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LEADERSHIP

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In the Old Testament Church leaders were of great importance. Priests, prophets, kings and judges were all of significance in the life of the people of God and the Old Testament draws attention to many particular, and sometimes peculiar, leaders.

It might be thought that in the New Testament Church this would not be so. We have no need for a King because Christ is our King and indeed we are all as Christians equal - Jew and Gentile, slave and free, men and women. We have no need for a Priest because the self-sacrifice of Christ, our High Priest, fulfilled the sacrificial system and now all Christians are priests - a holy priesthood. We have no need for Prophets because the Holy Spirit has been given to all. Nevertheless leadership is a key feature of the NT Church.

Jesus chose for himself twelve Apostles. There was a wider group of disciples, men and women, yet the twelve had a special role. Of those twelve three, Peter, James and John, were particularly close and these three were privileged to be the sole witnesses of Jesus' Transfiguration. Peter and John continued to be key leaders in the post-Pentecost Church and eventually alongside them was James the brother of the Lord. When we turn to the letters of Paul we see that he was recognised by others as a leader (sometimes he had to remind people why!) and he both appointed and nurtured other leaders. Leadership was clearly part of God's plan and purpose for his people. Leadership was not a late or regrettable development.

It is in the pastoral epistles, where the church is moving from first generation to second and third generation believers, that we find guidance on what the continuing pattern of leadership should be. Thus, for example in Titus chapter 1, Titus had been instructed to appoint elders (*presbuteros*) (verse 5) who are also described as bishops or overseers (*episcopos*) (verse 7). Within a few more generations, if the writings of Ignatius of Antioch are genuine, then a pattern had developed of a Bishop together with Presbyters and Deacons. Though on the whole such Bishops were the equivalent of the Rector of a thriving market town with perhaps a church plant and a few villages under its care. Ignatius did not oversee a hundred churches and 10,000 members like many modern Bishops.

The nature of leadership.

There were to be leaders in the Christian Church, but what was the nature of their leadership? The following is not exhaustive, but it covers the main roles.

Leadership is to be modelled on Christ (1 Cor 11.1). This must shape every other facet of Christian leadership.

Leaders are to be servants (eg. 2 Ti 2.24). Jesus gave this model particular shape when he washed his disciples feet. Though the leaders of the gentiles lord it over them, that is not to be the way with the leaders of the people of Christ. The leader is to be the servant of all.

Leaders are shepherds (Acts 20.28). They are to take heed to the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made them overseers. Like the Good shepherd himself the leaders must feed and nurture both sheep and lambs.

Therefore, the leader is also a teacher (1 Ti 3.2). When Paul lists what is required in a leader it is all personal qualities together with the ability to teach.

These can be thought of as positive roles but there are two further roles which we might be tempted to think of more negatively.

Leaders are to govern as stewards (Tit 1.7), they have authority. It is generally the leaders in the Church who make the decisions (Acts 15.6) though with the whole church (Acts 15.22). Organizational dynamics mean that this must usually be so.

Leaders are also to discipline. This can be an area of great difficulty yet they must confront wrong (Acts 5.3, Tit 1.13). Discipline is also part of the ongoing work of teaching the scriptures since in doing so the teacher will necessarily rebuke and correct.

These tasks of leadership are many and diverse and in the scriptures they are not confined to a few. There were then, as there are now, diverse ways in which leadership was exercised. Nevertheless, in the New Testament church and beyond there were particular people - the elders/presbyters - who had a particular role of leadership. As our practice has developed in the Church of England it is priests/presbyters who correspond most closely to the biblical role.

Before leaving the nature of leadership it needs to be said that there is one final feature of Christian leadership which is also modelled on Christ - bearing the cost. Whether in small measure or large, leaders will have to drink the cup of Christ (Mt 20.22). Indeed, history shows that when the Church has been persecuted it is often the leaders who have suffered first for the name of Christ.

Leaders today

In scripture the primary focus of leadership is not on Church government but on service, pastoring the flock and teaching. At its best in history, that is what Christian ministry, in its many and various forms, has aspired to. There is therefore much to be concerned about today. Many of the models of leadership being promoted today do not have the primary roots in the scriptures. I have commented in Cross†Way before on the model of the 'bricoluer' which I was taught at theological college and the characterisation that many see ministry as no different to Social Work is not unfair. We are in danger of borrowing too much from the world around us - Jesus warned his disciples about this (Mt 20.25) - when our primary model must be Christ. The temptation is to take on the models of leadership used in professions or in industry. There is much talk today of contracts, appraisal, career paths, remuneration packages. Sometimes when churches advertise for their next minister it sounds more like a specification for a managing director of a company than for a minister of the gospel. If these things are of any importance they must be secondary and those who lead should be more concerned with imitating Christ - being servants, shepherds, teachers.

Wider leadership

Within an institution such as the church there will always be a need for leadership with a wider sphere of operation. This can take on many varied and different forms but for many in such wider leadership there is a problem that contact with people is decreased. Such a leader will usually meet and have contact with far more people but for much less time and in a much shallower way. This factor affects all sorts of leadership and can be a problem in a single congregation but I want here to focus on the ministry of Bishops

as it has developed. Parish clergy often complain that they don't get much care from Diocesan leadership, yet this is largely the nature of the thing, it is not the fault of the individual Bishop or Archdeacon. In the wider sphere leadership becomes more remote, but not removed.

I wish to assume that a Bishop is a leader with a wider area of leadership. This is certainly how the office developed. Our Anglican formularies are circumspect in the way they describe Bishops, seeking to do justice to our heritage without saying more than scripture allows. Bishops are presbyters who are conferred with and set aside for a wider area of ministry.

This being so the Bishop faces some particular problems in exercising a presbyteral ministry.

The leader is a servant. It is much more difficult to serve people in any tangible way if the leader has so little contact with them. Titles such as 'the servant of the servants of God' sound grand but they are difficult to model.

The leader is a shepherd. The bigger the flock the more difficult the shepherd finds it to pastor, he simply cannot do it himself. The sheep do not know the shepherd well and do not easily follow the call.

The leader is a teacher. Whilst Bishops and others have the immense opportunity of teaching large numbers of people it is difficult to teach in depth. They cannot follow up one to one, they rarely teach one group more than once or twice and they cannot know their hearers so well. There are some advantages in these things but overall the role of teaching becomes more difficult. That is the nature of the task, not the fault of any individual.

If these things are problems, then so too are the roles of governing and discipline. These tasks still fall to the wider leader and sometimes it is an advantage. Sometimes a decision has to be taken which is hard to take when we are close to those whom it affects. However, more often for government and discipline there are potentially serious problems. In the case of discipline, when it is exercised by a local leader it should be an act of love, of pastoral concern. For the wider leader, the desire may be there, but it is far more difficult to do this, so it is easy for it to appear as discipline without love.

In order for them to be exercised properly the roles of government and discipline must be set in the context of loving service. For this reason we should be concerned about moving these functions too easily away from the local leaders in the Church. In an episcopal church, which recognises and values the role of Bishops we must nevertheless ensure that as far as possible leadership remains local. We should remember that the Church of England is not simply an episcopal church, it is more than that a national church and a parochial church. To use the buzz word, we need subsidiarity, if it can be done locally, it should be done locally.

Within our church we must beware of borrowing too readily from the world. Christian leaders must serve, pastor, teach, govern and discipline and in all things be modelled on Christ. We must also seek so far as is possible to keep these functions of leadership local.

One final comment: It is often said today that a Bishop is a focus of unity. This is surely true in two ways. First, the Bishop is a focus of unity in that he is given the task of preaching 'the faith once revealed' to all the people whom he oversees. Secondly, he

is a focus of unity since he is given the special role of defending the faith against error and disciplining those who teach error. Of course, when a Bishop himself teaches falsehood or accommodates error then he becomes a focus of disunity. Sadly this is becoming increasingly the reality. No amount of purple, fancy titles or exaggerated claims can make up for the divisions caused by Bishops who do not uphold the faith.