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Leading (and Following)

Prominence in the church

'Whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave — just as the Son of man . . .' (Matt. 20:27). In the secular world 'leadership', 'ministry' and 'authority' — terms recurring in the papers which follow — are all status words, but in the churches we should beware of making the same mistake as the disciples, to aspire for recognition as 'leader', 'minister' or 'the brother (or sister) responsible' because of the social standing it brings rather than the opportunity of humble service it offers. Yet it is clear from the New Testament that individuals were able to help the early church by various forms of ministry and wise and authoritative counsel. Today's need for leaders, ministers, and rulers in the churches with lowliness of mind is no less.

Ministry and leadership

Whereas in common parlance the 'minister' is the one in charge of a church or its services and an expositor of christian belief, in the New Testament 'ministry' takes many forms from domestic service to administration. In a church there are opportunities for each believer to serve others to the best of his natural ability — and beyond through his spiritual endowment. Each can help in different ways and some can help generally, 'ministry' or 'service' being listed in Romans 12:7 as one of the areas for the exercise of gift.

The service each individual gives is not isolated from the service of others. Much co-operation is needed and one may guide another into new avenues of service. This human influence does not displace the guidance and empowering of the Spirit in the exercise of gift in the church. So in the course of ministry one may also be leading others. If we look at an act of conferring benefit on others we can call it 'ministry', whereas if we look at the same act as influencing the service provided by others we can call it 'leading'. In every form of 'ministry' there is a need from time to time for someone to take leads, to exercise leadership.

Authority and leadership

When a particular ministry is recognised by others, the minister begins to carry authority in that he (or she) can influence others as a right. If his influence or guidance is accepted without question, i.e. because of who or what he is rather than because he persuades or demonstrates, then his authority is effective.

Of course authority may be claimed by some and recognised by others but nevertheless rejected or disregarded by those who are expected to submit to it. If the expected response comes only after rational reflection or emotional appeal, the main influence is persuasion, not authority. If later responses are made without question, authority has been re-established. This right to guide or influence people to give an expected response may be confirmed by appointment to an office which is seen as carrying such a right.

Authority may be sought and used in order to lead. So long as it is recognised, the required response may be obtained without a close personal relationship. Thus it is hoped that a public notice ending 'By order, The Clerk of the Council' will get respectful attention and compliance. But when the right to require a response is not admitted or is disregarded, some other means must be used to motivate the potential respondents, e.g. persuasion, demonstration, appeal, threat instead of, or in support of, the authority.

Leaders may use authority to influence others to follow — both authority based on office and authority based on respect for the person — but often their authority has not been established in that it does not exist or it is inadequate. In such a case the establishment of some personal relationship with followers, some of whom may be leaders of others, is required. Such relationships are not established in a moment so we need to look at how relationships, expectations, and beliefs about leading and following have been developed, for these set limits on what a would-be leader can accomplish.

The concept of leadership

Leadership is an ability to get others to change their behaviour with a view to meeting the goals of the leader or his followers. Leaders can influence followers because they have already established some kind of relationship and some expectations of how each party should behave towards the other. They also have imbibed or constructed theories of how influence should be exercised so we shall examine what stimulates or constrains the development of those relationships, expectations, and belief in a church.

Patterns of relationships

Leaders cease to be leaders when others do not follow. Many give leads which are ignored, rejected, or misapplied and are thereby discouraged from repeating the risk of being left out on a limb; thus they do not gain a recognised status as leaders and rarely venture to suggest or to take initiatives. Though those whose leads are followed may give little thought to their relationships with their followers, it is through those relationships that their initiatives become effective and every act and

every attitude stemming from those relationships affects the personal development of both the leaders and their followers. So a domineering style of leadership may produce either dependent followers or dissidents who may eventually rebel, while a supportive style may produce discriminating followers or interdependent co-leaders who may become rivals. In turn the responses of both those who follow and those who decline to do so affect the style and character of the leaders. Dictators are thus confirmed in their despotic rule partly by the adulation of followers and partly by the fears of rivalry and rebellion. Continued acceptance as a leader requires a sensitive understanding by the leader of the minds and hearts of followers so that the leads given are generally perceived, understood, accepted, and applied.

The work of the church requires initiatives to be taken and followed, and the fellowship of the church flows from the relationships of members with one another. As the exercise of leadership is necessary for the work and influences the nature of the fellowship, we do well to examine how we lead and how we follow. As later papers indicate, official or publicly acknowledged differences in patterns of church leadership do not necessarily indicate the actual differences. These real patterns are often harder to recognise than the formal or official patterns and, for those intimately concerned, harder to acknowledge, but they have a greater impact on our work and our fellowship as well as each member's personal development — spiritual, mental, emotional, and perhaps physical. Changes in those real patterns, reflecting almost imperceptibly at times the movement of life within the fellowship, warrant a periodic review in the light of scripture.

Patterns of expectations

Such a review may well reveal to us the extent to which we are bound, not so much by scripture as we think, but by our tendency to reproduce the patterns which we have known and used in our relationships outside the church — in the home, at work, and in the community — expecting others to be as familiar and comfortable with them as we ourselves are. For some, particularly in uncertain and stressful situations, there will be a harking back to patterns known in early development — perhaps to act again as a child towards those who betoken security or represent authority, or perhaps to imitate these parental figures. Most of us will also retain unthinkingly many characteristics of our habitual behaviour as workers — appearing to others as patronising, persuasive, officious, casual, detached, or obsequious — though some might deliberately try to adopt rôles or styles untenable in their working situations. Class attitudes, too, are still powerful in our society, leading to culture clashes within such close fellowships as a marriage or a church, requiring much effort to understand, to expose, and to reconcile. Here small differences

are as potentially dangerous as obvious ones because the parties may not recognise them or easily tolerate them. For instance, conventions regarding whom you may or must kiss, what you may or must wear, how you may or must address others, when you may or must applaud, where you may or must sit may have to be disregarded in a move, say, between Harlem and central New York, but may be disconcerting to many if disregarded by a church member in either place.

So strong is the cultural influence of the community they have known, even where infringement does not lead to persecution, that some Christians have moved themselves from its environment to establish their own separated community. They succeed only in part because they must bring themselves into the new community, having been made what they are largely through the human relationships they have previously known. Nevertheless they may question and examine their imported cultures to discard some aspects and modify or retain others, whereas those who stay in the world without in a spiritual sense being part of it may find it more difficult to work out new ways of relating with fellow Christians whom they meet less frequently. Neither group is likely to abandon all features of the wider culture they have known and no individual should hastily prejudge what others retain from their own experiences. Letting go the security provided by the old patterns of relating is often a stressful process requiring much patience and support within each fellowship as members co-operate in working out new patterns appropriate to their needs.

But the church must beware that the new sub-culture with its own pattern of leading and following does not itself become a prison, all the stronger because it may acquire over time an aura of sanctity. Developed to serve in past circumstances, it may be more constraining in the development of the church and its members than the cultures of the world. In requiring members to act out roles no longer relevant to the current fellowship and distinct from the roles they have learnt or observed outside the church, an outdated church sub-culture may hinder the building of authentic relationships. Rather than relate person to person, members relate through their roles, hiding their personalities behind their actors' masks and eventually warping their own development. The value to a church of, say, a preacher, or organist, or a cleaner is limited if they are recognised and treated solely as office-holders and are expected to use language, music, or materials that are not any longer as effective as they were.

Inappropriate behaviour however is not always easy to recognise. For example, a formal handshake intended as a gesture of acceptance and friendship may indicate to many a desire to retain a social distance or a patronising attitude. A more casual nod, an unexpected hand on the shoulder, or a more personal comment may lead more quickly to a closer relationship. 'Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss' (1 Thess. 5:26 NIV).

Custom makes it three in Poland, two in Czechoslovakia, but it is rather risky to try for one in Britain.

Patterns of belief

In our contemporary cultural patterns of the western world there are some pervasive and persistent beliefs about leadership which have affected our thinking. These beliefs are now being questioned in social and economic organisations as misleading and inhibiting, and therefore their validity for the church should not be assumed uncritically. For this reason they are labelled here as 'myths'.

The first myth is that the world is divided into two classes of people: leaders and followers. Some would go further and suggest that innate rather than developed characteristics are the basis of this distinction. In fact all people are capable of giving leads, though some may receive the impression from others that no one would ever follow any initiative of theirs and therefore they rarely venture to take one. On the other hand, few are capable of taking initiatives in all directions, e.g., in suggesting, in planning, in organising, in demonstrating, in encouraging, in communicating, in reconciling, in assessing. Even if capable of leading in some directions, a leader may be too pre-occupied with leading in others. In this respect the two-parent family has an advantage over the one-parent family, at least until the children become mature enough to take leads reliably.

One important lesson the disciples found hard to learn was to be content with subservient roles in relation to each other, but it was a necessary lesson for future leaders. Perhaps all managing directors and prime ministers need this lesson too, but certainly all church leaders do. All must learn how to be followers in order to lead and when they are leaders they do not cease to be followers. 'Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ' (Eph. 5:21 NIV). At any one time there may be many leaders, each contributing by leading in some ways while following in others.

The second myth is that leadership is a distinct function like pastoring, preaching, arranging music, or preparing a meeting-place. The facts are that each function contributing to the life of the church requires leads from time to time, and there is no function in which collaboration with followers is not possible, not even planning, organising, communicating, and directing. Leadership is not a function but an approach to any function — an innovatory risk-taking approach, dependent for its impact on the responses it generates.

In the church as in many other associations, people are inclined to wait for a leader — minister, elder, man of ideas or of action — to act before they do, but often he cannot give the required time and attention to many of the functions which serve the church, so they fail by default. The

esteem in which he is held by his followers, by establishing a social barrier, may make it more difficult to lead in other areas, such as promoting sympathetic understanding within the fellowship. Difficult but not impossible, for our Lord had time and a touch for little children when the disciples thought he should not (Matt. 10:14, 15), and in so many dealings with individuals such as the rich young ruler and the woman of Samaria he was at pains to adjust their view of himself before or while dealing with their question or plea (Luke 18:19, John 4:7-26). Later the disciples were able to help others similarly (Acts 3:6, 14:15).

The third myth is that, no matter how much responsibility is placed upon others and no matter how much is expected from them, all their contributions must be co-ordinated and directed by the leader, who gains respect and status by his dynamic activity and control of the communication network. In fact the most active or the most dominant leader is not always the most influential, for often his very activity and controlling position prevents his seeing the overall position of the group he leads and the responses of followers spring less from commitment to the leader's objectives than the desire or habit of conforming to his directives. More effective in the long run is the leader who can encourage others to take on responsibility themselves, even the responsibility of co-ordinating their contributions with those of others. As they develop their skills and their courage in leading, his task becomes less one of giving leads than one of ensuring that leads are given and responses made. Thus he will have time and energy freed to consider the overall strategy and development of his group, an overseer who by example teaches others to adopt an overall view.

Whereas in many associations a leader may succeed in getting others to pursue the objectives he or some outside body values, in the church a leader should be helping other members to clarify and pursue their own objectives rather than understanding and following his. In so far as their objectives are consistent with his, he will have gained powerful support through their commitment and they will gain in maturity — spiritual as well as intellectual and social. 'Each should be fully convinced in his own mind' (Rom. 14:5).

The fourth myth is that there is one best style of leadership if only we can find it and adhere to it. We may each create our own ideal, perhaps by combining what we have admired in the styles of those we have judged to be great men, particularly those who, while seeming to have full technical command of the tasks accepted by their followers, have understood and inspired them to devoted and competent responses. Several researchers in recent years have suggested dual-factor theories of leadership, indicating that while some are more task-oriented others are more people-oriented, while some lead instrumentally as a father others lead affectively like a mother, while some are strong in initiation others are strong in consideration. Following these theories some training pro-

grammes have aimed at creating a balance of approach, particularly helping people who have stood out technically to deal more effectively with people who have not the same skill, experience, or inclination. Extending a leader's repertoire of skills can be helpful but the approach leaves out of account the requirements of a situation, such as the technicalities involved, the organisational arrangements including the interests of bodies external to the group, and the personalities and expectations of leader and followers. In one situation an unequivocal demand may be most effective in the short run without loss of goodwill in the long run, but in another situation patient consultation and experiment may be more likely to achieve the group's objectives. The effective leader then diagnoses the requirements of each situation before selecting an appropriate style from his repertoire.

Followers who hold a simple model of what their leader should do may be disconcerted by changes of style which seem to them to display inconsistency, but they can be trained to accept changes provided that they can be confident that they are based on reasonable concern for the group and its objectives and not on the whims of the leader. Even children accept that a parent or teacher is required to behave differently according to circumstances, varying style according to who is involved, what is at stake, and how the tasks of the group are perceived.

As the expectations, capabilities, and commitment of the leader or his followers change, so the leader may risk a change of style. In a family or a church where there is a close fellowship in living, working, learning, and growing, such changes continually require adjustments in relationships. Often there is no problem as leader and followers sense the need for change, but occasionally some want to change faster than others can accept. One-style leadership, whatever its basic ideal, is too inflexible to help.

Our Lord himself varied his style of relating to others as he moved, for example, from the wedding feast at Cana to the temple at Jerusalem (John 4). In asking why he judged the situations to require different initiatives we are led to better understanding of his purposes and the need for guidance in assessing the situations in which we ourselves are placed and for grace to act with wisdom and boldness.

The ensuing papers

The differences in church order examined by Neil Summerton in the first part of his paper reflect to a large extent different views of authority, particularly as to its basis in official appointment or in charismatic ministry. He goes on to examine the nature of offices named in the New Testament, concluding that there is room for variation in official arrangements.

Brian Mills suggests a number of models which approximately repre-

sent styles of government existing today in assemblies of Christian Brethren and other churches. No single model is offered as an ideal arrangement for government and strategic decision-making appropriate for all circumstances, for there is no simple solution to the problems of leadership in today's assemblies. Arguments over whether the problems of today are greater than those of yesterday are futile. We should recognise that they are different in many ways and therefore should be met by serious study, prayer, and enterprise.

While both these contributors recognise that all members of a church share a responsibility for the conduct of its affairs, including the exercise of spiritual gifts to be found among them, John Boyes examines in more detail some of the practical problems of collective responsibility, both in the inner group of acknowledged rulers — the church council or oversight — and in the larger body of the church. The problems of exercising authority and gift in the church are solved neither by searching for an outstanding leader with wide authority nor by searching for unreserved unanimity. In their reaction against one-man ministry, often assumed rather than evident, brethren should not close their minds to other possibilities, including a full-time ministry with some financial support within one church. Neil Summerton examines this possibility in the last part of his paper.

Helpfully Brian Mills reminds us that no model of government or style of leadership will work in the church without awareness of responsibility to God in the choices we make or without spirituality in our service to the church.

The last paper examines preparations a Christian needs in order to lead others. Though it is recognised that there are benefits to be gained by training for various forms of ministry, there is a concentration on training for leadership. Few development programmes do that even where their title includes a reference to leadership. Training for leaders may not include training in leading.

Some examples are given of the cases discussed in small groups at the CBRF seminar in October 1978 on 'Leadership in the churches' as examples of material by which trainees help themselves in thinking through some problems. Brian Mills' paper set the scene for these discussions and John Boyes' paper followed. The remit to both stressed the need for brevity as the participants of the seminar were to make their own contributions through case discussion and questions to a panel. Neil Summerton's paper was written for a consultation of brethren in February 1979 and required a more exhaustive look at ministry as well as leadership.

Further reading

J. ADAIR 1973   *Action-centred leadership*
McGraw-Hill

M. ARGYLE 1967 — *The psychology of interpersonal*
Penguin — *behaviour*
R. R. BLAKE & J. S. MOUTON — *The new managerial grid*
1964/78
Gulf Publishing
C. L. COOPER (Ed) 1975 — *Theories of group processes*
Wiley
F. E. FIEDLER 1967 — *A theory of leadership*
McGraw-Hill — *effectiveness*
W. J. REDDIN 1970 — *Managerial effectiveness*
McGraw-Hill
P. B. SMITH 1973 — *Groups within organizations*
Harper & Row
E. SYDNEY, M. BROWN & — *Skills with people: a guide for*
M. ARGYLE 1973 — *managers*
Hutchinson