

A View of Leadership

Leadership is influence. Though popularized by John Maxwell in seminars across the United States, I first came across this phrase in J. Oswald Sander's *Spiritual Leadership* years ago. I am sure, however, that it predates him as well. What the phrase implies is that for intentional, planned change to occur will take the extraordinary influence of a leader. And intentional, planned change is in order for the church to capitalize upon this moment in history where the cultural constructs are in flux as postmodernism continues making its way onto the cultural stage.

Present trends in defining and shaping leadership in the North American church are heavily influenced by the corporate business culture. Russell Chandler in *Christianity Today* wrote an article on the annual church conference, "The Church in the 21st-Century Church", and self-evidently titled it, "Pastors Turning to Corporate America for Help" (Chandler 47). In support of this prevalent trend are the wealth of books written in this regard, complete with a "business-speak" language that gives such leadership models a sense of relevance and credibility rooted in the culturally prestigious business world. Further, the temptation to mimic business theory in the pursuit of success is to fall prey to moral pragmatism.

Such trends are visible in the church. Bill Hybels of Willow Creek Church recently wrote an article on leadership styles for the *Leadership Journal* (Winter

1998) in which he lists ten styles of leadership for church leaders, eight of which are cast in the common language of corporate business culture: “. . . a bridge-building leader; a re-engineering leader; an entrepreneurial leader; a team-building leader; a managing leader; a motivational leader; a strategic leader; a directional leader” (Hybels 85-89). This may make church leadership seem more accessible to those new to church culture or lend the church culture a sense of relevance, but one wonders who and how the content of such terms is being defined.

The use of such terms, though not exclusive to the domain of the business world, simply underscores the trend noted above. Not only is church leadership buying into the business community motif, it is promoting the concept. Wholesale or indiscriminate adoption of corporate business leadership styles to acquire their attendant cultural credibility, relevance, or success is to take a long step away from biblical origins and risk importing cultural leadership values that are not in sync with biblical leadership values. Without critical discernment through a biblical lens, the leadership style outcomes could be far from scriptural. Cultural leadership patterns are not to be rejected outright, but to be weighed and considered in the light of scripture. To ensure scriptural validity of local church leadership, the church is better served to begin with biblical models of leadership.

The Bible offers a wide range of leadership models of equitable validity. However, since leadership is never exercised in a vacuum, it is necessary to understand the context in which leadership is to be given in order that the model of leadership chosen will best serve the interests of that moment. The postmodern context that governs the leadership model required for this moment has been widely discussed above.

In order to contextualize the leadership that best corresponds to this postmodern ethos, I move now to discuss four leadership models that Scripture presents and critique them for their suitability for the postmodern context.

The first model is **the anointed leadership model** which for the purposes of this study is related to the kings of Israel in the Old Testament. Although not exclusively used of kings, (both persons and things were anointed as a sign of separation unto God; pillars in Genesis 28:18; the tabernacle and its furnishings in Exodus 30:20ff; priests in Exodus 28:41; prophets in 1 Kings 19:16) anointed serves as an accurate label for that model of leadership that assumes being set apart with divine authority in a sacrosanct manner to give leadership.

The account of David and Saul illustrates the distinctiveness of this anointed leadership model. Saul had been anointed by the prophet Samuel to be king in Israel (cf. 1 Samuel 9,10) but had fallen out of favor with God owing to his disobedience. In his place, Samuel

anoints David as king in 1 Samuel 16 while Saul is still on the throne. In the ensuing conflict between the two precipitated by Saul's jealousy, David flees and although Saul is caught in vulnerable circumstances where David could kill him on at least two occasions, David refuses to do so (1 Samuel 24,26). David views Saul, the king, as having both authority and sacrosanct status because Saul had been anointed king by the Lord Himself through the prophet Samuel. Thus in 1 Samuel 26:11a, David says, "But the Lord forbid that I should lay a hand on the Lord's anointed."

This anointed leadership model is commonly seen in the current church context as the independent church founded by a leader with a charismatic personality who rules in effect, as a benevolent dictator. Where that benevolence is focused on the best welfare of the community of faith such models can flourish.

However, abuses of such leadership abound. Whenever questioned or called into accountability or when attempts to curb their authority arise, the anointed leader points to his anointing by God to start the church and assumes that such a response answers the question satisfactorily. They view their leadership to be sacrosanct and vested with authority from God that is above accountability. After all, one should never touch the Lord's anointed.

(In the Bible a) sharp warning is sounded for pastors. A great deal of leadership authority is handed to them, but because they are human beings this can be,

and all too often is, abused . . . Sociologically, churches are voluntary associations. Spiritually, churches are the family of God. Neither allows for a coercive type of leadership authority . . . The dangers of lordship, rather than Christian leadership, are clear. (Wagner, *Leading* 116)

The anointed leadership model is hierarchical in nature and antithetical to the postmodern realities of community based determinations of truth and participatory decision making. In addition, this model functions on the premise of absolutes which is an untenable consideration to the postmodern mind. For these considerations, it is apparent that the anointed leadership model is not conducive to leading the church in a postmodern context.

A second leadership model common to Scripture is what I term **the prophetic leadership model**. Moses becomes the classic example of this leadership type. Moses is the one who has come down from the mountain with the will of God etched on tablets of stone (Exodus 19-35). In this model, Moses has exclusive access to God that others do not and he alone can determine the will of God as expressed in propositional absolutes. Moses meets with God face to face, dwells in God's glorious presence, and then informs the people he leads of what God has said they should be and do.

In the contemporary church context, we see this paralleled in the authoritarian leadership models of some church movements. In such contexts, the pastor/leader

has strong control over his or her followership sheltered under the covering of the seemingly unarguable status of prophet. "He (the prophetic leader) will be subject to the dangers of extremism . . . and his temptation will be to speak on his own and claim to be speaking for God" (Snyder, *Community* 91). Such temptations to self-serving ends are a clear distortion of the biblical picture of prophetic leadership. Herbert W. Armstrong serves as an example of this type of leadership model at its distorted extreme.

In contrast, John McCarthur may well serve as a positive example of this model, closer to the shepherd model espoused by Thomas Oden where authority for leading is not coercive, ". . . not an external, manipulative, alien power that distances itself from those 'under' it, but rather a legitimized and happily received influence that wishes only good for its recipient" (Oden, *Pastoral* 53).

Ideally cast, the prophetic leader functions as Moses did as a benevolent dictator, using that term in a non-pejorative sense. Across the wide spectrum of the church subculture, this prophetic leadership model finds wide and effective use in numerous denominational contexts.

Such an authoritarian model of leadership is sharply rejected by the postmodern mind. Although authoritarian models of leadership hold the appeal for a segment of the church population seeking definitive answers and black and white solutions, this model can only

diminish in effectiveness as postmodernism takes greater hold on culture. Exclusive access to God by a select few denies the need in the postmodern soul for a direct spirituality of immediate personal construction. The prophetic leadership model has its place in the Kingdom but is not the appropriate model for reaching this emergent generation.

A third model of leadership the Scripture espouses **is apostolic**. This model is rooted in the New Testament pattern of sent ones (from the Greek, *apostello*) who held special status and authority within the early church structure. The term implies a sense of commission or purpose in the selection of the twelve by Jesus as in Mark 3:14ff where the appointed tasks include preaching, authority for healing, and casting out demons. This personal commissioning by Christ becomes the authoritative entry point into apostleship along with having been with Him (Acts 1:21) and having witnessed a post resurrection appearance of Christ (John 20-21). Since the Holy Spirit is uniquely tied to the ministry of the apostles after the death and resurrection of Christ (cf. John 14-17, for guidance, leading into all truth, bearing witness to their ministry) the authority of the apostolic office is even more deeply rooted in the divine. "For this reason the apostles are the norm of doctrine and fellowship in the New Testament church. (cf. Acts 2:42; 1 John 2:19)" (N.B.D. 60).

The Apostle Paul represents a unique exception to the precedent criteria of apostolic office. His claim

comes from the resurrection appearance of Christ to him on the road to Damascus (Acts 9; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:8). Throughout his writing, he insists upon his place as an apostle, appealing to it for authority where necessary in order to gain compliance in the churches he dealt with (Romans 1:1; 1 Corinthians 1:1; Galatians 1:1 cf. Galatians 2:8; 5:2).

In appealing to apostolic authority, he is part and parcel with the institutionalizing of the New Testament church, where authority now comes to rest in distinct offices of the church. In this manner his apostolic writing finds its place in the New Testament canon along with Peter, James, and John who had firsthand interaction with Jesus. Included in this writing is the further institutionalizing of the church in his pastoral epistles (Timothy and Titus) and sections of his other epistles where offices and roles are described (Ephesians 4; 1 Corinthians 14).

As the original apostolic group passed from the scene, a secondary, derivative apostleship is evidenced in the post-apostolic era. Snyder writes, *"It cannot be successfully maintained that the apostolic ministry passed away with the death of the original Twelve. Nor is there Biblical evidence, conversely, that the apostolic ministry was transmitted formally and hierarchically down through the history of the church. Rather, Scripture teaches that the Spirit continually and charismatically gives to the Church the function of apostle."* (Snyder, *Community* 88)

Snyder notwithstanding, although there were no apostles of the classic, original sense, the office of apostle continued as a recognized office within the institutional church as it firmed in its structure. Ultimately within Catholicism, this led to a direct claim of apostolic succession in the papal line back to the Apostle Peter.

Of importance to this study is the vesting of authority in hierarchical, ecclesiastic office which consequently tended to define the church institutionally rather than charismatically. I use the term charismatically as a comparative with institutionally, understanding it to mean the function of spiritual giftedness, not human personality.

Although these two descriptors of church polity are intended to function in consort, church history betrays the common tendency to weight church function in one direction or the other. The regrettable result can be the institutional ecclesiastic office being occupied by persons without the spiritually charismatic giftedness for the ministry that office requires.

In my use of the term apostolic leadership I am referencing this tendency in the church's historical development where reliance upon the office or the title to secure leadership influence supplants the spiritual giftedness that ought to secure such leadership.

The apostolic leadership model carries little weight in a postmodern context that is suspicious of reliance

upon institutional leadership models. The decline of mainline churches across North America supports this contention. Titles and degrees are eschewed for the pragmatism of having your needs met in a competent manner. Authority to lead comes from a relationship of trust and confidence and demonstrated competence.

"Too often would-be leaders fail because they do not understand this principal. They think that a college degree . . . and a title on the door will give them that authority to lead. But it is not that easy" (Anderson, Dying 191).

The hierarchical architecture of presbyterian governance models is an imposing road block to a generation in tune with communal decision making. Insistent reliance upon ecclesiastical office to secure influence in a postmodern culture is a vacant hope. The postmodern person is looking for authenticity in leadership. Even when such is found in the appointed offices of the church, the structure itself becomes an impediment.

Despite how the above models do not suit the current cultural context it does not invalidate them as workable, scriptural models. In addition, there are other scriptural models of leadership not discussed here that have merit and validity in certain contexts and may serve as sub-species of other biblical models (for example, an activist leadership model within a prophetic leadership model as seen in Nehemiah; a contemplative

leadership model within a prophetic leadership model as seen in Ezra).

The leadership trap, however, is to try to force the constituency you lead to respond to a self-styled preference to one of these types of leadership under the spiritual covering of being biblical or counter-cultural. To stubbornly cling to an ineffective leadership model is to miss the opportunity to reach this generation and overlook the other fully biblical models of leadership that exist.

One such biblical leadership model is the servanthood leadership model as seen in Jesus Christ. Of the models discussed, this readily commends itself as the most tenable in a postmodern context. For a scriptural overview of this model we look to the Upper Room Discourse of John 13-16 (with particular attention given to chapter 13) as well as Jesus declaration in Mark 10:42-45:

"You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the *Gentiles* lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to be first must be the slave of all. For even *the Son of Man* did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Italics mine)

In the incarnation Jesus presented to humankind the enfleshment of God. Incarnational leadership then would be understood as being how God would lead if He took upon Himself human form. Paul writes that in so

doing, “. . . (Jesus) made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, . . .” (Phil. 2:7). Such is what we see in the teaching on leadership and the pattern of leadership that the incarnate Son of God portrays in this section of John's gospel.

The principal qualities of servanthood leadership are taken from the exegetical cues of the text and define the model for the purposes of this study. In each instance I will relate the quality illustrated or taught with its value in addressing the needs of the emergent postmodern culture.

The principal ethic of servanthood leadership also serves as its context: it is love. “Having loved his own who were in the world, he now showed them the full extent of his love” (John 13:2). In using the strongest word available to him for love (agapao), John is underscoring the measure of Jesus' love.

In addition, John underlines that this love is not simply professed but was demonstrated in the unseemly task of foot washing where the Master took upon himself the role of a slave. In a postmodern world, the tangibility of demonstrated love appeals to the pragmatic character of the culture and affirms the self-worth of the individual loved.

The second great quality of servanthood leadership is modeling. “I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you” (John 13:15). Modeling in leadership not only demonstrates the nature of leading but reduces the distance between the

leadership and the followership. In a postmodern ethos, this represents a winsome, non-hierarchical model.

The authoritative power to lead in servanthood leadership is secured in the actual serving. As Jesus serves in John 13 the disciples are powerfully motivated to follow his example and do the same. The authority is moral in nature, not the amoral authority of that which is simply vested in offices or titles.

"Modern leadership theory sees authority flowing upward from followers to leaders. Authority must be conferred. Christian leaders should adopt the leadership style of Jesus, who washed the disciple's feet. Interestingly, the 'old style' of Jesus is as up-to-date as modern leadership theory (Anderson, Dying 191-192).

In a postmodern culture of moral pragmatism, there is great moral authority to lead to be secured in the practice of incarnational servanthood. Jesus did not say to give up leading or ruling, but said in Luke 22:26 that ". . . the one who rules (is to be) like the one who serves." The call to lead ". . . needs to be exercised in the spirit of serving" (Ford, Transforming 153).

The servanthood leadership of Jesus is charismatic in two senses, personal and spiritual. In the personal sense, Jesus calls focus upon himself in this text (cf. John 13:12-15; 15:1-16:16) to the effect that he challenges his disciples of every age (cf. John 17:20) to take up the mantle of servanthood. This puts within the reach of the ordinary postmodern person the significance they long for. The significance found by Jesus' disciples

in winning and reshaping the world is a significance that can be found and contributed to by any disciple of Christ.

But in a second sense, this is spiritually charismatic because it is not tied to institutional realities but spiritual ones. For the spiritually hungry postmodern heart, practical servanthood becomes a truly spiritual function, empowered by the promised Holy Spirit (cf. John 16:7-11).

Servanthood leadership is highly relational, a core value in a postmodern ethos. "No longer do I call you servants . . . Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you" (John 15:15). In such declarations by Jesus we find no elitism, no special classes of disciples, and no overt distinctions within the community of faith.

"The New Testament doctrine of ministry rests therefore not on clergy-laity distinction but on the twin and complementary pillars of the priesthood of all believers and the gifts of the Spirit" (Snyder, *Community* 95). This intensifies the intimacy of relationships and flattens perceived or real hierarchies at the same time. This makes servanthood leadership life affirming, value adding, and inclusive.

Servanthood leadership is also visionary. In this whole discourse, Jesus walks his disciples into a future that he will not physically be a part of in order to prepare them for it (cf. John 13:33,34; 14:1-4; 15:9-15; 16:5-16). He alleviates their fears, comforts and assures them, and then promises the Holy Spirit as the new

source of all he will lead them to become and accomplish. The future as he paints it is to be preferred to what they presently enjoy, which is having him physically present.

In the midst of their grief at his imminent departure (cf. John 16:6) Jesus casts a vision of a preferred future that takes them beyond their immediate grief to the possibilities of tomorrow. There is hope in this text when read through the eyes of a despair that could only see Jesus' imminent departure. In a bleak and pessimistic postmodern culture, this message of hope assures and strengthens. Visionary servanthood leadership that picks up that cadence of hope and casts a scriptural vision of a preferred future with its message will find a ready listener in this culture of despair and abandonment.

Sensitivity that can only be called pastoral in character also marks servanthood leadership. On the night he is being betrayed unto death, the principal concern of Jesus is the welfare of his disciples and how they will fare in his physical absence (cf. John 16:5-16). Such pastoral sensitivity is a value-added component of servanthood leadership that humanizes relationships, affirms the worth of people, and places relationships in the forefront of any apologetic engagement with the postmodern cultural context.

Summary

The shift is underway. Modernism with all of its empirical constructs is giving way to postmodernism, a pastiche of styles as Snyder says, where ambiguity and contradiction rule at the expense of logic and reason. In the chaos of this transition which is colored by despair and pessimism, the need for community and the relationships it could provide is pervasive.

Historic cultural institutions that have been the principal providers of community such as family and church are cynically disparaged. The wider culture offers only the artificial community defined as geography (residential communities) or the commercially exploitive community of pop culture trends in music, entertainment, and fashion. The cultural vacuum of community is conspicuous.

Into this vacuum the church has an historic window of opportunity to offer authentic Christian community in answer to the cultural need for belonging, trust, relationships, identity, and spirituality as noted above. Sheltered in these needs are the multiple components of such postmodern points of angst as anti-institutionalism, distaste for hierarchies, despair and pessimism, a culturally pervasive low self-esteem, and the thirst for significance.

The church as caricatured, stereotyped, and experienced by the wider culture cannot hope to meet such needs from such a platform nor does it have the credibility to speak into them as they are known and

experienced within the emergent culture. But the answer is not for the church to prostitute itself to the culture or "dumb down" the essence of the gospel but to contextually re-invent itself in tune with the biblical norms of community and leadership.

On the leadership side of the equation, it is incumbent upon pastors and lay leadership teams to position the church to seize this moment. Without rejecting everything that cultural leadership patterns espouse, to effectively capture this moment with leadership that has scriptural integrity will take a biblical model of servanthood leadership, as modeled by Jesus and rooted in John 13-16. Here love is demonstrated, trust is engendered, relationships are primary, belonging is invited, identity is secured, spirituality is clearly in view, and hope is birthed in a new vision of reality sheltered within the Kingdom community. The intention of this project is to do that, which in turn invites critical evaluation on such terms and grounds.

For the present, the wider church bobs like an apple in the water of the wider culture. While in the midst of the culture and affected deeply by its waves and currents, the church still seems impotent to bring change. At many points, it seems to prefer to remain a closed, subcultural entity. However, with the correct kind of leadership the church can be positioned to reach this culture during this transition without compromising its message or character. And its greatest apologetic asset can be authentic Christian community.