 H.Reviv, *The Elders in Ancient Israel*, Magnes Press, Jerusalem 1989, p188.

positive treatment of the kingship (although not of course of the behaviour of individual kings) in the rest of the Deuteronomical History, the psalms and the prophets, the OT as a whole does seem to present a strong divine endorsement of the monarchy. It is important to note that the king's authority is severely circumscribed both by the requirement that he subject himself to the law in order to experience God's blessing on his rule, and by the presence of other divinely approved institutions, most notably the prophets and priests. Furthermore though these groupings are not a democracy they are corporate. Nonetheless, taken by itself, the Old Testament provides significantly greater endorsement for individual leadership of God's people than for collective models of leadership. Indeed, it could be seen as providing a significant buttress for a papacy or a monarchical episcopacy as much for maintaining the distinctive authority of an incumbent in a parish. However inevitably a Christian view of ministry, whilst noting the Old Testament perspective, will not see its conclusions as in any way definitive.

Leadership in the New Testament

In the New Testament, despite encompassing a far shorter time span, the situation is no less complex. In previous centuries each denomination was inclined to see their own structure of ecclesiastical government as explicitly legitimated. However more recently the prevailing critical orthodoxy has taken an exactly opposite approach; to see such a confused multiplicity of models emerging in different parts of the New Testament that each church is considered free to make its own judgement on pragmatic grounds about what model will best resonate with its prevailing culture.

At the heart of the problem of interpreting the New Testament understanding of Christian are two key terms for Christian leaders; *ἐπισκοπή* (episcopos – overseer) and *πρεσβυτερος* (presbuteros – elder)

The basic facts are these:

- (i) In the uncontested Pauline epistles there are no reference to elders, and only one to overseers (Philippians 1:1). Though local church leaders are referred to on a number of important occasions, the lack of a common terminology leads to general agreement that a specific office is not being referred to on any occasion.
- (ii) The Acts of the apostles repeatedly refers to the role of Elders in both Pauline and non-Pauline churches¹³, and in Acts 14:23 Paul and Barnabas are described as appointing elders in each church
- (iii) In the Pastoral epistles, both elders and overseers are mentioned several times. The majority view, since Lightfoot is that these are referring to the same office, although this has recently been challenged by Campbell. 1 Peter also contains both terms – and the same question pertains
- (iv) James 5:14 contains an encouragement to the sick to 'call the elders of the church'
- (v) The writer of 2 & 3 John terms himself 'the elder'.

¹³ Acts 11:30, 14:23, 15:2,4,6,22,23, 16:4, 20:17, 21:18.

The Pauline Material

Sohm and Von Campenhausen's view, which was followed by most 20th century Protestant scholarship, was to see the uncontested Pauline epistles as reflecting and authenticating a purely charismatic form of church organisation in which the possession of appropriate spiritual gifts were the sole criteria for the exercise of leadership. On this understanding the pastoral epistles and other later biblical material are seen to represent a serious declension from Paul's charismatic ideal, caused mainly by the malevolent introduction of the more institutional Jewish elder system. Acts too is seen in a very negative light, as simply an attempt to back-project this later understanding into the history of the Pauline period. A recent exponent of this view is Dunn¹⁴, who argues that, if there was an established leadership in the Corinthian church, Paul would surely have included some mention in 1 Corinthians of the leaders' role in sorting out the problems that had been referred to him.

However, Sohm and Von Campenhausen's view is open to serious criticism as to whether it takes full account of the limited degree of fixity about leadership that the cited references seem to imply¹⁵. For myself a more important problem is in the underlying hermeneutic which effectively de-canonises the later biblical material. On the contrary it could well be argued that these should be given greater weight than the earlier material, because they represent a more mature reflection on how churches can balance the tension between the ministry of the whole body and the need to prevent anarchy. More importantly, though it is because they represent a necessary development of local church leadership as the apostles' potential for direct influence in local congregations is diminishing.

This role of the apostles seems to me to be a hugely important component, which is often omitted from discussions of Pauline leadership patterns. In the Corinthians correspondence, Paul does not view the church as an egalitarian utopia. On the contrary, the most obvious reason why he does not appeal to the role of local leaders is because he is still trying to exercise a direct control over the life of the church, despite the problems of distance.

It is beyond the scope of this study to attempt an exact reconstruction of the patterns of leadership that are reflected in the different New Testament documents. Nonetheless, once this apostolic component is acknowledged, then I would contend that it is possible to detect a definite consistency in regard to the main question with which we began this investigation, namely the relationship between individual and corporate leadership over local churches. For in all the NT documents it can be argued that both are present, in creative tension.

The Gospels

The gospels provide an important starting point for this thesis, as Jesus' preparation for the Church's ministry after his ascension is portrayed in all four gospels as envisaging both a corporate role for the twelve, and a distinctive individual leadership role for Peter.

14 J.D.G.Dunn *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament*, 2nd edn, SCM, London 1990, p109-113, cited by Campbell, p14-15.

15 R.A.Campbell, *The Elders, seniority within earliest Christianity*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh 1994, p97ff.

In Mark's gospel, as Schillebeeckx helpfully points out, 'Mark is not interested in the structural forms, nor even in the theology of the ministry, but in the ethics and spirituality of the ministers of the church.'¹⁶ Passages such as the rebuke of Peter in Mark 8:31-33 and Mark 14:66-72, and of James and John in Mark 10:35-45 serve as a critiques both of the convictions and behaviour of the original disciples and of any contemporary church leaders who might retain such unreconstructed attitudes. However, though the post-Resurrection life of the church is seldom in view, the attention given to the twelve, and specifically to Peter, would be hard to comprehend if they were not widely believed by both the author and his readers to have held a important subsequent role in the life of the Christian community.

In Luke-Acts, this role is made explicit by the continuation of the story beyond the ascension. Though the majority of the 12 are subsequently not centre-stage (even Peter is not mentioned after Acts 15), in the early chapters of Acts they take the lead in ministry and mission – both to outsiders and among other believers. Furthermore alongside this corporate Apostolic leadership, Peter exercises a particular individual leadership role¹⁷

In the material unique to Matthew's gospel, there is a re-iteration of Mark's concerns relating to the status of leaders. However, alongside this, the subsequent leadership roles of Peter and the 12 are explicitly legitimated in Peter's individual commission (16:13-19) and in the Great commission (28:16-20).

The fourth gospel has comparatively little material that could be seen as explicitly preparing a small group for collective ministry and leadership after Jesus' departure. The distinctive role of Peter in the leadership of the community is however plainly endorsed in John 21:15ff. The commissioning of John 20:19-23 is significant too; though not explicitly limited to the 12, the confined setting suggests a small group being entrusted with a ministry both of founding, and of ministry within the early church.

Acts

In the Acts of the Apostles, we have already observed how the corporate leadership of apostles and the individual leadership of Peter fade as the book progresses. However the two most prominent forms of leadership which take over seem to reflect this combination of individual and corporate dimensions. The first of these is the Gentile mission, which originally was led by Barnabas¹⁸, but subsequently comprised of 'Paul and...' ...Barnabas (11 times),...Silas (9 times),...his companions (2 times)...the rest of us (2 times).

More tendentially perhaps, Schillebeeckx (following Schille) sees this combination of individual leadership alongside collegiality in mission as implied also by the first mention of Stephen in Acts 6:5, Sopater in Acts 20:4, as well as Romans 16:21-3, 16:6-12, Colossians 4:7, Philemon 23-4, Titus 3:12-13 & II Timothy 4:10ff.

16 Schillebeeckx, *The Church with a human face*, SCM, London 1985, p88.
17 e.g. Acts 1:15-26, 2:14-41 etc.

18 Almost all commentators see the placement of Barnabas' name before Saul's in Acts 13:2 & 7 as having this significance.

However in the Acts' account of the council of Jerusalem, we are surely on a surer footing in seeing the church's decision-making process as possessing both a corporate and an individual dimension. Here the apostles and elders meet together to consider the vexed question of admission of the Gentiles, but what might otherwise have been an impossible impasse was resolved by the individual leadership of James, whose judgement is seen as binding.

The Pastoral Epistles

In the pastoral epistles, as we have already noted, the situation is somewhat more complicated.

Campbell's contention is that the consistent use of the singular for episkopos, contrasting with the plural for elders makes it unlikely that the term are exact synonyms. On the contrary, he sees a central purpose of the letters being to establish the legitimacy of a monepiscopate as acting over and above a team of elders as a replacement for apostolic oversight¹⁹.

If Campbell's thesis is rejected and the role of overseer is seen to be identical to that of elder, then at face value the Pastoral epistles might be seen to be advocating a corporate leadership of peers. However this is to ignore the significance of the purported recipients of the letters, Timothy and Titus; for their supervisory roles, though never explicitly articulated, are constantly inferred. The situation is somewhat more complicated if the letters are deemed to be pseudonymous, and 'Titus' and 'Timothy' to be mere ciphers; however at the very least the choice of named individuals as ciphers seems most likely to reflect the perceived importance of individual leadership.

Early Church History

Whilst the New Testament documents seem consistent in portraying a combination of individual and collegial leadership, this balance has not been reflected in most of church history. Even the reformation's fundamental re-definition of the role of minister from that of a sacrificing priest to a Protestant pastor failed to re-balance the dominant role of the individual clergyman in most local congregations – certainly in the church of England. This declension from what we have shown to be a biblical balance however took some time to set in.

In the second century Clement's first letter to the Corinthians and the letter of Polycarp to the Philippians continue to refer to local church eldership as a collegial body. Indeed these documents rather raise the opposite question, as to whether there is adequate expression for individual leadership. However, as in our discussion of Paul's epistles, this is to forget the position of the writer himself, whose very writing represents a significant implicit claim to individual leadership.

A second component of individual leadership may well be identifiable in the consideration of how the growing churches in large cities actually functioned. There were as yet no purpose-built buildings; and so as the numbers of Christians grew, this must initially have led to a multiplicity of house-church meetings. It is of course

19 Campbell, *Elders*, p176ff.

possible that each of these was collegially led. However both Giles²⁰ and Campbell²¹ see the most natural interpretation of the available evidence as pointing to each elder/bishop as a householder having a natural authority over the meetings that took place in his (or possibly her) own property.

By contrast with the emphasis of 1 Clement and Polycarp on collegial leadership (at the city level at least), the writings of Ignatius of Antioch argue consistently for the power of the monarchical bishop. It is true that a corporate body of elders are mentioned frequently; they are even at times seen as being akin to a contemporary apostolate. However, as Campbell contends, this appears more likely to be a compliment than an indication of their present responsibilities.

There are several important questions raised by Ignatius' writings. To begin with, scholarship is divided on whether they originate from the beginning of the second century (as they claim), or the end. An even more historically significant question is how widely held was Ignatius' understanding of the authority of the monarchical bishop. It can certainly be argued that his writings' very stridency suggests that this view is fairly novel. Nonetheless, as Schillebeeckx demonstrates, during the third and fourth centuries, the Ignatian monarchical episcopate gradually became the norm throughout the church.

It might have been expected that concentration of power in the hands of the clergy could be traced directly to this development; perhaps the spirit of this kind of excessive clericalism which has pertained throughout most of Christian history can be seen to lie in the Ignatian episcopate. Nonetheless the Ignatian pattern contains -at least formally - a collegial element in the eldership. The direct cause of the domination of local congregations by a single cleric lies in a subsequent development that was more gradual and attracted far less recorded opposition. This was the practice of permitting a presbyter to celebrate the eucharist in the country region surrounding the city where the bishop ministered, as a 'visitor'²². As the churches in these country areas grew, this visitor eventually became resident- in time evolving into the role of 'parish priest'.

This may be seen as a legitimate development in itself; the problem came with the failure to create any kind of collegial leadership in the newly created parishes, akin to that which had previously existed (and to some extent still did exist) in the diocese. Indeed, as the number of parishes proliferated, the bishops' inability to exercise a significant day-to-day leadership or oversight at a parochial level meant that the parish priest was to become an even more isolated leader than the bishop had ever been.

An awareness of this historical process surely provides a reply to any who see current attempts to re-establish collegial patterns of ministry as threatening the historic three-fold order. For as, Croft helpfully points out, in many ways such developments represent a return to the kind of collegiality that the threefold order originally enshrined.

20 K.Giles, *Patterns of ministry among the first Christians*, Collins Dove, Melbourne 1989, p42.

21 Campbell, *Elders*, p 212.
22 Schillebeeckx p140-1

Contemporary Leadership Theory and Models

The need for individual leadership, even in enterprises and teams that are intrinsically corporate, is also reflected in much secular thinking. There is shown in the considerable volume of recent writing on how to be an effective individual leader²³; leading Adair to conclude:

It is now widely accepted that the most important role in a small work group is that of a leader...The role is to help the group achieve its common task, to maintain it as a unity and to ensure that each individual contributes his best.²⁴

In practice too, a very wide variety of contemporary organisations display this balance between individual and collective leadership. In the political sphere, though systems of democracy differ, they all include an identifiable individual leader. The standard model for managing a company similarly involves decisions being taken not by a board of directors acting as equals, but led by a chairperson. In the sphere of public service, especially in education, the potential for a single individual leader to effect change is widely acknowledged. The church therefore should think very carefully before taking on board – either consciously or subconsciously – an egalitarianism which denigrates the role of individual leadership

One of the most helpful analyses of the way leadership and power is exercised in churches was provided by Rudge in his seminal *Ministry and Management*.

He begins by describing 3 types of leadership styles which, in different ways, allow leadership to focus on a single individual.²⁵

- The **traditional** model. Here, the church is seen primarily as the custodian of tradition and the priest as the expert, who is trained to pass on this deposit of faith to the laity.
- The **charismatic** model is similarly centred around a single leader. However in this case, his or her authority derives from their own charisma and ability to persuade the laity to follow them on a course – which usually involves some kind of break with the past.
- The **classical** model of leadership centres around the creation of a hierarchical structure, which appears to represent a degree of lay involvement in the life of the local church, but which actually enables power to remain concentrated in a single leader.

According to Rudge's analysis, the most obvious counter to the authoritarianism inherent in these 3 patterns is to adopt a **human relations** model in the church. In this the leadership concentrates on building a network of harmonious relationships with the membership, often through the creation of small groups.

However this is seen to be inadequate at providing cohesion and leadership, and instead Rudge's work aims, from first to last page, to promote a fifth option, which he labels the **systemic** or **organic** model. This model is characterised by flexibility, and by a plural leadership in which decision-making and control is shared; as it is recognised that expertise does not rest with a single individual at the top

23 e.g. J.M.Kouzes & B.Z.Posner, B.Nanus and the writings of James Burns McGregor

24 J.Adair, *Effective Teambuilding*, Pan, London 1986, p34.

25 P.F.Rudge, *Ministry & Management*, Tavistock, London 1968, p 23ff.

of the tree. Nonetheless, unlike the human relations model, there is a clear need for an individual leader whose primary role is to help the organisation to adapt to changes in its environment, whilst maintaining its purpose and vision.

More recent writers on church leadership, such as Finney and King, while resting heavily on Rudge's basic analysis, have recognised that most real life churches defy such simple categorising, frequently containing elements from several of the models. In addition they have questioned Rudge's unqualified endorsement of the systemic model; whilst they generally admit that it is the preferred ideal, they see other models as more appropriate at different stages in the development of the life of a congregation.

For myself, I would question whether the systemic model has quite the degree of explicit biblical endorsement that Rudge claims for it. It seems to me that the biblical metaphor of the church as a body could equally well be seen to endorse the classical model, which Rudge so contemptuously rejects. Furthermore, because the systemic model is inherently fluid, it is not so tightly defined as the other four, and therefore seems to escape the kind of critical scrutiny that Rudge applies elsewhere.

Nonetheless his general line of thought is helpful in defining in more conceptual terms the need for a balance between the individual authority of an incumbent and for some kind of collegial decision making that this article has already argued for on biblical and theological grounds.

Conclusions

What kind of collegiality? What kind of balance between individual and collective leadership? How large should the collegial body be, and how should it be chosen? These are of course very important questions, and different strands of biblical material, and different periods in the life of the early church represent very different answers to these questions. We need to admit that we have most decidedly not found a blueprint for church order²⁶. Nonetheless in demonstrating, from the New Testament material at least, a common thread of the importance for local churches in having both individual and collegial dimensions to leadership we have, I believe, defined some helpful parameters.

These act as a sharp critique first of all of the domination of local churches by a single cleric which has prevailed throughout much of Christendom for much of the first two millennia. However at the same time, the repeated biblical emphasis on individual leadership surely calls into question some of the current understandings of collaborative ministry and leadership which appear to leave no real role for individual leadership.

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26 J.A.Dawswell, *Ministry Leadership Teams*, Grove, Cambridge 2003, however, for some reflections on how these biblical and theological principles might be applied to the current developments in the church of England in regard to local ministry, MLTs & OLMs.