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**THE BIBLICAL NATURE OF LEADERSHIP:
FROM THEOCRACY TO COMMUNITY**

James E. Cianca

INTRODUCTION

Today, with the variety of demands on Christian leaders and the expectations to perform and be successful, one could easily lose sight of a theological perspective on leadership and authority in the Church. Furthermore, when certain leadership myths are perpetuated within the church community, the practical implications regarding the nature of leadership tend to be clouded or misrepresented. Examining both Jesus' sayings and biblical tradition helps clarify and set the direction for Christian leadership. Jesus indicated that Christian leadership should not be based on "worldly" paradigms of power and control. He taught a new way, and although he gave his followers no formal training, he did instruct them in true leadership greatness. He implied that success was not measured by what one attained but by what one became, and appealed to potential leaders to be disciples, humble and obedient servants who laboured in his harvest. Jesus led his followers to adopt an attitude of servant leadership.

1. THE NEW LEADERSHIP

Although some see the servant-leader ideal as commonplace in the Hellenistic world¹, most commentators emphasize the contrast between expected Christian behaviour and that of the tyrannical leadership behaviour of world leaders, implying that the nature of Jesus' leadership was counter culture and paradoxical. After all, from a worldly perspective (particularly in Jesus' day) leaders were the "served" not the "servants."² Often, the Lord took occasion to note this difference in attitude between the prevailing philosophy of leadership and that of his own. The following incident presents a case in point as Jesus turned daily experience into an opportunity to instruct on the nature of spiritual leadership. Note the following scenario:

¹ David Seeley, "Rulership and Service in Mark 10:41-45," *Novum Testamentum*, 35, No. 3: 234-35.

² R. W. Paschal, "Servant," *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. Joel B. Green (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press 1992). The mark of greatness in both the Gentile and Jewish world was authority. Service was not something one gave willingly.

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came to Him with her sons, bowing down, and asking a request of Him. And He said to her, "What do you wish?" She said to Him, "Command that in you kingdom these two sons of mine may sit, one on Your right and one on Your left." But Jesus answered and said, "You do not know what you are asking for. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink?" They said to Him, "We are able." He said to them, "My cup you shall drink; but to sit on My right and on My left, this is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by My Father." And hearing this, the ten became indignant at the two brothers. But Jesus called them to Himself, and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many³.

This excerpt from the Lord's teaching describes the marked contrast between the world's (and apparently his disciples')⁴ philosophy of leadership greatness and that which Jesus encouraged⁵, for he called his followers to a new leadership which was not modelled after the power brokers of the world but on himself, the servant-leader who came to give His life for the salvation of many⁶. Apparently, the disciples were confused by their expectations of the eschatological Messiah and were zealous for another Moses or David-like leader who would take them to freedom and salvation. Their faulty concept, however, needed correction, and as Sanders says, their mistake was twofold, "First, they envisaged Christ's kingdom as one of earthly pomp and splendour. Second, they thought greatness consisted in place and position."⁷ Jesus implied that true leadership is not vested in the status of positional authority nor driven by abusive power that "lords it over"

³ Matthew 20:20-28 (NASB). See also Mark 10:42-43; Luke 9:48 and 22:26-27; John 13:14.

⁴ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary: Exposition of the Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 747. Hendriksen points out that the "ten" were, no doubt, angered at the brothers because they saw their proposal as a plot against them. They were, themselves, fearful of losing positions of preëminence.

⁵ Myron Rush, *Management: A Biblical Approach* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983), 11.

⁶ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: Crossroads Publishing Company, 1989), 45.

⁷ J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1967), 12.

others or pursues a course of self-exaltation or self-gratification⁸. He classified this spirit as “the way of the Gentiles” and was opposed to it. His words, “But so shall it not be among you,” are haunting. Perhaps the “spirit of Diotrephes”⁹ has never died, but it is clearly condemned by the teaching that was so perfectly exemplified in the Lord of the Church.

Jesus’ teaching on leadership focused on attitude and values, centred on sacrificial service, and at least in part, contradicted what might commonly be thought of as good (strong) leadership. Standard definitions of leadership (quite often adopted by Christians) illustrate the point. For example, one fairly neutral definition of leadership is “working with and through individuals and groups to accomplish organizational goals.” Compare also two older but more famous definitions: (1) Dwight D. Eisenhower: “The ability to get a person to do what *you want* him to do, when *you want* it done, in the way *you want* it done, because he wants to do it”; (2) Harry S. Truman: “A leader is one who has the ability to get other people to do *what they don’t want to do* and like it” (emphasis added)¹⁰. Although many personal styles could flow out of such definitions, the implication is generally on *using* people rather than *building* them. Leaders use others to accomplish their agenda. Rather than valued “ends,” subordinates become useful objects by which goals are accomplished. This subtle anti-Kantian¹¹ philosophy justifies the leader dominating the followers (subordinates), and according to Jesus this “way of the Gentile kings” is tantamount to an abuse of power.

⁸ Cf. Luke 9:46-56. Here the gospel writer records three encounters of the disciples with Jesus. In each case the disciples were wrong in both their assessment of the situation and their response to it. Beyond creating a teaching opportunity for the Lord with his followers, each situation reveals a faulty concept of the children of the king and how they should live in the kingdom. Through Jesus’ admonitions one might learn that greatness is not about “status,” “power,” or “judgment” but about “humble service,” “toleration and acceptance,” and “love.”

⁹ Cf. 3 John. Quite possibly Diotrephes was a powerful layman in a house congregation with which Gaius was associated. He assumed leadership in the group through an “egocentric lust for power, which he had confused with zeal for the gospel” [Stephen S. Smalley, *1,2,3, John, Word Biblical Commentary* (Waco: Word Books, 1984), 356].

¹⁰ Paul Hersey and Kenneth H. Blanchard, *Management of Organizational Behaviour* (5th ed.; Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1988), 3.

¹¹ Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of The Metaphysic of Morals*, trans. H. J. Paton (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), 96. In formulating his categorical imperative, Kant makes a satisfactory point in suggesting that it is never morally right to treat a human being as a means to an end, only as an end. Whatever else this does, it emphasizes the importance of God’s ultimate creation, man.

Whenever leaders manipulate or force their wishes on others for selfish reasons or seek personal advancement at the expense of others, power is misused. In contrast Jesus called his disciples to servanthood and humility which “precludes all power games . . . In short, to be coercive and Christian at the same time is impossible.”¹² On the other hand, the servant-leader must make use of inner power rather than delegated or institutional power. They lead by persuasion and example (rather than coercion) creating opportunities and alternatives which lead to growing autonomy in subordinates. Further the servant-leader believes that if subordinates are coerced into predetermined paths, even if it is for their own “good,” their autonomy will be diminished¹³ and their personhood will be lessened. On a human level, the servant-leader believes that coercive power only strengthens resistance, and its controlling effects last “only as long as the force is strong. It is not organic. Only persuasion and the consequent voluntary acceptance are organic.”¹⁴

If, however, Jesus’ attitude of humble service permeates all that a leader does, a better working definition of leadership would inevitably evolve. For example, Max DePree suggests that leadership begins with an ardent belief in diversity and giftedness that spawns a desire to liberate people to do what is required of them and to become all they can become¹⁵. More directly, John P. Kotter explains leadership “as the process of moving a group (or groups) in some direction through mostly noncoercive means. Effective

¹² Anthony Campolo, Jr., *The Power Delusion* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983), 10-11. Although Campolo distinguishes between appropriate and inappropriate use of power, he renames the positive aspect of power, “authority.” In his words, “When a leader is able to persuade others to do his will without coercion, when he presents himself in such a way that people want to obey him, when they recognize him as a legitimate leader with the right to expect compliance with his wishes, I say that he has *authority*.”

¹³ Robert Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 41-42. Greenleaf is candidly simple in saying that the first order of business for a servant-led institution is to build people, who, “under the influence of the institution, grow taller and become healthier, stronger, more autonomous” (p.40). He further suggests that any variety of techniques or innovations that do not originate in a desire to build people are like “aspirin — sometimes stimulating and pain relieving, and they may produce an immediate measurable improvement of sorts. But those are not the means whereby an institution moves from people-using to people-building. In fact, an overdose of these nostrums may seal an institution’s fate as a people-user for a very long time” (*ibid.*).

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁵ *Leadership is an Art* (New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc., 1989), 9-22.

leadership is defined as leadership that produces movement in the long-term best interests of the group(s).”¹⁶ Although these definitions could possibly over-emphasize human interest¹⁷, they at least make room to expand beyond “bottom-line” methods and move away from *leader-centred* activities and interests to a more holistic approach. If one accepts the emphasis on non-coercive behaviour and human growth as being inherent, Christian leadership might be understood as “a dynamic process in which a man or woman with God-given capacity influences a specific group of God’s people toward His purposes for the group.”¹⁸ This concept appears consistent with “the way of Jesus,” and suggests that the entire Spirit indwelt group (as important factors in the playing out of the will of God) have significant meaning and input to the direction and wellbeing of an organization or institution. It implies a need for a new paradigm for the Church, one that emphasizes loyalty to institutional or community vision and purpose, rather than loyalty to a *visionary*.

2. LEADERSHIP AND TRADITION

Beyond the radical and somewhat obvious contrast that Jesus established with his disciples, the servant-leader ideal can become convoluted and confusing to the bible interpreter. It can be argued that to invoke models of authority that are based on biblical traditions and experiences of biblical characters is misleading and dangerous, for it fails to take into account the different context to which those leaders related. If the foundation of leadership authority is inappropriate or built on misapplication, it can lead to a mistaken acceptance of conferred or positional authority, which further leads to

¹⁶ *The Leadership Factor* (New York: Free Press, 1988), 5.

¹⁷ It must be acknowledged that although Christian leadership activity should be motivated by love for God (i.e., God-centred), it is necessarily played out with its focus on people, thus fulfilling love for one’s neighbour (i.e., man-centred).

¹⁸ J. Robert Clinton, *The Making of a Leader* (Colorado Springs: Navpress, 1988), 14. In an unpublished paper, Clinton also articulates an expanded definition under the heading of “leadership act” (“A Short History of Modern Leadership Theory: A Paradigmatic Overview of the Leadership Field from 1841-1986,” pp. 39-40). He suggests that leadership is “a dynamic process over an extended period of time in various situations in which a leader utilizing leadership resources, and by specific leadership behaviours, influences the thoughts and activity of followers, toward accomplishment of person/task aims, mutually beneficent for leaders, followers and the macro-context of which they are a part.” He further states that a Christian view will include the major macro-context of God’s purposes and means by which they should be accomplished.

faulty understanding of power and ultimately undermines the spirit of servant leadership.

Many leaders throughout church history have appealed to both Old and New Testament paradigms for lessons in leadership. Models have been built on familiar concepts of ancient Near Eastern patriarchy and its associated hierarchical structures or the lives of (hero) leaders¹⁹ who have uniquely experienced private encounters with God and exercised their leadership within that divine framework. Most of these are used to validate autocratic and leader-centred styles of ministry. Inherent in either model is the ideal of ultimate responsibility for choice or decision making power residing in the patriarch or leader. Within this scenario wisdom, too, seems to end in the leader who has been given responsibility to set direction for a group and basically, with God, has the final word of judgment. Although many of the biblical characters portrayed in these models manifested a servant spirit, it is important to note that their leadership was marked by a distinguishable, atypical role based on their unique, private, and divine calling. This divine conferral was the framework within which they exercised their servant leadership. This image can be problematic, however, when used as a foundation for New Testament paradigms²⁰.

In the patriarchal family tradition, the patriarch was depicted as having a special union or relationship with Yahweh that enabled him to lead and make intercession on behalf of the family, thus bringing them to the place of blessing (Job 1:5)²¹. The patriarch was thought to be endowed with necessary abilities, and his leadership was unquestioned²². This basic cultural phenomenon was further localized as the promise of God was particularized in Israel, and a national leader was established (Exodus 3; 1 Samuel 10:1), an anointed one who was viewed as specially endowed by the Spirit and, at least to some degree, given a supernatural bestowment of divine powers²³. The ceremonial anointing also extended to the Levitical priests and implied

²⁰ The difference between Old Testament paradigms and those which are useful to church leaders does not lie in the *spirit* of leadership (for Moses was called a servant of the people), but in the nature of their *conferred* authority. The former was vertical, secluded, supernatural. The latter is horizontal, relational, and in community. Focusing on the spirit and motivation of leadership is the key to maintaining continuity without distorting New Testament church practice.

²¹ Regardless of how one takes the tradition of the book, Job can be seen as an accepted characterization of a household patriarchal priest.

²² Alvin John Schmidt, *Veiled and Silenced: How Culture Shaped Sexist Theology* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1989), 114.

²³ A. K. Helmbold, "Anoint," "Anointed," *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975).

“conferring office in perpetuity.”²⁴ This type of conferred or institutional power is primarily seen through Israel’s Old Testament history but also finds occasional support in the New Testament. This fact has led some interpreters to imply a continuity of leadership tradition from the Old Testament to the present²⁵.

The implications of accepting such continuity can be seen in both church and para-church organizations. One such example is the traditional Bible College movement which was begun and entrenched by strong leaders who thought themselves to fit within both the military and anointing metaphors of the Bible. Riding the spirit of triumphalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, dedicated men portrayed themselves as leading God’s army and claiming divine appointment as heads of denominations and colleges²⁶. These were men of significant stature who themselves were upheld as paradigms for leadership, and in some cases are still portrayed as such. Present day directors of Bible colleges and those who design its curricula must ask whether the former models of leadership are still correct, or in fact whether they were ever correct for the Church.

3. ANOINTED LEADERSHIP

With this in mind, it is helpful to briefly reflect on possible scriptural paradigms that are leader-centred and at first glance appear to contradict or preclude servant-leader philosophy. First, the concept of anointing as it appears

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

²⁵ John E. Johnson, “The Old Testament Offices As Paradigm For Pastoral Identity,” *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 152 (1995), 182-200. In an effort to clear the blurring of identity that he supposes is a major cause of burnout, Johnson attempts to develop a theology of ministry based on the four offices (including Sage) embodied in Jesus. Although many of Johnson’s applications are valid for any type of ministry, he takes liberties with associations and makes assumptions based on leaps in logic (e.g., in reference to Christ embodying the four offices he says, “Assuming the validity of all four offices [for Christ] the following summaries [“prophet,” “priest,” “king,” and “sage”] serve as a foundation to describe the pastor’s identity” (p. 186, emphasis added). The author attempts but fails to establish satisfactory safeguards necessary to distinguish divinely called Old Testament characters from what might be the expected New Testament norm. Further, his pastoral paradigm of prophet, priest, king, sage, seems antithetical to the Pauline concept of a “body” of gifted and diverse people.

²⁶ Robert W. Ferris and Ralph E. Enlow, Jr., “Reassessing Bible College Distinctives,” *Faculty Dialogue*, 24 (Spring 1995), 25. In their essay, Ferris and Enlow call for a reassessment of the theory and practice of leadership in Bible colleges.

in both the Old and New Testaments lays a foundation for some leadership practice. This convention went beyond simple cosmetics and acquired distinctly religious overtones as the anointing with oil was used to denote the setting apart of cultic objects (Exodus 30:22-33; 40:10-11), prophets (1 Chronicles 19:16; Isaiah 61:1), the priestly cast (Exodus 28:40-42), and most notably kings (1 Samuel 10:1; 16:13; etc.).

Importantly, the anointing of Israel's kings can be traced to the beginnings of the monarchy where anointed kings were assured of succession and raised to an inviolable status before the people²⁷. The underlying concept of this kingly distinction, however, predates the inauguration of the theocratic monarch and finds its roots in Moses (Exodus 3-4)²⁸. From Moses the spiritual endowment which enabled the recipients to lead the people of God can be traced. Further, it implied a direct connection to Yahweh, enrichment of insight to wisdom, and at times was accompanied by divine, supernatural powers. Moses (who might be termed the first national messiah) received this bestowal and led God's people. But when Moses died his authority and apparently the spiritual endowment that accompanied it were passed to Joshua (Numbers 27:15-23), then to the judges of Israel (Judges 3:10; 3:15; 3:31; 4:9; 6:14; 11:29; 14:6), and finally to the kings²⁹. The ministry of all these leaders should be seen as having some messianic overtones, and in the story of Israel these specially called and endowed leaders acted as harbingers of the final saviour who was to have ultimate authority, Jesus, the "Christ" (Mark 8:29; Matthew 28:18). The image of an elite retreat and

²⁷ J. Van Edgen, "Anoint," "Anointing," *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1984).

²⁸ Although Moses can rightly be thought of as the first national messiah, he was predated by the "father of the nation," Abraham. It is interesting, if not significant, that Abraham, Moses, and David were privately called or anointed, which led to the public anointing of the subsequent kings of the Davidic dynasty.

²⁹ J. Barton Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1962), 75. Payne points out that the ceremonial anointing of oil during the period of the kings was sacramental and signified the coming of God's spirit in unusual power and the anointed one's peculiar subjection to the direction of Yahweh. It is this spiritual anointing that is traced from Moses to Jesus. Moses found Joshua, who was indwelt with the spirit of God (Numbers 27:18), laid hands on him, and he was "filled" with the Spirit (Deuteronomy 34: 9) which enabled him to lead with wisdom. This same charismatic anointing was periodically given to the Judges in the time of Israel's consolidation. This giving of the Spirit should not be seen as an indwelling (cf. Numbers 27:18) but rather, a divine endowment to lead the people of God.

encounter with God allowed the Old Testament leaders to institutionally rise above the malady of the masses. That is, although they were never portrayed as perfect (after all they were only harbingers of the *hope* of Israel), they were seen as having special access to the wisdom of Yahweh which could enable them to lead, rule, and deliver the nation. These were leaders who were not to be questioned, nor corrected, and in some sense were above the law of the land³⁰.

Whether or not the Church should continue to look for divinely appointed, specially endowed leaders becomes a key issue at this point. If the anointing of Old Testament leaders was messianic in nature, which when following the ritual from Moses to Jesus is hard to deny, then the ritual with its implications must cease with Jesus, the final messiah. By virtue of the fact that Moses died, his authority had to be passed on to another (Numbers 27). Likewise, it is the same with all the kings, from David to Solomon to their posterity to the final Davidic king, Jesus. It stands to reason, then, that a Christian cannot today claim the right of anointed leadership in the new covenant community, for this right remains with Jesus. All references or statements that imply such a possession (e.g., “Touch not the Lord’s anointed” or “I have received unique direction from the Lord,” implying, “Follow me”) become inappropriate. The conclusion should be drawn that, “The model of a prophetic leader who retreats to seek the mind of the Lord, then emerges to announce God’s will for His people, is not a New Testament pattern.”³¹

Summarily, regarding the concept of anointing and how it relates to the contemporary Church, it could be said that the New Testament church leader is not expected to rule as a king, nor intercede as a priest³², nor receive divine oracles that would set the direction and practice of any group of God’s people. All such paradigms must be carefully sifted through a frame-

³⁰ Cf. Numbers 12; 2 Samuel 11-12. Although the anointed one was not correctable by subordinates, they were personally accountable to God and subject to his Word. For example, see Nathan (2 Samuel 12:1-14) who, with trepidation, went before the King with a word from the Lord.

³¹ Ferris and Enlow, “Reassessing Bible College Distinctives,” 27. Contrast Chua Wee Hian, who although stopping short of one-to-one identification of present leaders with unique leaders described in the Old Testament, implies a legitimate paradigm in stating, “Genuine leaders are *personally* commissioned by God” (emphasis added) [Chua Wee Hian, *The Making of a Leader* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1987), 60].

³² Wayne Grudem, *1 Peter* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 101. Grudem writes, “To try to perpetuate such a “priesthood” distinct from the rest of believers is to attempt to maintain an Old Testament institution which Christ abolished once and for all.” Cf. also 1 Peter 2:5; Revelation 1:6.

work of biblical theology, for if one mistakes who they are as a leader, the servant spirit can quickly erode. Moses could be the divinely appointed “man of God” with the servant spirit because he knew who he was and to what macro context he related. Moses functioned within the sphere of his divine appointment.

The theological transition, however, must be made from theocracy to community, from open and ongoing revelation to a communally accepted and interpreted canon. Although there are obvious applications and overlaps³³, to use theocratic terminology in reference to church leadership becomes confusing and counterproductive. Old Testament narratives with their biographical sketches of divinely appointed leaders cannot be used as reference manuals or quick guides to leadership formulae. It is not surprising that when this inappropriate posture is adopted by church leaders, the tendency can be toward autocratic and power driven models that appeal to designated authority and status, which steals away the servant spirit.

4. APOSTOLIC LEADERSHIP

The New Testament, too, provides its own sayings and paradigms for those who favour a “man of God” approach or patriarchal-hierarchical leadership in the Church, but it bears the same need to theologize. For example, the anointing metaphor of the Old Testament often gives way to another leadership metaphor, the “apostle.” Perhaps this is so because the term is based on Old Testament allusions³⁴ or because the apostles possessed some of the same characteristics as the specially anointed ones in the tradition of Israel. The reference, however, is out of character for a church leader, and when “apostle” is used as a paradigm for leadership behaviour, it steers toward authoritarian leadership (at best) or apostolic succession and despotism (at worst).

An apostle of Jesus Christ in the New Testament, technical sense implied that one was an authorized representative, specifically chosen and sent by Christ. They must have been eye witnesses to the resurrected Christ (Acts 1; 1 Corinthians 9:11) and they would have manifested “signs of their apostle-

³³ In applying the basic principle of Old Testament office, one could say that the “mantle” falls on subsequent generations. That is, metaphorically, it is right to say that the covenant community must have its “prophets” (with their Word) to guide in appropriate kingdom living, its “priests” (with their Law) to keep the liturgy, i.e., to guide in covenant forms and be teachers of the *Torah*, and its sages (with their wisdom) to give counsel (cf. Jeremiah 18:18).

³⁴ It was said that Moses and other Old Testament prophets were specially chosen by God and *sent* to preach a message (cf. Exodus 3:10; Isaiah 6:8, 61:1; Jeremiah 1:7).

ship" (1 Corinthians 12:12; Acts 2:43; Acts 5:12; Hebrews 2:4). Apostles of Jesus Christ were unique in their office³⁵, foundational (Ephesians. 2:20), and by nature of their selection, temporary. The apostolate was a gift of God to the Church (Ephesians 4:11) which relied on the common witness of the apostles as its foundational dogma (Acts 2:42). They were seen as not only witnesses of the saving acts and resurrection of Christ but interpreters as well. Their dogma became authoritative (1 Corinthians 14:37), and they retained the ability to discipline (Acts 5:1-11; 1 Corinthians 5:1-5) and give oversight (Acts 15:36)³⁶ in the church. An apostle could declare divine judgment and bring justice from heaven (Acts 5), he could deliver individuals over to Satan for remedial punishment (1 Corinthians 5:5), or bring the "whip" of discipline to bear (1 Corinthians 4:20-21)³⁷. For the apostles the spirit of service and sacrifice was never in conflict with their elevated status and its attendant authority. Unlike contemporary church leaders, their authority was divinely appointed, and their greatest service was in the exercise of it.

Paul is an example of one who claimed divine authority over the churches, but even as an apostle his authority was primarily connected to the gospel. When he has no direct word from Jesus, he implies that his words are important and significant but carry less than divine authority³⁸. Paul, however, never gave opinion regarding the gospel. His commission and authority stemmed not from himself but from his encounter with the resurrected Christ (Galatians 1:1), and he was not hesitant to exercise that authority in the churches. Referring to the locus of apostolic authority, however, Goldingay cites Brevard Childs as saying, "Gospel and apostle are correlative terms."³⁹ He further explains the statement in context of apostolic authority and its continuation in the church. He says,

³⁵ Peter Stuhlmacher, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 20-22. Paul represents an interesting test case for claiming the right or "line" to apostleship. His critics from Galatia to Rome disputed his right. Whether or not Paul should be considered on equal status with the Easter witnesses remains debatable. However, it is significant that Paul claimed this status (no doubt, by virtue of his vision on the road to Damascus) and appealed to it to validate his message and ministry to the Gentiles. Paul's testimony was corroborated by Luke's historical perspective in Acts 9.

³⁶ It is interesting to note that in the case of the Jerusalem Council, it was the apostles *and* elders that rendered the decision (cf. Acts 15:22-29).

³⁷ Stan Fowler, "Apostles and Elders," *Kairos*, 1 (Fall 1987), 8.

³⁸ John Goldingay, *Models for Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1994), 94-95.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

The churches then share on equal terms with him in the gospel and in its authority, but on the same basis; he only continues to exercise authority over them when they fail to embody the gospel and to exercise its authority themselves, but that authority continues to be one that stems from his own relationship with the gospel rather than one inhering in him. Therefore, this authority need not have been confined to the early apostles. But it did come to be associated with them and to be transferred, appropriately enough, to writings through which they could continue to offer their indispensable witness to the gospel, share its authority with the churches, and exercise that authority over them when they do not exercise it themselves⁴⁰.

Authority in the post-apostolic church is founded in the gospel, and secured in a “once for all,” recognizable body of truth about the Son of God. The apostles delivered their authoritative tradition which was considered normative for the people of God and the “hallmark of authentic Christianity.”⁴¹ It is to this teaching that the believing community submits itself, and historically the church has appealed to the wisdom of the elders to rightly define and guard this witness. As Alexander Strauch points out, in the ancient Near East rule by elders was common, and referred to “corporate rule by the qualified, leading men of society.”⁴² This idea supports the common sense appeal of all types of communities to lean on the wisdom of those who, by virtue of their experience and awareness, have gained insight and intuitive ability to lead. This is in contrast to the divinely appointed authority and leadership of the apostles.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Michael Green, *The Second Epistle of Peter and the Epistle of Jude* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1968), 159. Commenting on Jude 3, Green points out the historical nature of Christianity and the importance of the witness of its original hearers. The church cannot go outside the determinative, apostolic witness. The task is to interpret it to successive generations. One whose doctrine outruns the New Testament witness must be rejected (cf. 2 John 9-10; 1 Timothy 5:20; 2 Timothy 1:13-14).

⁴² *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call To Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Littleton: Lewis and Roth Publishers, 1986), 39. Whereas eldership had been entrenched in Israel (Numbers 11:16-17), it is not surprising that the Church borrowed this practice. Neither is it surprising that whenever elders are mentioned in the New Testament, they are pictured as a plurality, no doubt because most congregations could summon more than one reliable sage who had the spirit of Christ. See also D. Edmond Hiebert, “Counsel for Christ’s Under-Shepherds: An Exposition of 1 Peter 5:1-4,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* (1982), 331.

It is concluded that the unique, transitional nature and task of the apostolic office and the fact that there is no legitimate record of its continuation⁴³ render the retention of the apostolate as a paradigmatic leadership metaphor anachronistic and theologically inaccurate. The original eye witnesses who were commissioned by Christ passed off the scene, and leadership through elders who, themselves, were participating members in the believing community, became the common sense answer to the protection and continuation of the authoritative message which was received, preached, validated, and articulated in Scripture by the original apostles of the resurrected Jesus Christ. For a contemporary church leader to go further and claim continuous connection to a positional, divinely conferred authority is to create a faulty framework for leadership⁴⁴. This mistaken identity can only serve to divert authority from the gospel, put undue power in the hands of the leaders and, again, tends to hinder the servant-leader spirit⁴⁵.

5. LEADERSHIP AND NEW TESTAMENT AUTHORITY

Finally, in the New Testament, having passed the lure of an apostolic paradigm, one encounters sayings related to oversight and authority, which, when linked with a type of divine call, appear to justify single, authoritarian rule

⁴³ D. Müller, "Apostle" in Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), 135. Eventually the twelve apostles (including Paul) became known as the only legitimate initiators of world mission. The title was finally confined to the Twelve, in the more restricted technical sense, indicating their role as guarantors of the legitimate tradition. The author adds, "one thing is certain. The NT never betrays any understanding of the apostolate as an institutionalized church office, capable of being passed on. . . . the adoption and transformation of the concept of apostleship by the primitive church had an important and possibly decisive influence in preventing the disintegration of the witness to Christ and maintaining the continuity of its tradition down to the time when the canon of the NT was fixed."

⁴⁴ Even those like Jim Petersen, *Churches Without Walls: Moving Beyond Traditional Boundaries* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 1992), who term themselves "apostles," find it necessary to remind their readers that the term is often abused. Petersen says, "We are often uncomfortable with the word apostle today — probably because of the way it has been abused. For some, it conjures up images of special positions of authority, or of succession from the original twelve. Such notions have no part in our definition" (p. 206).

⁴⁵ For one to claim a status or position of leadership authority that does not belong to them and then give it away as an act of service is not humility or servant-leadership, but rather, presumption and patronizing.

within the church. This too, is out of character for the church leader and misunderstands the macro context of the New Testament believing community.

First, it must be said that it is inappropriate for the church to acquiesce to any authority structure that is based on a divine call which elevates the leader above the rest. Primarily, throughout the New Testament the concept of "call" emphasizes a call to the individual to repentance and faith⁴⁶. In Pauline theology particularly, "calling" almost always refers to the effectual call of God that produces faith in Christ (e.g., Romans 8:28-30). In general, "calling" can be seen as a semi-technical term for an act of God which through the ministry of the Word and the Spirit effectually draws sinners to faith and into the kingdom of God⁴⁷. There is simply no unambiguous biblical evidence to support a mystical, subjective call to ministry in the present era⁴⁸, and the burden of proof clearly lies on the one who would interpret otherwise⁴⁹. Criteria for New Testament leadership emphasizes spiritual maturity, a desire to lead God's people, and the ability to teach the Word of God. To ignore this fact is to confuse the issue and become arbitrary in the application of a calling of God to a given ministry. Some authors are particularly confusing in their terminology, using "divine call" (e.g., Jeremiah 1:5; Galatians 1:15; Genesis 12) in reference to contemporary leadership⁵⁰. This is unfounded in the New Testament and non-verifiable. Further, once leadership is based on an existential call, the leader is placed outside the authority of the church and canon.

In a sense, all members of the body of Christ are called to be servant-leaders, and within that context it is honourable for some to aspire to oversight and responsibility in the Church. This does not, however, in some mystical sense separate or elevate a Christian leader from the rest of the

⁴⁶ *TDNT*, s.v. "(kaleo)," pp. 487-500.

⁴⁷ *ZPEB*, s.v. "Calling, Call," by C.H. Horne.

⁴⁸ Garry Friesen, *Decision Making and The Will of God* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1980), 317. Friesen helps to clear away some of the mystical rhetoric surrounding the pursuit of ministry when he suggests that although certain tradition speaks of a "call" to ministry, the New Testament speaks of a "desire" or "aspiration."

⁴⁹ Of the 200 references of *καλέω*, *προσκαλέω*, *φωνέω*, *μετακαλέω*, *κλητός*, and *κλησις*, 74 have God as the subject of the calling. Almost 90% of these refer to some aspect of the call to salvation. Of the remaining citations, six involve a call to be a disciple, an apostle, or a priest (Matthew 4:21; Mark 1:20; Romans 1:16; Galatians 1:15; 1 Corinthians 1:1; Hebrews 5:4). All refer to a non-repeatable, direct revelation event. Two references imply a setting apart or call to the ministry (Acts 13:2; 16:10), but both involve direct revelation of God and the ministry of the apostle Paul.

⁵⁰ Philip Greenslade, *Leadership, Greatness and Servanthood* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1984), 35-40.

body of Christ. One may be willing and suited to play a different role than others, but this in no way implies direct or inherent authority in the leader or leadership position. Not only is it out of place, but it holds the potential to pervert or preclude servant leadership.

Second, and notably, the New Testament passages that imply authoritarian rule, with submission being given to leaders (e.g., Titus 2:15; 1 Peter 5:5; Hebrews 13:17⁵¹) are balanced with themes of mutual submission (Ephesians 5:21), shepherding (1 Peter 5:1-4), servanthood (Matthew 20:25-28), and stewardship (Luke 12:42)⁵². It is true that all Christians are to take their appropriate place in the order of things (submission), trusting their spiritual leaders to guide them in a straight course of true doctrine. Again, however, it is equally true that church leaders are under the authority of the Word and in relation to it must focus on serving those committed to their care, for the Scriptures not only give foundation for leadership authority but also set its parameters. New Testament, post-apostolic church leaders are not exempt from correction or instruction, and those who sin against the truth are held accountable by those whom they serve (1 Timothy 5:17-20)⁵³.

⁵¹ Paul Ellingworth, *Commentary on Hebrews* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 706. Hebrews 13:7-17 form an inclusion. The readers are told to remember former leaders (making no reference to position or office) and imitate them because of their consistent lives. Verse 8 serves as a transition, suggesting that, although the leaders had passed away, the doctrine remains the same. Believers always have the same ground of consistency. The Word of God, founded in Christ, stands against “a multiplicity of useless teachings” and should not be characterized by dietary or other cultic practices but rather by inward and ethical response (vv. 9-16). Verse 17 closes the inclusion with another reference to leaders, those who remained. These leaders were to continue the tradition of sound doctrine and shepherd God’s people in the unchanging Word of God. The readers were to give deference (ὄπεικω) to the leaders, as they displayed the same consistency of life and doctrine of their deceased predecessors, and allow them to lead (πείθω). Obviously the writer had total confidence that their present leaders were reliable and not responsible for the wavering of some of the readers. There was safety (doctrinally — soteriologically) in being led by them. It must also be noted that the specific instructions given to the readers of Hebrews became part of the church canon and were given in the midst of its formulation.

⁵² Ferris and Enlow, “Reassessing Bible College Distinctives,” 26.

⁵³ Those who lead with excellence are to be given honour for their commitment to truth and teaching. They should be esteemed, and accusations against their character should not be taken lightly. They remain, however, culpable for their actions and receive no immunity from public rebuke. Compare Romans 12:8 where *προϊστῆμι* quite likely refers to a sense of “concern about,” “care for,” or “give aid” [James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16* (Waco: Word Books, 1988), 731].

Whereas the apostles ministered within a specialized and divine framework of leadership authority, servant-leaders in the church minister within a community based and derived authority.

It becomes plausible to suggest that Christian ministry is best served through mutual submission and servant leadership which is gained by mutual assent. Christians should follow their leaders not because authority is intrinsic or absolute, but because they willingly give themselves into the hands of those whom they trust to preach and protect the true doctrine that was delivered by the apostles⁵⁴. In a sense, the followers empower the leaders to lead.

There is now no single leader who is expected to know the mind of God and rule the affairs of the Church with final authority. It is notable that the first church leaders (living in an age of transition and supernatural, divine call) still sought and acted upon wisdom that derived from a collective, united agreement of those who were recognized as elders (wise men)⁵⁵. This is not to suggest that the church be authoritatively ruled by an oligarchy of sages, for domination by a few is virtually no better than domination by one. The elders, too, must recognize that true wisdom and direction reside in God, and that the church must now be ruled by canon. Respect for the elders is derived from their ability to persuade⁵⁶ the believing community (with whom they make up the “priesthood”) of their effectiveness, personal commitment, and godly example.

So then, contemporary Christian leaders are not unique in their ability to gain access to God’s wisdom and grace. They alone are not the anointed ones of God for ministry (Jesus being the last of a long line of “anointed ones” who would rule in the theocracy)⁵⁷. They cannot claim apostolic

⁵⁴ Ferris and Enlow, “Reassessing Bible College Distinctives,” 28. As the authors point out this is not necessarily an accommodation to culture. It is true that hero worship and the deifying of leaders is waning. There is cultural pressure to abandon institutional power and leadership and take on flatter organizational forms. This is not wrong simply because it comes from the direction of culture. Christianity need only be counter-culture when and if culture crosses the basic values and tenets of the faith.

⁵⁵ Acts 15:25: “It seemed good to us, having become of one mind ” (NASB).

⁵⁶ William Lane, *Hebrews* (Waco: Word Book Publishers, 1991), 554. Lane comments on the term (πειθω, Hebrews 13:17) which is not the normal word to connote submission to authority. The term implies that the obligatory conduct to which he calls his audience is an obedience brought on by persuasion. The “specific quality of the obedience for which (πειθω) asks is not primarily derived from a respect for constituted structures of authority. It is rather the obedience that is won through persuasive conversation and that follows from it.”

⁵⁷ Cf. 1 John 2:25-26. In a sense all believers have an anointing from God. This cannot be equated with the messianic anointing described above.

authority or other forms of divine appointment and should not minister with an attitude of superiority. All of which frame servant leadership in a unique form. They are, however, in the spirit of their predecessors, called upon to teach, care for, and build the saints of God that the ministry might move in the right direction and prosper as a whole (cf. Ephesians 4:11ff).

CONCLUSION

New Testament leaders are not autocrats who for some reason have been elevated above the rest, or who appeal to divinely conferred authority, but rather, they seek to lead through the assent of their followers, functioning like facilitators who see value in their subordinates and work to unleash the power of God that is resident in them. They are not preoccupied with their own needs or objectives, but rather, focus on the needs of others who will benefit from good leadership. Rush summarizes it well in saying, “The Christian leader is to serve those under him by helping them to reach maximum effectiveness.”⁵⁸ In doing so, they allow and aid those people to develop as mature contributors to the cause of Christ. This is the way of the servant-leader. It is the attitude that sees all of life as potential ministry with opportunity to positively add to the creation context in which one is placed. This attitude, according to Robert Greenleaf, who has spent decades in public service and is considered the grandfather of the modern “empowerment” movement, is a hopeful sign of the times⁵⁹. He was candid and somewhat ahead of his time when he said that,

A new moral principle is emerging which holds that the only authority deserving one’s allegiance is that which is freely and knowingly granted by the led to the leader in response to, and in proportion to, the clearly evident servant stature of the leader. Those who choose to follow this principle will not casually accept the authority of existing institutions. *Rather, they will freely respond only to individuals who are chosen as leaders because they are proven and trusted as servants.* To the extent that this principle prevails in the future, the only truly viable institutions will be those that are predominantly servant-led (italics added)⁶⁰.

The Church should not decry this state as simply a loss of respect for institutional office or resist the trend to withhold official power. Rather, it

⁵⁸ Rush, *Management*, 12. Basically, this is discipleship.

⁵⁹ Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership*, 39.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

should take up the challenge of new direction and seek leaders who derive power through their inner commitment to service and sacrifice and who properly relate to their existing macro context. Although this may at times seem distant in an imperfect world⁶¹, it is consistent with Christian values and worth pursuing.

The Church must move beyond concepts of leadership that derive authority from paradigms created by myths of heroes who were great men, divinely separated from their communities with unique abilities to lead to victory or salvation. History has brought the church beyond the need for such vested authority into an arena of community based and distributed authority. Because of this, although the quest for a hero can be attractive (after all it appears to place the burden of responsibility on the leader alone, absolving the followers), the attraction can be fatal, for dependence on a hero leader within the church community becomes debilitating in that it creates a sense of false security⁶², reinforces the perception of powerlessness within the group, and works against the personal development of leadership within the body.

It is not wrong to aspire to leadership, neither are hierarchy and equality mutually exclusive, for as Max DePree explains, "Equality makes hierarchy responsive and responsible."⁶³ An argument for servant leadership is not an argument for anarchy, and organizations will always need some kind of leadership hierarchy⁶⁴. As Peter Block points out, "Top management is essential

⁶¹ James Fenhagen, "The Bishop and the Diocese in a Time of Change: Reconnecting function and symbol in the Episcopal Church," *Anglican Theological Review*, 77 (January 1995), 57. Fenhagen puts this in perspective when he quotes an unnamed bishop as saying, "Servant leadership is not a fad. It is the fruit of that second conversion that so often alludes us. The form of the servant leader is the only real model for Christian leadership that we have, yet down through history it has been the exception rather than the rule, for it demands a level of mutuality and personal security that runs contrary to our concerns for institutional survival."

⁶² The dichotomy between *clergy* and *laity* presents an interesting example. There is, it seems, a powerful lure of the priestly cast. It is an attractive concept to suppose that one can "give over" to another the responsibility for spiritual security and safety. The benefits of such a position, however, are not founded in reality.

⁶³ *Leadership is an Art*, 145.

⁶⁴ Perhaps the term "hierarchy" could be replaced with "structure." Although it is potentially confusing, it better indicates that leadership is found at all levels of organizations or institutions. Structure is important in that it recognizes and strategically positions those with greater motivation, integrity (i.e., to be trusted), clarity of purpose, and ability to articulate and champion a vision.

to define the mission and the playing field. It is time, though, to take the spotlight off the leader. Make it a job, not an answer.”⁶⁵

Finally, one who envisions a successful leadership ministry must never be content to master the technical skills alone, but must combine those skills with a depth of spiritual insight and concern for others. Regarding the latter, the Christian leader’s efforts must always be marked by submission and service to others even at the risk of jeopardizing personal gain, honour, or comfort (Mark 10:42-45). This willingness is the pathway to true greatness. It is not an easy path, and any one who aims to take it must carefully count the cost. Jesus became the archetypical model for servant leadership and the benchmark against which all subsequent leaders must examine themselves⁶⁶. Leadership success (in the light of a Jesus-servant model) is measured by the degree of one’s service to others and the resultant growth subordinates (followers/disciples) experience because of that service⁶⁷.

Jesus has challenged the twentieth-century church with a difficult but functional paradigm. It is one that requires patience enough to work for long-term change but precludes the production of change that wins at the expense of others’ dignity or self-worth. The real strength and authority of servant leadership comes from within, and results from trust and faithfulness. This trust “not only takes time and effort, but a willingness to give up the often subtle ways in which we seek to gain power over one another.”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ “Reassigning Responsibility,” Sky, (February 1994), 31. This is in harmony with the biblical principle of leadership that is acknowledged in the transition from divine appointment to community affirmation. See also Peter Block, *The Empowered Manager* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., Publishers, 1987). Block is convinced that we must move away from patriarchy toward stewardship. To exercise stewardship is to believe that one can be accountable for outcomes without feeling the necessity to control. To retain accountability while surrendering control creates an environment of community responsibility and joint ownership.

⁶⁶ Cf. Mark 10:45; John 13:4-5; Philippians 2:7, all of which demonstrate the nature of Jesus’ model. This is the posture that Jesus challenged his disciples to assume.

⁶⁷ *The Leadership Book* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1994), 5-28. The concept relates primarily to attitude, not style. Keating warns that to follow prescriptively the leadership style of Jesus may at any one time be dangerous. The *spirit* of leadership flourishes within many *styles*. No one style of leadership is best, and generally style depends on situation. Good leadership finds its roots in the servant spirit, but also depends on an ability to assess the level of maturity in a group and model the leadership style which will be most effective for that level. Good leaders know themselves, their followers, and the situation.

⁶⁸ Fenhagen, “Bishop and the Diocese”, 54.

James E. Cianca has a B.A. from Tennessee Temple University, an M.B.S. and M. Div. from London Baptist Seminary, and his Th.M. from Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary. He serves as the Academic Dean of Heritage Baptist College, and is currently engaged in writing a thesis on Christian leadership for the D.Min at Central Baptist Theological Seminary.