

Leadership in Christ's Community: A Different Perspective

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Alan Roxburgh in his book, *Crossing the Bridge: Church Leadership in a Time of Change*, relates that we are in a time of liminality, a time of transition (between two cultures—modern and postmodern), which requires the development and exercising of a different kind of leadership. He indicates that this time of transition may “last several generations” (Roxburgh, 53) and so all of us will only know leading within this time of transition. He adds that we need to realize that we are “novices with and for one another” (Roxburgh, 82) as we discern what it means to be leaders in Christ's church in these changing times.

It is in such times of transition that we are given the opportunity to reexamine accepted metaphors, to ask questions of accepted ways which are embedded within us, and to explore with fresh eyes how different metaphors might enable us to live and act more authentically within a culture that is in transition. I believe one of these embedded metaphors we need to examine has to do with Christian leadership. We need to examine to what extent our present understandings of leadership, of being a leader, enable or do not enable us to act in obedience to Christ's calling upon our lives.

We are inundated with material on Christian leadership that has grown out of a market-driven ecclesiology which focuses on an approach to leading “modeled on business and the power of the CEO” (Webber, 147): books, seminars, journals, workshops—you name it, it's there. George Barna, committed to a market-driven understanding of church, has observed “that only 4% of pastors have the gift of leadership. Most he claims, are gifted as shepherds, teachers, and preachers—but not as leaders. Leadership, he said, is primarily about indicating what direction to take” (Morrison, *Being a Pastor Today*, 88). Gregg S. Morrison, project director for the *Leadership Development for a New Millennium* research project, articulates that “the nature of pastoral leadership is surely a major issue for seminaries and divinity schools whose very reason for existence includes the equipping of ministers for the church of Jesus Christ” (Morrison, 88, 89).

We got into our present state of affairs when boomers entered into the 30-something's and came of age. Though the foment of the 60's and 70's resulted in a focus on social justice, the presence of the kingdom in all of life, the church as community, the empowerment of the laity for ministry (cf. the writings of Howard Yoder, Howard Snyder, Frank Tillapaugh, etc.), all of this was pushed underground as the boomers sought to do church in light of models of success and excellence as exemplified within a paradigm of business. Church Growth, though originally focused on a strategy for evangelism which sowed the seed where the ground was most receptive

¹ Originally, this was a transcript of a presentation given at *Up/Rooted* – a discussion forum for exploring the emerging church in a postmodern and post-Christian culture – on February 2, 2004 at Life on the Vine Christian Community in Long Grove, IL. This revision updates timeframes and makes minor corrections, though a more extensive revision is necessary – and will be forthcoming.

Also, more current sources need to be integrated into this article – which will be included in a future more extensive revision. Additional footnotes will alert to some current work in progress.

to the Gospel (cf. the work of Donald McGavran in *Understanding Church Growth* (Eerdmans, 1970)), morphed into a marketing approach within the American context and it took off. Marketing the church quickly gave rise to the seeker-sensitive movement, the idea that the only successful church was a mega-church, and that effective leadership needed to focus on the best from the business world. Though some of the themes of the 70's were picked up, such as empowering the laity for ministry, these themes were all recast into a framework of efficiency and success. Now that the boomer experiment has for the most part run its course – though it will remain entrenched for some time yet – that revolutionary grasping of the gospel within a missional perspective, which was pushed underground or overwhelmed in the beginning of the 80's is now resurfacing, but now also in conjunction with the advent of a post-Christian culture.

Though I attempted to be a part of the boomer experiment I never really fit in and I never really knew why until a few years ago (a discussion for another day.) Since the early 90s I have been on a journey, which has placed me on the “other side” of the pulpit – having pastored for close to 20 years prior to 1993. As I sat in the pew – post-1993 – I came to see how arrogant I had become as I observed those in leadership roles within the church. If I was anything like them, and the realization is that I was, I came to understand that I had done harm to the people I was called to serve in the way I was leading. And, now being one of the people on the “other side” of the pulpit, I realized that this style of leading did not connect with me, just as it was not connecting with those who were in the pew with me.

Those ensuing years were a wilderness experience for me as I reflected on the kind of pastor I had become, and the kind of leadership I sought to exemplify. I am in a different place now – have been for almost fifteen years now – and I have come to a different understanding of how we are to lead in Christ’s community.

A Disclaimer

I need to insert a disclaimer. I understand that some of what I say caricatures our present understandings or models of leadership. I “throw out the baby with the bath water” in order to present in stark relief what I see as a necessary and essential reframing of the way we lead – which in many ways recognizes that *leading* is indeed a gift and needs to be explored and practiced, but the concepts of *leadership* and being *the leader*, may owe more to business constructs than biblical understandings.

Once I have displayed the parameters, then we can get beyond these caricatures by focusing on nuances and subtleties in dialogue together, in order to discern the shape of a new paradigm for leading that is Christian.

The Present Context and Struggle Within Christian Leadership

Though there are others with whom I express a common voice, a significant majority of church leaders are still leading in ways, which I find antithetical to a biblical paradigm.

In talking with an associate pastor about the stress he was experiencing in ministry due to the incompatibility of his ministry style with the responsibilities demanded of him by the senior pastor's vision of the church, he remarked he was taking some time off to assess whether he still "fit" with the church he was serving. Though he is a very relational person, the style of leadership thrust upon him by the vision of the senior pastor is one of developing programs and administering tasks. He remarked about his senior pastor's desire to maintain "control" in articulating a clear three-fold vision of the future direction for the church and is being "packaged" in a carefully crafted preaching campaign to motivate the congregation to be supportive of this vision through increased financial giving and program involvement. This associate pastor was not the only one on the staff who felt this pressure to conform to the organizational model championed by the senior pastor.

Nor is this church alone in exemplifying a form of leadership that seems to stifle, rather than, foster growth towards maturity in the body of Christ. Scenarios such as this are repeated in thousands of American churches. Pastors and staff seek to become more effective in exercising their leadership so that their churches will be directed by a clearly articulated purpose and grow numerically. Look at any pastor's library and you will find shelves full of books on leadership. Leadership seems to be the number one issue with which the majority of pastors wrestle. As one pastor commented, "I read anything I can get my hands on in leadership, it's that important."

Yet persons who are growing spiritually are in a quandary. They sense that they are "hitting a ceiling" in their churches. Somehow, their trust in their leaders to know what the congregation needs for maturing spiritually falls short. They are given options to see if involvement in different ways "fits" them, guided to seek another community of faith, or even challenged as to their spirituality because they are out of sync with "God's vision for the community."

Margaret Wheatley in *Leadership and the New Science* shares an insight into the Western leadership metaphor, which so many North American churches seem to have adopted.

"All this time, we have created trouble for ourselves in organizations by confusing control with order. This is no surprise, given that for most of its written history, leadership has been defined in terms of its control functions. . . .

If people are machines, seeking to control us makes sense. But if we live with the same forces intrinsic to all other life, then seeking to impose control through rigid structures is suicide. If we believe that there is no order to human activity except that imposed by the leader, that there is no self-regulation except for dictated policies, if we believe that responsible leaders must have their hands into everything, controlling every decision, person, and moment, then we cannot hope for anything except what we already have—a treadmill of frantic efforts that end up destroying our individual and collective vitality" (Wheatley, 24-25).

One of my students, who left the business world to pursue a calling into the pastorate commented:

. . . the one [issue] that I struggle with the most is the role of pastor as leader. The role of

leader that I have come to understand comes from the business world, where a leader is typically a forceful motivator of the vision of the business. In the business world a leader is usually the driving force behind the business success. But that is not the type of pastor/leader that I see in God's world. In God's world, I see a pastor who is more servant than master, more giver than taker (Fisher, September 29, 2003 *Critical Response Paper*).

Eugene Peterson, in *Working the Angles: The Shape of Pastoral Integrity*, describes the kind of church leaders we have become:

“The pastors of America have metamorphosed into a company of shopkeepers, and the shops they keep are churches. They are preoccupied with shopkeeper's concerns—how to keep the customer happy, how to lure customers away from the congregation down the street, how to package the goods so that the customers will lay out more money.

Some of them are very good shopkeepers. They attract a lot of customers, pull in great sums of money, develop splendid reputations. Yet it is still shopkeeping; religious shopkeeping, to be sure but shopkeeping all the same. The marketing strategies of the fast-food franchise occupy the waking minds of these entrepreneurs; while asleep they dream of the kind of success that will get the attention of journalists.” (Peterson, *Working the Angles*, 1)

Further Peterson expresses how our leading has led to the development of a consumerist Christianity:

“The American religious ship, well-outfitted as it is, full of passengers as it is, is the wrong place for the pastor to be. . . .

North American religion is basically a consumer religion. Americans see God as a product that will help them live well, or to live better. Having seen that, they do what consumers do, shop for the best deal. Pastors, hardly realizing what we are doing, start making deals, packing the God-product so that people will be attracted to it and then presenting it in ways that will beat out the competition. Religion has never been so taken up with public relations, image building, salesmanship, marketing techniques, and the competitive spirit. Pastors who grow up in this atmosphere have no awareness that there is anything out of the way in such practices” (Peterson, *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, 35-36).

The point in all this is that we have become so enamored with such a way of leading and have become so comfortable with this vocabulary of leadership in the church that we do not even question whether it is the right category or metaphor to describe what we are called to as God's people. Though there is a realization that secular or business models and business language for

leadership are not quite in line with a biblical understanding, we are reluctant to replace the term because we believe that in some way strong directive leadership is what we need to be about.

And so we continue, as Alan Cellamare, program coordinator for the Center for Development of Evangelical Leadership at Gordon-Conwell's Charlotte campus has expressed, "... creating ... a strong theology of leadership" (McDonald, *Teaching Pastors to Lead*, 82), yet do little to challenge the current paradigm that shapes our understanding of how we are to lead. We, therefore, find ourselves developing adjectives to redefine what we mean when we use the term *leadership* in order to soften the harsher aspects of leadership, to hopefully express a more biblical understanding – and so we talk about *spiritual leadership*, *servant leadership*, *pastoral leadership*, *ministerial leadership* and/or *shepherd leadership*.

A Proposal For A Different Perspective

I wonder if its time to jettison the *leadership* metaphor altogether, and seek a metaphor which is more in line with Jesus' calling upon those of us who are called to exercise the gift of *leading* within his community.

What if we stopped using the word *leadership* and came up with a different metaphor, rooted in Scripture, to describe what we are called to in ministry. Perhaps we might begin to leave behind the struggles we encounter when we try to "lord" a vision over our congregations, trying to persuade "them" to take ownership of it, for them to "buy" into the vision, or we might begin to leave behind our private wonderings if, as leaders, we are indeed "great enough?"

I believe, in light of such critiques and questions, it is time to deconstruct the concept of Christian leadership and begin to reframe how we envision what we, who are called and gifted to lead, are called to in the life of Christ's community.

Deconstructing Christian Leadership – Genesis

The beginning point for this deconstruction needs to arise out of Scripture and theology and it needs to result in a construct that is authentic to our identity in our postmodern world.

Scripture and Theology

First, we find a foundation for this deconstructing dialogue within Radical Orthodoxy. Much of our understanding of church leadership has been derived from sociological or secular constructs. However, John Millbank writes, "I wish to challenge the idea that there is a significant sociological reading of religion and Christianity, which theology must take into account" (cf. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals*, 99). Robert Webber in *The Younger Evangelicals* relates:

Millbank faults liberalism for the current irrelevancy of theology. "The story of faith," he claims, "is a complex theological statement that none of us fully understands. The idea that it's nonsense if it doesn't fit scientific principles, is in itself a secular form of knowledge." ... These [secular] assumptions ultimately moved God out of the equation. But now in the postmodern world Millbank wants us to return to the unknown, invisible

reality that stands behind all things, through which all things are understood. Therefore, philosophy finds its origin within theology (Webber, 99).

Webber continues in stating that now the “starting point for truth . . . [is to be found in] an unapologetic nonfoundational Christianity” (Webber, 99). Webber cites William Placher, who has stated in *Unapologetic Christianity*:

Frei proposes a radical solution. Suppose we do not start with the modern world. Suppose we start with the biblical world, and let those narratives decide what’s real, so that our lives have meaning to the extent that we fit them into that framework. That is, after all, the way a great many Christians—Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Calvin—read the Bible for a long time. If we do that, then the truth of the biblical narratives does not depend on connecting them to some other real world. They describe the real world (Webber, 99-100).

Therefore, in terms of coming to an understanding of biblical “leadership,” we must also not primarily rely on sociological constructs or business constructs to set the paradigm for leadership, but rather, we need to draw upon the biblical narratives, draw upon biblical exegesis and theology to describe an understanding of what we are called to be and do under Christ’s reign.

Authentic Identity

Tullian Tchividjian, grandson of Ruth and Billy Graham and minister to young adults and families at Cedar Springs Presbyterian Church in Knoxville, TN expresses the need for authenticity in the way the church lives out its presence in society. In a paper, cited by Webber in *The Younger Evangelicals*, entitled, *A Cry for Difference from the Culturally Weary*, he relates the following:

I have talked to many people who are becoming increasingly wary of the latest “techno-trend” and complain of how impersonal and disenchanting modern life has become. The influx of secularization has left many yearning for an otherworldliness *and* a historical connection that modernity cannot provide. They seem desperate to recover a world that once was, a world that allows for mystery, miracle, and wonder, a world with “windows to other worlds.” Their cry for something completely unique to this world, something otherworldly, something only the church can truly offer.

“The world,” says Richard John Neuhaus, “desperately needs the Church to *be* the Church,” not to *do* church differently. The difference that people are longing for, in other words, is a difference in *being*, not *doing*. So while many church “strategists” are locating reformation and revival in structural renovation, we must remember that the deepest needs of the Church today are *spiritual*, not *structural*. And yet, “church-growth” advocates are constantly telling us that the Church’s cultural relevance depends *ultimately* on its ability to keep up with the changing structures, on its ability to *do* church differently (Webber, 128-129).

A similar argument can be made for how we as church leaders appropriate cultural models of leadership to guide our practice. We are far too willing to draw from modern models, models, which exist outside of our own identity in order to lead the church. However, our relevance is not to be found within the culture, but within the identity in which Christ has formed us. Whatever “leading” we are to be engaged in has to be authentic to our identity as the church of Jesus Christ, much more so than being relevant to the culture.

A New Terminology – Authentic to Our Identity as Church

Perhaps it is time for a different term to guide our understanding of ministry and the practice of leading. Rather, than as one mentor of younger pastors noted, “The greatest need is for leadership,” we might begin to realize that the greatest need in ministry is for a metaphor, which is embedded within our identity as the community of Christ, a metaphor which better enables obedience to our callings.

I propose the metaphor of *servantship*.

Actually, this is not a new metaphor. It was a metaphor that was proposed in the late 70's, but it got little notice in the 80's and 90's as the baby boom generation came of age in the business and church world – in which business models influenced the metaphors of leadership for church ministry (this is turn also affected ecclesiology – another theme for another time to focus upon). Sendjaya and Sarros (2002) express that “although the notion of servant leadership has been recognized in the literature since Burns’ (1978) and Greenleaf’s (1977) publications, the movement has gained momentum only recently” (Senjaya and Sarros, 1).

Yet, here’s why I propose the metaphor of *servantship*, rather than even linking it with “leadership” as in the term *servant leadership*!

What raises the question for me, whether the vocabulary of “leadership” is appropriate language for what is to go on in church ministry, is that the “leadership” vocabulary in Scripture seems to rarely have a “take charge” sense. The vocabulary of leadership as “control” is rarely used in the New Testament for ministry. Such understanding of leadership is also not used in relation to the ministry of Jesus. Since our ministry is to be a continuation of the ministry of Christ, it seems imperative for us to live within a metaphor, which would better exemplify what our ministry is to entail, as we seek to emulate Christ Jesus.

The numerous terms in the New Testament which are translated as *lead*, *leading*, or *leader* have a sense of leading as guiding, but not in a grandiose manner of setting the direction for ministry—which almost all definitions of leadership propose. Rather, they are focused more on aspects of how we are to be with others – in bringing someone to another, of not leading one into temptation, of bringing or calling together a group of people, or helping or guiding someone. It seems that the only connotations that have to do with leading or guiding in a way that sets direction for ministry has to do with God – as in God leading his people out of Egypt, or with Jesus – who as the shepherd leads people to springs of living water, or the Holy Spirit – as in guiding persons into the truth or moving them to action. Yet, even here, God’s leading involves

God coming alongside of us in our being led. Therefore, leadership, as setting the agenda or direction for ministry, is a metaphor, at best, for describing God's activity in our midst, rather than being descriptive of our own activity.

Kenneth O. Gangel further relates the unique position of Christ's leadership in relation to our roles of leading. He states, "Many of the metaphors in Scripture emphasize the centrality of Christ's leadership role in the church. He is the Head, and we are the body He is the High Priest and we are a kingdom of priests He is the Shepherd and we are the sheep He is the Master and we are the servants" (Gangel, *Feeding and Leading*, 31). Clearly, Jesus is Lord and Leader, but the question remains how we are to exercise our roles of *leading* in relation to him.

Yet, even as we ask this question, we must realize that Christ's ministry is not one in which he sets the direction. Rather, his ministry was, and continues to be, one of obedience to his Father's leading. Christ as Lord and Leader was one who lived out his calling as servant.

Notice this particularly in John's Gospel in which Jesus continually declared, "For I did not speak of my own accord, but the Father who sent me commanded me what to say and how to say it" (John 12:49 NIV, cf. John 7:16; 8:42; 14:10-11, 24; 15:10). As Ray Anderson points out, "All ministry is God's ministry. Jesus did not come to introduce his own ministry. His ministry was to do the will of the Father and to live by every Word that precedes out of the mouth of God" (Anderson, 1979, 7).

Therefore, as Christ's followers, our metaphor for ministry is not to be expressed through "leadership," but in a similar manner as Jesus – *servantship*. Jesus expresses the basis of our metaphor in John 13:14-15. "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." Clearly, Jesus left us with a metaphor for ministry, which is one of being servant.

Though we acknowledge this call to servantship, we want to reinterpret Jesus words here as guiding us to be servant leaders. Morrison relates that when his study asked pastors "what the term 'servant leader' meant to them, most indicated that it includes empowerment, effort, motivation, courage, strength, and vision" (Morrison, 89). We just cannot get away from the "take charge" directive role of leadership, no matter what adjective we use to redefine it. It is my contention that our holding onto the vocabulary of leadership comes from the same attitude which raises the question, "Who is the greatest?" (cf. Mark 9:33ff and Matthew 20: 20ff). We have succumbed to a way of thinking that suggests we need to express some kind of authority or some kind of control in order for the church to grow and to have an influence upon the culture around us. But Jesus shifts our understanding, our paradigm of leadership when he makes clear that we are not to lord it over others (cf. Matthew 20:25), rather we are to be simply *servants*.

Jesus makes clear that our paradigm is not to be one of leadership, but of servanthood. Therefore, when we as pastors reflect on our leadership roles, we ought to think not of *servant leadership*, but of **servantship**.

What Does Servantship Look Like?

If then, we are not to aspire to leadership or being leaders, how does the term *servantship* guide our ministry in which we are called to lead?

Actually the terms for *leading* in the New Testament, as alluded to above, describe this servantship as a “withness,” an “amongness,” or an “alongsideness.” They are words, which do not describe persons who are directing the ministry, but rather persons who are with and among the people they are serving. This ministry of serving is done amongst and alongside the community of people in which God has placed us for the purpose of bringing them into repentance, to bring them together, to bring them along, to carry them, to guide them and to walk with them, as we seek to demonstrate together being the community of Christ in the world. This understanding of pastoral servantship, which fell out of favor in the 80's because it seemed too passive in light of a more dynamic, aggressive understanding of leadership, is actually one that more effectively leads a people towards maturity in communion with God, to be transformed by the work of the Spirit. It is far more effective in shaping the lives of people in becoming like Christ, than it is for leading people to perform certain ministry tasks and programs.

In the New Testament, the terms that are directly translated as “leader,” or “to lead,” are *hodegos* and *hodegeo*. The root of these terms is *hodos* meaning “the way” – denoting “a walk, a journey” (G. Ebel, “Walk,” *NIDNTT*, 3:935). There is a sense that the one who leads is on a walk, a journey, on the way and guides others in the way. So “leading” entails, “to lead on a way, to show the way, to guide, instruct” (W. Michaelis, “οδηγός, οδηγέω,” *TDNT*, V:97). Interestingly, in the LXX – the Greek translation of the OT – uses *hodegeo* “universally . . . with reference to God” and that God is “the One who makes a way, where it appears impossible for men (*sic*)” (Ebel, *NIDNTT*, 3:937). In its usage in the NT (used only 5 times) its references are largely focused on the Spirit and Jesus as the Lamb. I still need to do much more exploration of the leadership terminology within Scripture, but it seems suggestive of a different understanding of “leading.”²

In changing to a metaphor of “a journey in light of servantship,” such a change in metaphor has promise for transforming the way we engage in the ministry of leading in the church.

For example in the area of visioning.

Present Need to Cast the Vision

Whereas in the present leadership metaphor, pastoral leaders feel it is their responsibility to cast the vision and articulate it in such a way that members of a congregation will take ownership of

² In recent years I have been exploring the idea of *paraclesis*, as a way we are called to come alongside those we are called to lead. In John 14, Jesus expressed that he would not leave us as orphans, but would send another Comforter to be with us. The term used for the Spirit is *paraclete* – “one who comes alongside.” Pastoral theologians Jacob Fieret (*Dynamics in Pastoring*) and Ray Anderson (*The Shape of Practical Theology*) both make note of the importance of *paraclesis* in caring for and leading the people of God. *Paraclesis*, seems to have promise for developing a deeper understanding of the character of not only the way Jesus led, the Spirit leads, but how we as one called to exercise leading in the church, are called to lead as well.

it in order for the church to grow. Listen to Rick Warren on vision in one of his recent issues of *Ministry Toolbox*—“Nothing starts happening until somebody starts dreaming. . . The first task of leadership is to set the vision for the organization. If you don’t set the vision, you’re not the leader. Whoever is establishing the vision and goals in your church is the leader of that particular church” (Warren, *Ministry Toolbox* 1/14/2004, www.pastors.com/RWMT/.)

In the Servantship Metaphor the Vision is Already Cast

In contrast, within a servantship metaphor, the pastor recognizes that the vision has already been cast by Jesus Christ, the Lord of the church, who has received it from the Father. Jesus is building his community and sets its agenda for ministry in the world. The serving pastor then is set free from the responsibility of creating, casting and setting a vision, or to be the mediator in articulating a vision that the people are too dull to hear. Rather, the serving pastor lives among the people in order to help them attend to God, so that they see and hear Jesus Christ in the midst of their daily living, to encourage their living in the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. In so serving, the people begin to hear what God is saying to them, how God is leading them. Then through the ministry of the pastor as servant, the people not only hear Christ’s vision within their lives, but they are encouraged to begin to live it out in obedience to Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit. The pastoral role involves discerning the personality of the congregation that the Spirit of God is forming, of hearing the unity of God’s voice amongst the diversity of God’s expression through each life. In guiding people into obedience to Christ Jesus, the pastor does not need to take on a controlling “take charge” leadership responsibility, but rather, guides the community of faith to follow after the leadership and Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Example of Martin Luther King Jr.

I see this kind of visioning exemplified through Martin Luther King Jr. When he stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in August 1963, he did not cast a vision that was alien to his listeners’ lives. No, his was an articulation that grew out of his involvement with those with whom he walked – those striving for civil rights. His vision expressed what was the voice of the people yearning for civil liberties; an equality among all humanity. And he was able to discern and express this common voice because he walked with the people, was among the people, was alongside the people. What he expressed in his “I Have A Dream” speech resonated with the heartfelt realities in the lives of those listening. This was not his own vision, but rather an articulation of a vision he saw already being expressed in the lives of millions of oppressed African Americans. He gave a clear voice to the vision that was already existent within the hearts and minds of those experiencing racism within the American context. It was not a vision the people had to be sold on or buy into, it was a vision to which they could shout “Amen,” and sing, “We Shall Overcome!”

Theological Basis For This Understanding of Vision – Human Vocation in Covenant with God

Yet, this is not just a pragmatic concern, the basis for this understanding has a theological basis. James W. Fowler in *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*, relates that an essential understanding of being human is that we were created to be in covenant partnership with God (Fowler, 89). As

human beings in relationship with God we are in “partnership in the Creative, the Governing, and the Liberative-Redemptive work of God” (Fowler, 89). Fowler citing Walter Brueggeman, from his article, “Covenanting as Human Vocation” (1979) suggests that humans are shaped for covenantal living and as a result this ““transposes all identity questions into vocational questions’ [in which] we move from the question Who am I? to the question *Whose* am I?” (Fowler, 93). Ultimately being human, being in covenant with God means that our vocation as human beings “is finding ‘a purpose for being in the world that is related to the purposes of God.’” (Fowler, 93). Likewise, Karl Barth expresses, our human vocation involves “confronting and corresponding to the divine calling” (Fowler, 94). Fowler, therefore, characterizes vocation as: “the response a person makes with his or her total self to the address of God and to the calling to partnership” (Fowler, 95). He continues stating: “The shaping of vocation as total response of the self to the address of God involves the orchestration of our leisure, our relationships, our work, our private life, our public life, and of the resources we steward, so as to put it all at the disposal of God’s purposes in the services of God and the neighbor” (Fowler, 95).

Clearly, in this understanding God is the initiator and primary partner in this covenant relationship and this relationship defines our vocation as human beings. The vision of this vocation is to be discerned in each of our lives as we grow in our covenant relationship with God. The discerning of this vision comes not from some “slick” presentation of a vision that we need to adopt into our lives, but requires our developing an awareness for the presence of the Spirit in our lives, developing ears to hear what God is speaking in us and through the community with whom we are in relationship, developing eyes to see the activity of God all around us. This vision is to be discerned from within, rather imposed upon us from the outside.

Vision and vocation are integral to our identity as human beings, rather than a course of action imposed upon us by a leader who seeks to implement a strategic plan.

The question then arises, how are pastoral servants to guide those they shepherd and serve so that we as persons in covenant relationship with God are able to discern the vocational vision that God has sowed in our lives and our community.

The Pastoral *Servantship* Role in Relation to Christ’s Vision

What then is the pastoral role in relation to such visioning in the paradigm of servantship? Eugene Peterson’s provides exemplars for servantship by reframing the pastoral role. In his pastoral series: *Five Smooth Stones*, *Working the Angles*, *The Contemplative Pastor*, and *Under the Unpredictable Plant*, Peterson reveals the tenor of servantship that lives within this understanding of visioning. In his words:

The biblical fact is that there are no successful churches. There are, instead, communities of sinners, gathered before God week after week in towns and villages all over the world. The Holy Spirit gathers them and does his work in them. In these communities of sinners, one of the sinners is called pastor and given a designated responsibility in the

community. The pastor's responsibility is to keep the community attentive to God. (Peterson, *Angles*, 2)

What are the actual means by which I carry out this pastoral vocation, this ordained ministry, this professional commitment to God's word and God's grace in my life and the lives of people to whom I preach and give the sacraments among whom I command a life for others in the name of Jesus Christ? What connects these great realities of God and the great realities of salvation to the geography of this parish and in the chronology of this week? The answer among the masters whom I consult doesn't change: a trained attentiveness to God in prayer, in Scripture reading, in spiritual direction. This has not been tried and discarded because it didn't work, but tried and found difficult (and more than a little bit tedious) and so shelved in favor of something or other that could be fit into a busy pastor's schedule. (Peterson, *Angles*, 11)

The pastor's question is, 'Who are these particular people, and how can I be with them in such a way that they can become what God is making them?' My job is simply to be there, teaching, preaching Scripture as well as I can, and being honest with them, not doing anything to interfere with what the Spirit is shaping in them. Could God be doing something that I never thought of? Am I willing to be quiet for a day, a week, a year? . . . Am I willing to spend fifty years reclaiming this land? With these people? (Peterson, *Contemplative Pastor*, 11-12)

In this way, through appropriating a servanthip metaphor for visioning and guiding people to be attentive and responsive to what God is creating in their lives and doing in their midst, we as servants are more fully released to engage in the mission of God that God is directing towards God's eschatological telos.

Conclusion

Though pastors have a role that involves standing before congregations, the leader of the congregation is the Lord Jesus Christ. It may be best to understand our roles as being on a journey with the congregations we serve. Though we sense pastoral ministry involves leading, we need to avoid the temptation to identify ourselves in terms of the leadership metaphor in order to begin to discern what it means to fulfill our pastoral callings through servanthip.

There are those who will argue that we still have need for strong leadership, and I would agree that we need strength in our abilities to listen, to discern, to guide, to support what God is doing within the church and world, rather than taking on a "controlling or manipulative" agenda. Servanthip understands that the Spirit of God does the shaping, directing, leading, rather than the pastor. The pastor guides the process of discipleship, rather than laying down the terms of discipleship. This kind of servanthip involves trust and risk – in relation to both God and people.

In opening ourselves up to explore this different metaphor, I believe we will discover that the metaphor of servanthship will take us far beyond the present limiting concepts of what we have embraced in pursuing the concepts of leadership³.

³ Recent writings by business educators, such as Barb Kellerman of Harvard and C. Otto Scharmer at MIT have expressed the shortcomings of present leadership models. The billion dollar industry of leadership training has not garnered effective leadership in business, government, education, nor the military. Kellerman in her book, *The End of Leadership* shares new directions that our engaging leadership needs to take, and Scharmer in his book, *Theory U*, calls for a greater focus on the inner qualities of those who seek to lead.

Also other areas to explore, in embracing a servanthship perspective involves how missional understandings shape the way we lead. How did Jesus' understanding of his mission shape his way of leading? How does current missional theological engagement further shape our exploration of servanthship? My web site www.imissional.org is host to a blog entitled *Missional Matters*, which seeks to address this.

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