

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF SPIRITUAL LEADERSHIP

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1. Introduction

CONTEMPORARY studies reveal that there is an alarming trend to confuse leadership with the position one holds. This view does not pervade only the non-Christian Churches, but also, it is at the core of many non-profit organizations tolerating the idea that “the more, one is at the top the more one is able to lead.” If so, Christian organizations everywhere are in need of true leadership.

The Bible has a lot to offer in term of what God himself says about leadership. The phrases “to be a leader” or “to lead” abounds in meaning. This article intends to review these expressions in order to set a foundational net that every leader has to know.

Some questions are in focus in this paper. The questions how do people become leaders? Is there any specific endowment in social and spiritual leadership abilities? Is there such a thing as being born to lead? Is leadership is about actions and not existence? These questions need to be answered by anyone who wants to be a leader.

The world has had his leaders since the historical memory can be recollected. People usually perceive leadership as in inborn aptitude to lead. However, the Bible has more than seventeen verbs to translate the dynamic or action of the verb “to lead” (13 in Heb, and 4 in Greek).¹

There is no doubt that Cyrus the Great (539-530 BC), Alexander the Great (336-323 BC), Julius Caesar (13-44 BC), Abraham Lincoln

¹See Robert Young, *Analytical Concordance to the Bible* (1970), s.v. “lead.” (pp.593-594).

(AD 1809-1865) and thousands others, we classify as leaders, have maybe shown headship abilities and great charismatic traits at a very early stage of their life. However, spiritual leadership, at face value, needs those great human qualities, but it does not rely primarily on them. Abraham, Moses or David considered themselves lofty for the mission (cf. Gen 18:27; Exod 3:11; 2 Sam 7:18). It is only when their individual characters changed in the encountering with Yahweh and when they were humbled in their inner beings that God used them powerfully for His own purpose. Moses was known as a meek "above all the men who were upon the face of the earth" (Num 12:3). Paul says, "For when I am weak, then I am strong" (NKJV, 2 Cor 12:10b).

Though there is a huge market of book written about leadership, the unrealistic and stipulative theories abound. Topic such as *Leading Change*, *Casting a Vision* or *Working as Team* are legion, and mostly put forward non-Christian views on leadership. They can be helpful for the psychological aspect of the discipline. But, training does not necessarily make a leader. People often are trained to reach a position, but not to maintain it with God's given strength.

Nowadays, it is easier to characterize Christian leadership with tyranny, for the practice of the servant leadership's concept is mostly nonexistent. The worst of all is that young pastors come to believe that in order to maintain their salvation, they must avoid any leadership function as they become more afraid of any position of responsibility. This is because there is a clear difference between a Christian with or without leadership position. In the third world, for example, in Africa, leadership is equaled with administrative functions.

This article seeks to offer the multifaceted biblical image of what constitute a leader in various spheres where God intend us to "lead." And then identifies principles on how leadership can develop God's agenda based on God's own principles and strength. The presupposition guiding the writer is that although it is not all who stand before the people, yet all have the grace to lead, because, spiritual leadership remains God's choice. This is because spiritual leadership is not an inborn genetic ability, but God who enables His people to work for His purpose.

2. What Do We Have to Say About Leadership?

As people see leadership as inborn qualitative abilities, this paper argue for leadership as God's dynamic responsibility over His people for their direction. It is God's innate strength to care for people. Leadership is a life of experience with God, which shall not be confused with activities in which the one who leads is involved, for leadership is not inherent in men but found in God. It is through God's strength and wealth that leadership is done, for God is the one who helps and acts for and with us (see Zech 4:6; 2 Chr 32:8).

Leadership becomes the ability to allow God's will on behalf of His people through us. Matthew puts it as, "Thy will be done, On earth as it is in heaven" (Matt 6:10). Thus, it is one thing to develop someone through training, and another to have his/her inner being in tune with God. The more one grows in knowing his/her weakness, the more one would lead accordingly. Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby capture well this reality when they say, "Certainly leadership involves some specific skills, but ultimately leadership is more about 'being' than about 'doing.'"¹

One of the fundamental questions that continue to puzzle organizations is to know whether to be a leader is an inborn quality or it takes a large degree of expertise or both? Everywhere, it is easily testified, in the secular arena or in the religious sphere, we have seen how gifted men felt short.

Churches are desperate to find leaders to continue the mission. For example Monroe indicates that a survey among church members of a congregation who were asked whether they were leaders, only 6 percent responded positively whereas 96 percent did not feel fitted for the task.²

Nevertheless, according to Monroe, leadership is not exclusive for an elite; every Christian "has the instinct capacity for leadership, but most do not have the courage or will to cultivate it."³ His understanding when applied to spiritual leadership means that God is disposed, according to his will, to use anyone, and that leadership

¹Henry Blackaby and Richard Blackaby, *Spiritual Leadership* (Makati City, Philippines: Church Strengthening Ministry, 1984), 31.

²See Myles Monroe, *The Spirit of Leadership: Cultivating the Attitudes that Influence Human Action* (New Kensington: Whitaker, 2005), 10-20.

³*Ibid.*, 15.

needs to be broad as to include any circle of responsibility. In fact, Cyndy Tutsch adds to Monroe's understanding that all Christians are leaders, since for her, it is a "part of our responsibility as follower of Jesus."¹ The oneness of the Spirit and the diversity of spiritual gifts as mentioned by Paul in 1 Cor 12:1-13 indicates that leadership is not about positions; it is about functioning according to the manifestation of God's Spirit.

3. What is the Characteristic of a Leader?

3.1 Leadership and Culture

One of the most important challenges for leaders is how to adapt or apply the Christian leadership to cultural environments. Some would just follow how things are being done to be in tune with the moment. Once it is understood that all who are part of the body of Christ are peculiar members and that this gives us special gifts from God, then the task remains to acknowledge that every Christian is a leader whether they are "Jews or gentiles, whether be bond or free" (cf. 1 Cor 13b, v. 7; 1 Pet 4:10); so as to say he/she should exercise his gift.

Thereafter, the first important characteristic of Christian leadership is courage, the courage to go beyond prevailing philosophies and the cultural tyranny. This is essential to be used by God (cf. 1 Sam 2:29; Matt 10:37). Taking an example from the Bible, when all the assembly of Israel believed the report of the spies, so as to be threatened, only among them Moses, Aaron Joshua and Caleb had the courage to go against the prevailing philosophy that when the people are "greater and taller" and that their "cities are great and walled up to heaven" (Num 13:10, 32; Deut 1:28), it is impossible to win the battle. Leadership is thus to follow God against the evidences and be disposed to do according to His plans and not according to the great numbers, because selflessness and godliness lie at the heart of Godly leadership.

Thus, spiritual leadership belongs to those, who through the fear of God, want to go beyond the *idées reçues*. Every time one feels the need to challenge the preconceived ideas that "nothing can be

¹Cyndy Tutsch, *Ellen White on Leadership: Guidance for Those Who Influence Others* (Publisher, Pacific PressPub, 2008), 9.

changed" or "it is the way things are being done for long" or "we are waiting for you to see whether you can change anything," it means that he has been called for change. Spiritual leadership is about bringing and maintaining God's people on His agenda and doing things not according to the "conformity of this world" (Rom 12:2), for the whole world system lies in the power of evil (1 John 5:19), but Christ sacrifice gives us the power to be free from it.

3.2 Leadership and Growth

Because the work of God is done through his mighty power, God requests interests from every leaders. Spiritual leadership is for those who are agents of growth; they should not stay in position when they cannot bring the change or bring forth care, protection and happiness to the people who are under them and help accomplish the mission. God's people become the "offspring" of leaders and metaphorically their life as the life of the organization are not merely agent of production, but agents of growth. In fact, the growth of Church organization is seen in the multiplications, and ability to care for the people (see Act 1-6).

This kind of leadership is summed up by "a life of service," which by serving God's people, means to serve God's interest itself. Spiritual leadership is not the pursuit of positions, benefits or power, but the intense enthusiasm to achieve a noble task for the common good. In brief, true spiritual leadership displaces everything wrong and returns to God's focus and plan for His Church. Leaders will receive the reward of faithfulness as Matthew says, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master" (Mat 25:21 ESV).

In that understanding, any Christian who fears the Lord in his inner being and strives to exercises God's principles within his/her sphere of influence regardless of the challenges multiplies God's interests (cf. Matt 25:27). Spiritual leadership requires accountability to God. From parenting to deacons, to pastors, teacher and administrators, they should all serve one God "in faith and in good conscience" (1 Tim 1:19). If God works with any leaders through His Spirit, it means that while leaders need skills to operate, but the glory should be given to God himself. Thus, the Church needs to re-emphasize God's given strategy. Godly leadership should be re-defined as faithful service rendered to God and His people within His pattern and strength. It is this special duty of leadership, which result in the glory of God. Therefore, a leader could be anybody of

average size who is highly motivated by God's Spirit to influence others for the mission of making all the nations the disciples of Christ.

This side of spiritual leadership is not based on external factors, but in inner reality and ability to allow God to lead through humankind His people. Christian leadership is about bearing "fruits" not positions. To summarize it with external reality, it is to be endangered to be rejected as the King Saul (see 1 Sam 15:23; 16:7; cf. John 7:24), avoiding to work accordingly. This could also be true for secular leadership, the most successful leaders the world knows, is that the lowly person had great achievements whenever they cared for their people.¹ Thus, a leader is to be judged in the multidimensional growth he brings both to the people of the organization and to God's Church.

4. Biblical Semantic of Leadership

4.1 The Old Testament's View on Leadership

Though addressing the subject from a variety of perspectives, the Old Testament presents an authoritative theology of leadership, under the leadership of God. Various words express the semantic of "leading" God's people.

אָדוֹן. In the OT, the term is used in reference to an earthly lord over 300 times and to divine lordship about 400 times; the earliest out of the Jewish people is that Pharaoh was called אָדוֹן (Gen 40:1). And Gen 42:10, where Joseph is called אָדוֹנִי, "my lord" by his brothers and they refers to themselves as "your servants" (עֲבָדֶיךָ). However, when it is not God who is involved in אָדוֹנִי, it simply refers to an expression of courtesy, viz., a substitution for the address "You" (cf. Gen 24:27; 31:35). However, the term denotes various authoritative positions.²

¹Blackaby and Blackaby, *Spiritual*, 32-33.

²(a) master as lord of servants/slaves (Gen 24:9; 40:7; 42:10; Exod 21:4,6,8,32; Deut 23:15; Judg 19:11,12; Job 3:19; Ps 123:2; Prov 25:13; 27:18; 30:10; Isa 24:2; Zeph 1:9; Mal 1:9); (b) husband as lord of wife (Gen 18:12; Judg 19:26-27; Ps 45:11 [12]; Amos 4:1); (c) master as lord of people (1 Kgs 22:17); (d) vizier as lord of a country (Gen 44:8; 45:9); (e) owner as lord of a territory (1 Kgs 16:24); (f) household master as lord of household (Gen 45:8; Ps 105:21); (g) prophet as

אֱלֹהִי. Leadership is of much concern within the realm of the family. Tribal organization was based on leadership. Three words designate the leaders of a tribe in Gen 36:30; the term אֱלֹהִי, "tribal chief" (Zech 12:5-6), semantically tied with רֹאשׁ, "head," "leader" or "ruler" (Num 1:16; 10:4; 14:5; Josh 22:14,21,30; 1 Chr 12:21; 11 Q19:16; 1Qsam^a 1:14),¹ and אִיל, "leader" (Exod 15:15), as all the three words label leaders of groups or tribes in seminomadic context. But, during the monarchy, אֱלֹהִי came to be related to מֶלֶךְ, "king," and נָגִיד, "prince." These stand also for institutional heads during the monarchy of sedentary people. Though during the patriarchal time both אֱלֹהִי and מֶלֶךְ designate both the edomite leaders (see Gen 36:10-43), but אֱלֹהִי is pre-monarchic in its outlook. Among other things, the term מֶלֶךְ has the strongest tone of leadership, since after God, there are no other leaders.

זָקֵן. Another important term for leadership is זָקֵן, "elder." The root occurs 226 times in 26 books of the OT, in which 56 percent are in the Pentateuch (179 times as adjective, 20 times as noun, and 26 times as verb). The adjective means either, "old men," "elder," and the noun may also connote either "old age" (Gen 18:12; 19:31; 25:8; 35:29), as in contrast to youth (Gen 19:4; Josh 6:21 etc.). Since it denotes someone who is beyond the prime time, and technically, זָקֵן means an elder or leader of the community (Gen 19:4; Lev 19:32; 1 Sam 28:14; Isa 9:15); this usage is clearly related to the first, since in Ancient Near East culture, older men were given authority and leadership because of their accumulated wisdom and experience. Elders existed among the Egyptians (Gen 50:7; Ps 105:22), Moabites and Midianites (Num 22:4,7), Gibeonites (Josh 9:11), and Israelites (Exod 3:16). However, when it comes to wisdom, it is not the old age in the OT, which have primacy, for it is the Spirit of the almighty that gives wisdom (see Job 32:7-9).

After the destruction of Jerusalem (AD 70), the term זָקֵן takes a new dimension. Scribes who used to expound and apply the

master of disciples (2 Kgs 2:3,5,16); (h) provincial governor as lord of district (Neh 3:5); (i) prince as lord of people (1 Sam 29:10); (j) king as lord of nation (Gen 40:1; Judg 3:25; 1 Sam 29:4); and (k) oppressor as tyrannical lord of the poor (Ps 12:5).

¹Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Johann Jakob Stam, trans. M. E. J. Richardson, CD-ROM ed. (Leiden: Brill, 1994), BibleWorks, v.9.

law into the Sanhedrin of Jamnia honorably called "elder," were outstanding theologians. This, according to Coenen, "implies, if not membership of the council, at least ordination (cf. Sam 11:1-4). At the same time the presidents of the Jewish synagogues, in which the old structure of the local communities persist, are also called *πρεσβύτεροι* (cf. the elders of Gelead, Judg 11:5,7)."¹ Their duty was to preserve the tradition with strong discipline. Moreover, inscriptions indicate that from about the 2d century, *זקן* lost its functional significance in the Jewish life and there appears other expressions from the Greek language influenced by the Jews of the diaspora. They would have leadership and the duty of preserving the traditional order with disciplinary powers (cf. Luk 7:3). But it is still found frequently as a title of honor for patrician families.

שפטים. In the book of Judges, when the people forgot to obey, God gave them to the hands of the foreign kings and then, send the **שפטים** to save them (Judg 2:16,17,18, cf. Ruth 1:1; 2 Sam 7:11; 2 Kgs 23:32; 1 Chr 17:6,10), their mission was to save the people from the power of the oppressors, hence **מושיע**, "savior" (Judg 3:9,15). There is one unique usage of the verbal participle of **שפטה** (*šōpāh*), "judging" (Judg 4:4), which occurs with respect to Deborah, who is clearly depicted in the office of prophets (6:8). She takes no leadership in any battle other than to assure Barak's victory (4:14; 5:7), but the text presents her leading the praise to God (5:1,12). She functions much as a prophet, since she is called "mother" in Israel as someone would address the prophet: "prophet" (see 1 Kgs 2:12; 6:21). She should not be taken as Judge like Barack, for she is described as **יושבת**, "sitting" (4:5; cf. v. 2) and this suggests a static ministry of giving advice and directions according to the divine guidance.

נצח. The intensive of the verb **נצח**, "to supervise" or "excel greatly," hence "lead," and "preside" has the connotation of someone who oversees, a superintendent or director. Such activity is expressed eight time in the OT: as a music director (1 Chr 15:21;

¹L. Coenen, "Spiritual Gifts," *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. L. Coenen, E. Beyreuther & H. Bietenhard (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1986), 1:198.

23:4; 2 Chr 2:1,17), the duty of inspection was associated with the temple (2 Chr 34:12:13; Ezr 3:8,9). 55 times, at the beginning the Psalms titles the lyric seems to be addressed to a songs leader or the *לְמַנְצֵה*, "to the director of music" or "famous one" (Pss 4-6; 8; 11-14; 18-22 etc.), and once at the end of Hab 3:19.

4.2. The New Testament's View on Leadership

The NT adopts most of the concepts of the Old Testament. However, there are new words borrowed from the Greek language. One of them is *κυβέρνησις*, "administrator," which literally, refers to the skill with which a pilot guides a ship; figuratively, of the leadership expertise, hence "administrative ability," "gift of leadership," "managerial skill." It is used once in 1 Cor 12:28 in Paul's list; it is the seventh gift before the gift of tongues. This plural indicates not a leading position in the body of Christ, but to a special wise Christians who gives good advice to the body. This word seems not to be a gift bestowed, rather it is a quality needed to election in the community, thus, bishops and deacons are probably in view. Although, divine charisma was necessary for working for God, at least both elders and deacons need first social managerial qualities in order to be elected.¹ That's why the question of 1 Cor 12:29 does not apply to it as with the ability to help. The ecclesial body of Christ without wise guidance is called to failure (cf. Prov 11:14). In the Church's fathers, it is often depicted as a ship and Christ as the Helmsman or Pilot. The stilling of the storm and the ark provide a starting point. The symbolism is that Christ steers his church safely to port through the storms of life or across the sea of sin.²

The Greek Septuagint (LXX) translates *κυβέρνησις* for the Heb *תְּהִלָּה*, "direction," "steering," which seems to be related to wisdom (*σοφία*), "clever directions" for success (cf. Prov 1:5; 24:6).³

¹In J. H. Moulton and G. Milligan, *Vocabulary of the Greek Testament* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1930), BibleWorks, v.9, The verb, which is used of divine "guiding" in Wisd 14:6 and it is applied to the management of a household in the inscriptions.

²See H. W. Beyer, "κυβέρνησις," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich; 1964-76), 3: 1035-37.

³Koehler & Baumgartner, *HALOT*, s.v. "תְּהִלָּה," So probably the skill of the helmsman, the art of steering a boat should be taken as the original meaning

Thus, the tropical meaning for the word exists.

The verb κυβέρνηω never occur in the NT. And According to Coenen, in 1 Cor 12:28, "the first three [gifts] differ from the rest by being numbered, but it is unlikely that any basic contrast is intended. The position of κυβέρνησις after the gift of healing and giving help, and before those of tongues, suggests that the word is a term for mediating functions of keeping order within the whole life of the Church. Dibelius thinks that it is unlikely that the conduct of worship or administrative duties are involved."¹ Mainly, κυβερνήτης is the captain in charge for the management of a ship, such as "pilot" (cf. Acts 27:11; Rev 18:17) in the sense of a helmsman. The Latin is *gubernare*, "to govern" or "a government."

The second term is πρεσβύτερος. Of the sixty six times, the NT uses this word in three senses. First, in the synoptic gospels, and at beginning and at the end of the book of Acts, the substantive refers to the old aged persons and to the members of the Sanhedrin. In the central portion of Acts, the Pastoral Epistles (James 5:14), and the various salutations in 2 and 3 John, the Christian elder is meant. Finally, in Revelation, it denotes heavenly beings, although it remains an open question whether they surround the divine throne as representatives of the heavenly or the earthly church.²

It does not appear in the Pauline Epistles apart from the Pastorals. The noun appears seven times with **two references**. It refers simply to an elderly man (Luk 1:18; Tite 2:2; Phlm 9), and as either the lay council related to the High priest in the highest Jewish council in Jerusalem (Luk 22:66; Acts 22:5) or the Church council, including all the elders (1 Tim 4:14). The adjective means "old aged" or "old person" (Luk 15:25; James 8:9; Act 2:17), ancestors (Matt 15:2; Matt 7:3; Heb 11:2) and as designation of an official, hence, "elder" or "presbyter," either among the Jews (Matt 16:21; 27:41; Mk 14:43,53, Luk 7:3; 9:22; Acts 4:23; 6:12) or among the Christians (Acts 11:30; 14:34; 1 Tim 5:17,19; Tit 1:5 etc.).

of the substantive.

¹Coenen, "Spiritual Gifts," 1:198-199.

²See E. Lobmeyer, *Die Offenbarung des Johannes*, 3rd ed. Handbuch zum Neuen Testament 16 (Tübingen: Mohr-Siebeck, 1970), 44-50.

5. Women as Leaders

Another aspect of leadership concerns the role of women. Although there is no specific words for women leaders, the leadership in the Bible is gendered for the social and spiritual matters. Miriam for example leads the women for the praise for God's victory while Moses took the lead of the men after the victory (Exodus 15:19-20, 1-18). Women were standing at the entrance of God's house by the time of Ezechiel, which maybe was enlarged to the court of women during the second Temple (Ezech 8:14). The NT is not against this background, women will have their own place of prayer (Acts 16:13; 1 Cor 12; 14), though they could also gather with men. However, in that instance, when it is spiritual ingathering, men would serve at the table (cf. Acts 6).

In the political sphere, the case of Athaliah shows that a woman can reign (2 Kgs 11). Many works have been done on the question of women leadership. In this paper, I just want to give briefly, what the author thinks it should be. Women are leaders when they may feel their accountability to their savior. The leadership would however, take a multifaceted leadership. Born equal to men, as her helper, they have a role to play, and a very important role. If leadership encompasses a center of interest, God model for women was to educate the future of every nation. She may lead around her first center of reference, her family constituted of her husband and her household and children (Prov 31:10-31). Women would only take the lead when men have abused their privilege to serve God. From the midwives Shiphrah and Puah who plaid their role in saving God's children (Exod 1:15-22) to the prophetess Miriam who lead the women in their social rejoicing (Exod 15:19-21) or to Deborah who accompany the fearful Barak against Sisera commandant of a Canaanites' kingdom, all plaid very well their role at their sphere imparted by God.

The New Testament implications that God allows the spiritual gifts to rule the ministry (cf. Rom 12; 1 Cor 12 and Eph 4) would not change male dominance in Spiritual leadership, because within the Church, for, it is true that "anyone" can be overseer in God's new system (1 Tim 3:1), but, it is compulsory that the person be "the husband of one wife" (μίας γυναικὸς ἄνδρα, v. 2). Women had their spheres of influence, such as Dorcas had with her good works (Acts 9:36-39); Phoebe in her supportive role in the early Church (Rom 16:1-2), or of any woman in the sphere of giving good advice to younger sisters and childbearing (1 Tim 2:15).

A lot of debate on the leadership of women is going on. To be laborer with God, it does not require any ordination. What is needed is God's entrusted power, which may shine for his glory. This vital power is lacking in the Church. Many women should have a chance to give expression of their gift, within their circle. They may be missionary for Jesus or teaching Godly women everywhere.

There is a headship/submission principle in Christian life. As Christ is the head of Church and have to be the first in everything and over all authority, thus, likewise in the home and in the Church the women have to stay in submission to their husband and paternal head if they are not married (cf. Eph 4:15; 5:23; Num 30:3-9; Judg 11:36-39), thus, it is not only in likeness of Christ-Church relationship that women have to submit, but also in the Lord (Eph 5:22,24; Col 3:18; 1 Pet 3:1, 5b-6). This submissive position is part of the curse in consequence that she has brought sin into the world and was first deceived in the Garden (cf. Gen 3:16). The hierarchical model man-woman/husband-wife submission does not prevent a mutual submission in human spheres in general, for they all belong to Christ and to God. It is this God's given order that women have to focus notwithstanding of the advanced world in the task of their major role, "the power of maternal role" or "motherhood" (1 Tim 2:15).

6. Conclusion

Briefly, much of what this paper stands for, is that leadership is not an inborn quality, but a spiritual ability to please the Lord by being able to pursuit only one goal at the time: His. We have tried to show that leadership encompasses many sphere of interests in which man and woman are called to fill up. Leadership should be done within the parameters and outline of God's given will. The acceptances of spiritual gifts are a spiritual guide to allow God's choice of spiritual leaders to be made clear. The Service of God is lacking of leaders, because no one goes to look where the Lord wants us to go, to his word and will clearly revealed to the Spirit of Prophecy on leadership.