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Clergy Appointments

Biblical Principles of Leadership



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. Some seem to treat the Christian minister as the same as a manager in a business, whilst others give all the appearance of seeing ministry as a spiritualised form of Social Work. 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 - as servants, shepherds, teachers.

congregations 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.
- ❑ The above 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,

The Biblical Requirements for Presbyters.

We have used the term presbyter in this document because it is a word found in the Bible (the Greek being *presbuteros*) and from this word, through Anglo-Saxon our modern English word 'priest' is derived. Unfortunately there is also a long tradition of using the English word 'priest' to translate a different Biblical word (in Greek *hiereus*) which is used to refer both to the priestly line in Israel and the pagan priests in the Graeco-Roman world of the New Testament. Properly speaking the English word "priest" means presbyter, that is an "elder" and was a term and role already familiar in the synagogues out of which the early Christian communities sprang. In the New Testament the word presbyter seems interchangeable with another word, "overseer" (Greek *episcopos*) as can be seen from Titus 1.5 & 7.

In writing to both Timothy and Titus the Apostle Paul sets out qualifications and standards expected of those to be presbyters. These standards have been accepted by the Church through the ages as being enduring and not just specific to that time. Whilst no-one is perfect yet the Church should seek to ensure that those appointed to its public ministry match as closely as possible these standards. Clearly such discernment should be taking place in relation to selection for ministry and ordination but sadly not everyone in the Church of England is prepared to accept the Biblical standards or even those set out in The Ordinal. Moreover clergy do change for better and sometimes for ill. Therefore, it is essential that those involved in parochial appointments see it as their duty to ensure that candidates do match, as far as humanly possible, the Biblical standards.

What is immediately striking from the person described by Paul in both places is the almost total lack of ability. Only two abilities are required, and these are not accidental.

First, the presbyter must be able to govern his own household well, because he will have to govern a church. A Vicar or Rector in the Church of England is not a mini-dictatorship; partnership in the gospel is essential and this means allowing people to use gifts, whilst at the same time recognising that part of the role of a presbyter is to govern. Done well this will be largely unobtrusive and

certainly not dictatorial, but the buck has to stop somewhere and sometimes a firm hand is needed on the tiller.

Secondly, the presbyter must be able to teach. The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes (Rom 1.16). The task of all Christians is to share this gospel with others and presbyters are to take the lead. We see in Acts how the early Christians had to take responsibility off the leaders so that they could be free to 'minister the word of God' (Acts 6.2). The Church of England has preserved this important focus that presbyters are to teach. This is not just a public role, the Apostle Paul says that he taught in public and from house to house (Acts 20.20).

These two abilities are called for because they are the heart of Christian ministry and of how the Church of England has received that ministry.

The other qualities set out in the Pastoral Epistles are also important and illustrate that the presbyter must not only have a firm and clear faith, but live out that faith in his personal life. The modern notion that what someone does in private is their own affair is utterly alien to the Bible. The Lord sees the heart and to teach one thing in public and do another in private is hypocrisy and severely condemned in Scripture.

The Apostle Paul also states in these letters that presbyters should be men. This indeed was the practice of the Christian Church through generations until very recently. We see women ministering in all sorts of ways in the New Testament but not as presbyters. The principle, which is grounded in creation and the roles of men and women as established by God is not only set out clearly in these pastoral epistles but is applied to specific situations in the early churches (for example 1 Cor 14 & 2 Tim 2). This was the practice of all the early churches (1 Cor 14.33) and indeed has been followed by Christians ever since.

In addition to the important lists given by Paul we can find many other principles of Christian leadership in the New Testament which are worth bearing in mind both in appointing a presbyter in the Church of England and in shaping the life of a Christian community today.

The importance of leadership

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 New Testament 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 there were three, Peter, James and John, who 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. Such Bishops were the equivalent of the Rector in a thriving market town today with perhaps a church plant and a few villages under its care. Ignatius did not oversee a hundred