
AMBIVALENCE ABOUT LEADERSHIP: LEADERSHIP AND MINISTRY IN THE CHURCH OF SCOTLAND

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Abstract

What kind of leadership does the Church of Scotland require from its parish ministers if it is to be faithful to its missional vocation? The failure to discuss this vital question has created an ambivalence among ministers about leadership and led to a hesitancy among many ministers to call themselves leaders. This paper sets out to stimulate a debate. It argues that the Church of Scotland needs five characteristics in its leadership. Its leaders must be adaptive, servant-like, collaborative, facilitative, and empowering. This paper also explains how these characteristics counter the negative patterns of the super-hero, tyrant, autocrat, moderator, and marshmallow.

Introduction: Ambivalence About Leadership

“Beyond being a preacher and a pastor, the minister is also called to be a leader.”¹ For Eric Jacobsen, an American Presbyterian senior pastor, this statement is self-evident, requiring neither explanation nor evidence. Leadership is a fundamental part of the ministerial vocation. In the Church of Scotland, another Presbyterian church in which I have been a parish minister since 1991, this is not self-evident. One day I heard this expressed explicitly by a senior lay leader: “We are not comfortable with leadership language in the Church²; it is a toxic phrase.” The other members of the

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¹ E.O. Jacobsen, “Forward” in *The Three Tasks of Leadership*, ed. E.O. Jacobsen (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans 2009), x.

² I use Church (capitalized) to refer to the Church of Scotland.

group nodded in agreement before another person asked me, since I was the only minister present, “Why is it that ministers are unwilling to be leaders?”

An ambivalence surrounding ministers and leadership had been apparent for some time. Between 2011 and 2015, I convened the Church’s Ministries Council, the body that is responsible for formulating and implementing policy in relation to ordained ministries within the Church. During this time, I repeatedly argued that Church ministers needed to exercise leadership. The combination of the context the church found itself in and the pivotal position that ministers play within the structure of the Church meant it was imperative that ministers exercise leadership.

Reactions to my proposals were mixed. While some clearly agreed, others seemed less convinced. The reasons were unclear. Did it stem from a disagreement about vocation? Was one minister articulating what the majority believed when she said “My calling as I understood it, was to be a preacher (minister of Word and Sacrament) and pastor”?³ Did reluctance stem from a conviction that the Church of Scotland is committed to a model of shared rather than individual leadership?⁴ Was hesitation a consequence of ministers feeling ill prepared for a leadership role? Was one minister speaking for many with the statement, “I feel what we trained for in ministry has changed so much that I don’t feel equipped to fully lead my people at the moment”?⁵

My Doctor of Ministry final project provided an opportunity to get to the root of this ambivalence about leadership. My goal was to discover if ministers were

³ Jean B. Montgomerie, “A View from the Parish,” *Theology in Scotland* 9(2) (2002): 49.

⁴ For example, “Leadership within the Church will normally be corporate.” Panel on Doctrine, *Report to the General Assembly* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Church of Scotland, 1989), 192

⁵ Neil J. Dougall, *Parish Ministry and Leadership: How Prepared Are Church of Scotland Parish Ministers for the Leadership Role that the General Assembly Expects Them to Play?* unpublished D.Min. Final Project (Pittsburgh, Pa.: Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, 2018), 148.

reluctant to lead. If they were, why was that? If they weren't, why did church members perceive that they were? To this end, I conducted a survey of all Church of Scotland ministers. The data from this quantitative research offers clues about what lies at the root of this ambivalence.

Survey Results

All Church of Scotland ministers were invited to complete an online survey. Nineteen percent did, a response rate that makes the results statistically reliable.⁶ The survey results were as clear as they were unexpected. Three headlines emerged.⁷

First, Church of Scotland ministers see themselves as leaders, are exercising leadership, and feel reasonably equipped for this role. Although the public conversation about ministry and leadership might suggest they are ambivalent about offering leadership, the reality is quite different. The vast majority of ministers understand themselves to be leaders and are offering leadership. Leadership is an essential aspect of being a minister in the Church today.

Second, leadership within the church, on occasions, is problematic. Sixty percent of ministers indicated that they believe the Church of Scotland has a problem with individuals acting as leaders.⁸ Because ministers both lead and experience problematic leadership, it is hardly surprising that a degree of ambivalence exists.

Third, some characteristics of the leadership that ministers aspire to offer can be discerned. Five characteristics in particular stand out; these are leadership that is adaptive, servant-like, collaborative, facilitative, and empowering.

⁶ Louis M. Rea and Richard A. Parker, *Designing and Conducting Survey Research*, 3rd ed. (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 2005), 145–150.

⁷ For more details, see Neil J. Dougall, *Prepared for Leadership* (2018). <http://ascend.churchofscotland.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Prepared-for-Leadership.pdf>, accessed Dec. 4, 2018.

⁸ Dougall, *Parish Ministry and Leadership*, 86.

Taken together the data suggest that ambivalence about leadership within the Church of Scotland stems less from reluctance among ministers to lead and more from confusion about the kind of leadership that is appropriate and required. Comments from participants bear this out. One participant said, “Leadership is a word like *mission* and *vision*—much overused with no meaning other than what is attached to it by whomever is using it at the particular time.”⁹ Another said, “Parish Minister is by definition a leadership role—although *leadership* can mean different things.”¹⁰ A third summarized the issue very clearly: “We need a clear paradigm of Christian leadership.”¹¹

Emerging from this, therefore, is a fundamental question and the outline of an answer. The question is, What kind of leadership does the Church of Scotland require? The outline answer emerging from my survey is that this leadership should be adaptive, servant-like, collaborative, facilitative, and empowering. In what follows, I will add detail to this outline and explain why this is the kind of leadership, which, I believe, the Church requires at this time.

Criteria

Any assessment of the kind of leadership that the Church requires depends on the criteria chosen for assessment. Defining these criteria could constitute another essay. Acknowledging the subjectivity in doing so, I have selected the following as the three most important criteria: Mission, Faithfulness to Scripture and Tradition, and Contextual Appropriateness. The following is brief outline of my reasons for choosing them.

Mission

I believe that, in the words of David Bosch, “the church is missionary by its very nature.”¹² On Easter day, the resurrected Christ instructed his disciples, “As the Father

⁹ Dougall, *Parish Ministry and Leadership*, 144.

¹⁰ Dougall, *Parish Ministry and Leadership*, 153.

¹¹ Dougall, *Parish Ministry and Leadership*, 154.

¹² David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y., Orbis, 1991), 391.

has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21).¹³ Mission is not simply one of the activities of the church. The essential calling of the church is to participate in the *missio Dei*, the mission of God to the world. Therefore, the leadership that the church, at all times and in all places, requires is missional leadership. It is leadership that will encourage and enable the church to be faithful to its missional calling. It is leadership that will assist the church, through word and action, to declare and demonstrate the good news that “God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ” (2 Cor. 5:19).

Faithfulness to Scripture and Tradition

The Church of Scotland affirms, “the Word of God, which is contained in the scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, as its supreme rule of faith and life,” and declares that “its government is Presbyterian.”¹⁴

Faithfulness to Scripture does not mean treating the New Testament as a blueprint for the church in all ages. Rather it involves establishing patterns of leadership that can be said to be “agreeable to the Word of God”;¹⁵ that is, patterns that are consistent with and in harmony with patterns and principles evident in Scripture. Faithfulness to tradition involves respecting the history of my denomination. It is to recognize that being Presbyterian brings a particular understanding of leadership. In particular, as noted by John Leith, it is one in which there is a parity between ministers, lay people are given a significant role in church government, and authority is vested in conciliar bodies rather than in individuals.¹⁶ This pattern of church government, like all others, has strengths and weaknesses

¹³ Scripture quotations: NIV 2011.

¹⁴ D.F.M. MacDonald, *Practice and Procedure in the Church of Scotland*, 6th ed. (Edinburgh, Scotland: Church of Scotland, 1976), 391.

¹⁵ The phrase is taken from the Church of Scotland ordination vows, which asks ordinands, “Do you acknowledge the Presbyterian Government of this church to be agreeable to the Word of God”; D.F.M. MacDonald, 394.

¹⁶ John H. Leith, *Introduction to the Reformed Tradition* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Saint Andrew Press, 1977), 147–156.

and confers opportunities and challenges. Rather than being fixed, it is constantly evolving.

Contextual Appropriateness

The third criterion I propose is that of contextual appropriateness. I am persuaded by the arguments of Stephen Bevans, who has written extensively on contextual theology, that the classicist understanding of culture, which asserts that there is one universal and permanent culture that needs to be expressed in every age and every time, is false. The fact that we are unable to discern a universal pattern of church leadership in Scripture is not simply because insufficient detail is given; it is because no universal pattern exists. Bevans says, “There is no such thing as ‘theology’, there is only *contextual* theology.”¹⁷ Patterns of effective church leadership, therefore, are ones that are appropriate; that is, those which fit the current context that the local church finds itself in.

Contextualization explicates the limits and benefits of this paper: a commitment to context narrows the focus toward greater specificity. At the same time, the cultural tides affecting the Church of Scotland are similar to those faced by other denominations across the western world. Although the issues raised will inevitably differ among denominations, commonalities will appear. My hope and prayer is that by being specific about the context of the Church of Scotland, this discussion on leadership will stimulate reflection on church leadership for others within their contexts.

Context

Three features capture the essence of the context in which the Church of Scotland finds itself.

¹⁷ Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll: N.Y.: Orbis, 2002), 3.

Decline

The Church of Scotland is in decline. That is, it is a smaller institution within Scottish society. Therefore, it is more peripheral to the lives of the majority of the Scottish population and its impact on that society has declined, as well. Various statistics bear this out, painting a remarkably uniform picture of decline. By way of example, Table 1 shows the results of worship attendance censuses carried out in 1984, 1994, 2002, and 2016. Census statistics show that in 1984, seventeen percent of the Scottish population attended a Christian church service. Thirty-two years later, that had fallen to seven percent. Within the Church of Scotland, the decline in worship attendance between 2002 and 2016 was a remarkable forty percent.

Table 1: Church of Scotland Attendance at Worship¹⁸

Year	% of total population	Church of Scotland Attendance
1984	16.9	361, 340
1994	13.6	292,170
2002	11.2	227,500
2016	7.2	136,910

The Ebbing of Christendom

The Church of Scotland is the product of and an expression of Christendom. It describes itself as “a national Church representative of the Christian Faith of the Scottish people.”¹⁹ While neither a state church nor an established church, it secured an official place within the structures of

¹⁸ Brierley Consultancy, "Scottish Church Census," *Brierley Consultancy.com*, Feb. 2017. <https://www.dropbox.com/s/4tb7ehkxtt6yjwv/The%20Fourth%20Scottish%20Church%20Census%202016.pdf?dl=0> (accessed Aug. 8, 2018).

¹⁹ D.F.M. MacDonald, 391.

Scottish society. It was a place of influence and privilege. During Christendom, the Church was part of the fabric of life in Scotland. Simply by being there, to a considerable extent, it achieved its vocation of ensuring that people responded to God's call to worship.

Christendom has been ebbing for at least a generation. Following World War II, the Church experienced a decade of renewed life and vitality. Its membership peaked in 1956 when it had 1,319,574 adult members,²⁰ which equated to one in four people living in Scotland. Every year since then, the number of members has decreased. In 2017, membership stood at 336,831, which equated to one in sixteen people living in Scotland.²¹

These numbers illustrate the loss of influence the Church has experienced on individuals and on society as a whole. Stuart Murray characterizes this as a set of transitions from societal privilege to missional imperative, which include "from center to margins," "from majority to minority," "from privilege to plurality," and "from control to witness."²²

The Change of Age

During the last generation, western societies have experienced profound, constant, and discontinuous change, which appears to be of a different order from the change that all generations experience. Phyllis Tickle has noticed a pattern in which these kinds of events occur about every five hundred years, with the last one being prompted by Gutenberg's printing press, which undergirded the Protestant reformation.²³ John Naughton, whose research focuses on the cultural transformations resulting from technological innovations, captures the essence of the latest

²⁰ Committee on General Administration, *Report to the General Assembly* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Church of Scotland, 1959), 30.

²¹ Council of Assembly, *Supplementary Report to the General Assembly* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Church of Scotland, 2018), 54.

²² Stuart Murray, *Post-Christendom* (Carlisle UK: Paternoster, 2004), 20.

²³ Phyllis Tickle, *The Great Emergence* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 2008), 19–21.

cultural earthquake in the title of his book, *From Gutenberg to Zuckerberg*, in which he argues that it is the invention of the Internet that lies behind the emerging information age.²⁴ The Internet has disrupted entire industries and transformed human relations. People are now gaining information, socialising, shopping, and accessing entertainment in new ways, most of which were not possible before. It has broken the monopoly on broadcasting, which powerful institutions once held. Anyone with access to the Internet can now become a global publisher. The changes brought about by the Internet are profound and far-reaching and, Naughton argues, far from over because the way that the Internet has been created and configured makes it a “powerful enabler of disruptive innovation.”²⁵ This is what led Phil Hanlon to suggest at a conference organised by the Ministries Council that the transition we are living through should be characterised as a “change of age”, a phrase which the Council used some months later in its report to the General Assembly.

We are not simply living through an ‘age of change’ as all generations do to some extent. More unusually we are living in a ‘**change of age**’. By that is meant that the *modern* age, which began with reformation and the enlightenment and itself superseded the medieval period of European history, is itself coming to an end.²⁶

The change of age from modern to postmodern is leaving people bewildered and confused. Many of the institutions and organisations they assumed would always be there have disappeared, while the influence of other stalwart institutions has waned. It is a frightening and unsettling time for many.

The three features described—numerical decline, the ebbing of Christendom, and the change of age—are related,

²⁴ John Naughton, *From Gutenberg to Zuckerberg* (London, England: Quercus, 2012), 43–109.

²⁵ Naughton, 45.

²⁶ Ministries Council, (*Report to the General Assembly*, (Edinburgh, UK, Church of Scotland, 2012), 4/11 (bold and italics in original).

and their collective effect clear. First, the Church now has fewer resources of people and money. Second, the Church has experienced a profound sense of loss and confusion. Third, the decline of Christendom has created the need and the opportunity for the Church to develop new patterns of worship and gathering, which are appropriate for the changed age it finds itself in. Fourth, it is clear that the Church needs to rediscover its missional identity.

I now consider what patterns of ministerial leadership might enable the Church of Scotland to be faithful to its missional vocation in the context in which it finds itself.

The Kind of Leadership the Church of Scotland Requires

Evolutionary psychologists have shown that leadership is as old as the human race. Mark van Vugt, for example, explains, “Leadership is a response to the need for collective action. How do members of a group decide what to do and how and when to do it?”²⁷ In practice, per Ledbetter et al., leadership turns out to be “easy to recognize, yet difficult to define or prescribe” while its impact is significant: “with good leadership we flourish; without it, we flounder; with the wrong kind, we suffer.”²⁸

In retrospect, when I convened the Ministries Council of the Church and argued that parish ministers should offer leadership, I paid insufficient attention to the question of the *kind* of leadership needed. It was a position of significant influence. With the benefit of hindsight, it might have been more profitable to stimulate debate about the sort of leadership the Church required.

Unfortunately, good leadership often goes unnoticed while bad leadership is obvious. Wise stewardship of leadership goes unreported while abuses are newsworthy. Inevitably, the whole idea of leadership becomes tarnished. Ministers are hesitant to call themselves leaders because they do not want to be seen as power hungry. Congregations are

²⁷ Mark van Vugt, “The Origins of Leadership,” *New Scientist*, 198(2660) (June 14, 2008): 42.

²⁸ Bernice M. Ledbetter, Robert J. Banks, David C. Greenhalgh, *Reviewing Leadership*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2016), 1.

reluctant to give individuals too much leadership responsibility for fear it will be abused. The Church, therefore, should be more explicit, explaining that both good and bad leadership are possible—leadership that gives and leadership that destroys life. It should describe good leadership and take steps to encourage this, while also naming and rooting out bad leadership.

In order to begin that process, building on the results of my survey, I propose that the Church needs leadership that is adaptive, servant-like, collaborative, facilitative, and empowering. In the section that follows, I describe each characteristic, discussing how each offers an alternative to five flawed patterns of leadership. This section further explains why this kind of leadership is agreeable to the word of God and Presbyterian tradition, is contextually appropriate, and can help the church be faithful to its missional vocation. Describing what each of these might mean in practice is critically important but lies beyond the scope of this paper.

Table 2 summarizes the characteristics.

Table 2: Characteristics of Leadership

Characteristic	Catchphrase	Why needed?	The flawed pattern it counters	Catchphrase of the flawed pattern
Adaptive	I'll help you find the answer	Change of Age	Superhero	I'll rescue you
Servant-like	You before me	Abuse of power	Tyrant	What's in it for me?
Collaborative	Let's do this together	Post-modern suspicion	Autocrat	Do what I say
Facilitate	How can we make the system work for us?	Going round in circles	Moderator	My job is to remain neutral
Empowering	I want to equip you	Well-functioning body	Marshmallow	Whatever the last person said

(The benefit of the table is that it provides a summary that can be quickly assimilated. The limitation is that it suggests each idea is separate from the others, when in fact there is considerable overlap. For example, a valid argument could

be made that collaboration, facilitation, and empowering are essential features of servant-like and adaptive leadership. Therefore, many of the comments made for one characteristic are also applicable to some of the other ones.)

Adaptive

“From the moment humans are born they turn to those in authority to provide answers, comfort, sustenance, and safety,”²⁹ which is what gives birth to the idea of the leader as superhero according to Heifetz et al. The more difficult and challenging life is, the greater the clamour for a savior. People are attracted to charismatic leaders who, in superhero-like fashion, promise to save them. Justin Lewis-Anthony argues that the superhero is the fundamental pattern for leadership in western society.³⁰ Although I believe he overstates the influence of the superhero template, he helps explain why many ministers believe they are expected to act like superheroes.

Superhero-type leadership has always had its downsides, which include ministerial burnout, the aftermath of a minister leaving, and its tendency to disempower church members. Nonetheless, it is a pattern that also often works well. The benefits it brings to leaders and followers explain why it persists.

In a change of age, however, rather than simply having downsides, superhero leadership will not work. Superhero leadership depends on competence. The leader masters a complex system, diagnoses problems, and devises ways to address them. Such leadership assumes that answers exist.

In a change of age, there are no answers. The solutions do not yet exist because organizations and people are facing situations that have never occurred before. Adaptation is the only way to deal with this, hence the term *adaptive leadership*.

Peter Northouse, in his leadership textbook, explains, “Adaptive leadership focuses on the *adaptations* required of

²⁹ Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* (Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business Review Press, 2009), 73.

³⁰ Justin Lewis-Anthony, *You Are the Messiah and I Should Know* (London, England: Bloomsbury, 2013).

people in response to changing environments. Simply stated, adaptive leaders prepare and encourage people to deal with change.”³¹ What makes adaptive leadership distinctive is that, instead of doing things for people, it focuses on empowering people to do the work themselves. As an example of traditional leadership, John Kotter, formerly of Harvard Business School, offers what would once have been understood as a normal, that is a nonadaptive, understanding of leadership when he says, “leadership defines what the future should look like, aligns people with that vision, and inspires them to make it happen despite the obstacles.”³² In this approach, the leader is the one who can see into the future, who sets the course, and who ensures that people buy into their ideas.

The *adaptive* leader refuses to do this. Under the concept of adaptive leadership, both the problem and the solution belong to the people. The leader’s role is to help people take ownership of the problem and to assist them in finding the solution to it. Ron Heifetz, who has written extensively on adaptive leadership, argues that, in a time of tumultuous change, adaptive leadership is the only way forward. Society as a whole, and groups within it, are facing not simply technical challenges, but adaptive ones.³³ Technical challenges are ones for which the solutions already exist, which means the leadership task is to retrieve and then apply the solution. Adaptive challenges arise when people encounter a scenario that no one has encountered before and for which there is, as yet, no solution. “For these the world needs to build new ways of being and responding beyond the current repertoires of available know-how.”³⁴

Tod Bolsinger, who is chief of leadership formation at Fuller Theological Seminary, points out that this is precisely

³¹ Peter G. Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 7th ed. (Los Angeles, Calif.: Sage, 2016), 257.

³² John Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press, 1996), 25.

³³ Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky, *Leadership on the Line* (Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business Review Press, 2002), 13.

³⁴ Heifetz et al., *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 2.

the context that the church in the west finds itself now in. He asks what Christian leadership should look like when “the world in front of you is nothing like the world behind you?” and proposes, “leadership is energizing a community of people toward their own transformation in order to accomplish a shared mission in the face of a changing world.”³⁵

Technical leadership works well in a world where questions have answers, problems have solutions, and pains have their medicines.³⁶ The world we are living in is no longer like this. We do not know the answers to questions like: What patterns of worship will enable this generation to connect with God in the way that typical Sunday morning worship once did? The Church is facing problems that no one has the solution to: for example, How do we care for existing congregations and establish new ones when ministerial numbers are plummeting? The Church has no idea what medicine it should offer for the wounds of the world when behaviors, which were once classed as sin and could be cured by repentance, are now considered to be illnesses that require therapy.³⁷

The perspective of adaptive leadership is reassuring yet challenging. It is reassuring because it lifts the burden of being a superhero from ministers. At the end of a workshop where I introduced adaptive leadership to ministerial colleagues, one of them remarked that she felt as if a huge load had been lifted from her shoulders. It was liberating to discover that she was no longer required to define the vision and explain how to achieve it. At the same time, adaptive leadership requires ministers to act in a way most people find counterintuitive. Instead of offering solutions, the adaptive leader encourages people to face their problems and find their solutions. Instead of restoring order when

³⁵ Tod Bolsinger, *Canoeing the Mountains* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 17, 42.

³⁶ Henri J. M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus* (London, England: Dartman, Longman and Todd, 1989), 35.

³⁷ Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Owen Strachan, *The Pastor as Public Theologian* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2015), 8.

conflict emerges, the adaptive leader allows it to emerge and uses it creatively. Instead of taking away pain, the adaptive leader helps people use it as a springboard for change.

Alan Roxburgh, a missiologist, uses the image of cultivation. He suggests that the adaptive leader “works the soil of the congregation so as to invite and constitute the environment for the people of God to discern what the Spirit is doing in, with and among them as a community.”³⁸ This image makes it clear how adaptive leadership is different from abdication. The adaptive leader does not abandon people to find their own solutions. Instead, they create an environment, manage the dynamics, and encourage the reflection that will enable people to discern the way forward.

Servant-like

Fresh reports of abuses of position and power by those entrusted with leadership appear on an almost-daily basis. These failures of leadership occur among politicians, CEOs, judges, entertainers, and tragically, ordained ministers. The common thread is that rather than serving those they lead, these leaders put their own interests first. These widespread and repeated examples of exploitative leadership mean that, according to Martyn Snow, “there are plenty of people in the church today who question the language of leadership.”³⁹

The solution to tyranny and abuse of leadership lies not in abandoning leadership, but in the concept of servant-leadership, clearly modelled by Jesus in the gospels. When the disciples were preoccupied with status, Jesus explained that “the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve” (Mark 10:45). When the disciples at the Lord’s Supper were arguing about position, Jesus declared, “I am among you as one who serves” (Luke 22:27). John’s description of Jesus washing his disciples’ feet (John 13:3–17) is the example *par excellence* of servant leadership. While

³⁸ Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader* (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 28.

³⁹ Martyn Snow, “Developing Leaders,” *Leadership and Virtue, The Bible in Transmission* (Summer 2015): 5.

Jesus' words, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done" (John 13:15), seem self-explanatory, they are more complex than many realise.

According to Larry Spears, "The words *servant* and *leader* are usually thought of as opposites. When two opposites are brought together in a creative and meaningful way, a paradox emerges."⁴⁰ *Paradox* is the critical word. Both *servant* and *leader* are easily understood concepts. Christians tend to default to one or the other. They speak of Jesus as a servant who washed his disciples' feet. Christian leaders are to serve. Like Jesus, they are to shed any notions of authority. They are not to direct people, and, it is assumed, they should not attempt to lead.⁴¹ Alternatively, they speak of Jesus as Lord, the one to whom every knee will bow (Phil. 2:10). Jesus passed his authority to the apostles (Matt. 28:16), who pass it onto those who are ordained as ministers.⁴²

Both of these tendencies ignore the paradox of the servant-leader, found in John 13 and in Philippians 2.⁴³ When Jesus washed his disciples' feet, he gave them a "rule of life," which would shape "their future association with each other."⁴⁴ In doing this, he acted as a servant but did not abdicate his position as leader. He said, "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord', and rightly so, for that is what I am" (John 13:13). He continued by being directive: "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done" (John 13:15). The term *example* (*hupodeigma*) can also be translated as *model* or *pattern*.⁴⁵ The same paradox is present in the Christological hymn in Philippians 2, which "portrays Christ

⁴⁰ Larry C. Spears, "Tracing the Past, Present and Future of Servant-Leadership," *Focus on Leadership*, eds. Larry C. Spears and Michele Lawrence (New York, N.Y.: John Wiley and Sons, 2002), 2.

⁴¹ Eddie Gibbs, *Leadership Next* (Leicester, UK: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 23.

⁴² For example, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 1982), Ministry B:15.

⁴³ In John 13:16 and Phil. 2:7, *doulos* (slave or servant) is used. In Mark 10:45 and Luke 22:27, *diakonos* (servant) is used. Although these words have important nuances, it does not affect this discussion of servant-leadership.

⁴⁴ Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1997), 463.

⁴⁵ Edward W Klink III, *John* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2016), 585.

as the supreme moral example.”⁴⁶ It is the very same Jesus who emptied himself and made himself nothing who is exalted to the highest place (Phil. 2:7, 9). Servant leadership should be the defining characteristic of parish ministry, which means that ministers lead through their service and serve through their leadership. Reformed theologian Karl Barth describes how Jesus embodied this paradox. “He is the Lord as He is first the servant of God and all others. The two things cannot be separated or reversed. It is not the case that He rules and at the same time serves, or serves and at the same time rules. It is as He serves that He rules.”⁴⁷

A number of ministers attempted to explain what this means in practice. One person said, “Ministers are not to lord it over people—they are to serve their people.”⁴⁸ A second expressed the underlying paradox, “Called to lead by serving, called to serve by leading.”⁴⁹ A third commented, “Ministers are in a position of exercise leadership but must do so carefully, patiently, and sensitively and in ways which are God honoring, reflecting the servant leadership model of Jesus.”⁵⁰

Collaborative

Barbara Kellerman, lecturer in Public Leadership at Harvard University, describes a fundamental shift in attitudes toward leadership. “By the end of the twentieth century, leading by commanding and controlling was dead and gone, and leading by cooperating and collaborating was in fashion.”⁵¹ Traditional top-down power structures were replaced by more egalitarian ones. The obedience of followers could no longer be assumed. People expected to

⁴⁶ Walter G. Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2009), 121.

⁴⁷ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol 4.2 (Edinburgh, Scotland: T & T Clark, 1958), 690.

⁴⁸ Dougall, *Parish Ministry and Leadership*, 144.

⁴⁹ Dougall, *Parish Ministry and Leadership*, 145.

⁵⁰ Dougall, *Parish Ministry and Leadership*, 153.

⁵¹ Barbara Kellerman, *The End of Leadership* (New York, N.Y.: Harper, 2012), 31.

be consulted and their views taken into consideration. In today's world, Warren Bennis and Joan Goldsmith note that "the ability to command and control is valued less than the ability to orchestrate, collaborate, and inspire."⁵²

Ministers live with a paradox. They are simultaneously enormously powerful and powerless. As Lim Siew Pik comments, "Clergy wield enormous spiritual power by virtue of their position,"⁵³ which creates the temptation to act in an autocratic manner. Ministers are expected to declare the word of God week by week. People look to them for spiritual guidance. They are trusted with the intimate details of people's lives. Inevitably this gives them enormous influence. Henri Nouwen tellingly describes how he became "aware of the extent to which my leadership was still a desire to control complex situations, confused emotions, and anxious minds."⁵⁴

Equally, however, the Church is a voluntary organization. In the words of Gibbs, ministers find themselves "functioning as a leader in a community of choice."⁵⁵ Their ability to reward or sanction members of the community is virtually non-existent. They cannot compel church members to do anything and live with the knowledge that church members possess large amounts of negative power. They can refuse to cooperate or leave altogether.

Collaboration offers a key strategy for coping with this paradox. Stephen Pickard offers a helpful definition.

To collaborate means to work with one another. The accent is on "with" rather than "for" or "under." It is a cooperative activity that requires trust in others, humility concerning one's own wisdom and

⁵² Warren Bennis and Joan Goldsmith, *Learning to Lead*, 4th ed. (New York, N.Y.: Basic Books, 2010), 3.

⁵³ Lim Siew Pik, "Toxicity in Clergy Leadership: An Emerging Phenomenon of Leader's Personal Power in the Pentecostal Charismatic Church," *Journal of Religious Leadership* 15(1) (Spring 2016): 38.

⁵⁴ Nouwen, 56.

⁵⁵ Gibbs, 100.

competences and a desire to release the creativity and gifts of those with whom one works.⁵⁶

Ministers of the Gospel, an influential report within the Church, said:

Seen from the perspective of Christ's ministry, it is clear that ministry in the 21st century will be the work of the whole Church and every member and particular ministry. This will require a shared ministry of all the gifts. Therefore, in making their own distinctive contribution, ordained ministers in the 21st century must be gifted and skilled in working well in the collaborative setting of such a shared ministry.⁵⁷

Paul's description of the church as the body of Christ, particularly in Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 provides a rationale and a template for collaborative ministry. The logic of "Now you are the body of Christ and each of you is a part of it" (1 Cor. 12:27) is that ministry does not belong to the minister but is shared with all who have been baptised. By extension, leadership in the church should also be collaborative.

Pickard explores at length some of the theological complexities that collaborative ministry poses for episcopally ordered churches. Being Presbyterian, the Church is spared these. It is a way-of-being church, which is committed to significant lay involvement in ministry and leadership, particularly through the eldership, which Doug Gay, a Scottish theologian, characterises as a "hybrid office, poised between what other traditions called clergy and laity."⁵⁸

In practice, however, the Church also experiences clericalism, with ministers wanting to exercise control and congregations often being complicit in this. While postmodern suspicion has eroded the habitual deference ministers once enjoyed, it has also created a loss of identity.

⁵⁶ Stephen Pickard, *Theological Foundations for Collaborative Ministry* (Farnham, U.K.: Ashgate, 2009), 6.

⁵⁷ Board of Ministry, *Report to the General Assembly* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Church of Scotland, 2000), 17/22.

⁵⁸ Doug Gay, *Reforming the Kirk* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Saint Andrew Press, 2017), 50.

If all God's people are ministers, with some gifted in preaching and others in caring, what is the role of the ordained ministry? Genuine collaboration involves sharing power and control, and many ministers aspire to do this; for example, "a parish minister can be a leader, but such leadership should be shared."⁵⁹ However, it is not surprising that when ministers lack confidence about their role and security about their position,⁶⁰ they struggle to practice collaborative leadership.

Rather than invalidating the contention that leadership should be collaborative, this inconsistency indicates some of the issues that need to be addressed in order for collaborative leadership to become a reality.

Facilitative

The Church often suffers from death by committee. Presbyterianism is a form of church government that places a high value on collaboration and debate. Its instinct is to form at least a small group, if not a committee, when a new issue arises. Then, rather than the group having executive authority, they are charged with bringing a report back to the original body for decision and action.

Across society, people despair at the inability of organisations to deal effectively with complex issues, to find a balance between consulting and acting, and to ensure that progress is made. Frustration with sclerotic systems is widespread. In this change of age, when the rate and type of change leave people reeling, the failure of participative bodies to respond in a timely manner increases the appeal of charismatic superheroes who offer a more autocratic approach and who sometimes turn out to be tyrants.

A particular aspect of this problem in the Church of Scotland is the role of moderator. Rather than appointing bishops or superintendents to give leadership, most Presbyterian denominations appoint moderators. Their role

⁵⁹ Dougall, *Parish Ministry and Leadership*, 143.

⁶⁰ Sally Nash, Jo Pimlott, and Paul Nash, *Skills for Collaborative Ministry* (London, England: SPCK, 2008), 10.

is akin to that of a Speaker in a legislative assembly. They have no executive power. As outlined by Andrew Herron, “The powers of the Moderator are very limited, being strictly confined to the conduct of the meetings of their court.”⁶¹ A national moderator is chosen, who moderates the annual meeting of the General Assembly and acts an ambassador for the Church for the rest of the year. Each Presbytery also chooses a moderator to moderate its meetings and to preside at ordinations and other joint services. In both cases, moderators serve for one year.

While this pattern might work reasonably well, its corollary at the congregational level can be problematic. A parish minister is the moderator of the Kirk Session, which is the leadership body of the congregation. Many ministers understand that their role in the Kirk Session is to moderate discussion and not to enter into debate, but this is technically wrong and missionally disastrous. It is technically wrong, for while the moderator of a Kirk Session needs to chair discussion fairly, he or she may also “introduce business and may speak to any item of business so long as he [sic] does not propose a motion.”⁶² It is missionally disastrous because parish ministers have “a pivotal position”⁶³ within the ecosystem of congregations. They are effectively the chair, the chief executive, and the head of communication of the organization. It is an ideal position from which to offer leadership. If the parish minister cannot or will not lead, it is difficult for anyone else to lead. To understand their role within the leadership body as simply to ensure fair discussion results in an abdication of leadership.

While this may be a particular Church problem, it is possibly a manifestation of a much broader one. In most cases, ministers inherit a system. It is likely to have developed in an earlier age. Systems by their very nature tend to be conservative and resistant to change. Ministers,

⁶¹ Andrew Herron, *The Law and Practice of the Church* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Saint Andrew Press, 1995), 252.

⁶² Herron, 288.

⁶³ Ministries Council, *Report to the General Assembly* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Church of Scotland, 2012), 4/18.

unless they choose to form their own organization, find themselves participating in the *missio Dei* in a system that will be flawed and frustrating.

The characteristic of leadership that is needed to address this situation is that of being facilitative.⁶⁴ According to Ingrid Bens, “Truly facilitative leaders are more than people savvy; they’re group process focused.”⁶⁵ There is a skill in understanding how any system works. At its best, this results in the system assisting and supporting missional initiatives. Even when that is not possible, progress can be made by learning how to make the system work for, rather than against, you, which involves an understanding of group dynamics and organizational culture.

Peter Block argues that the central leadership question is “What can we create together?”⁶⁶ He goes on to argue that the way and place in which people gather will shape the answer. Part of being facilitative is knowing how to make meetings effective. Different issues need different kinds of meetings. It is important to understand how the outcome of the meeting will be affected by three things: the distribution of the agenda and other documents, how discussion is encouraged and managed, and what happens after the meeting.

Bolsinger⁶⁷ argues that the challenge facing ministers today is knowing how to lead on and off the map. The Church faces new challenges. It is required to adapt and discover new ways of being in order to respond to them. Yet, ironically, the permission required to do this often has to be given by the very system that is no longer effective. One of the key leadership skills, therefore, is to be able to

⁶⁴ *Facilitative* and *empowering* have similar meanings and are sometimes used interchangeably. I am choosing to create a distinction between the two. I use *facilitative* in relation to structures and processes and *empowering* in relation to people.

⁶⁵ Ingrid Bens, *The Ten Essential Processes of Facilitative Leadership*, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/joe.20163>, accessed Aug. 15, 2018.

⁶⁶ Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (San Francisco, Calif.: Berrett-Kohler, 2008), 47.

⁶⁷ Bolsinger, 14.

work within that system, to communicate and explain, and to encourage discussion and prompt decisions so that permission is given for experiments and initiatives that have the potential to transform the system. Achieving these goals requires the art of facilitation.

Empowering

Eugene Peterson offers a vivid description of the Old Testament king, Zedekiah. “The man was a marshmallow. He received impressions from anyone who pushed hard enough. When the pressure was off, he gradually resumed his earlier state ready for the next impression.”⁶⁸ Unfortunately, being a marshmallow is a ministerial trait, which, perhaps, is understandable given the inherent tension between the call to be a pastor and the call to be a leader. Will Willimon explains: “Caregiving, the default mode of most pastors, is always less costly than leading. But the problem is no group survives or thrives without continually refitting and repositioning itself—and certainly not an institution that’s accountable to the living God.”⁶⁹

The default response of the marshmallow is to accommodate others, which is not leadership. The Church urgently needs to adapt to the changing world. While adaptive theory argues that it is not the leader’s (in this case, the minister’s) job to determine what change is required, it remains the leader’s responsibility to ensure that a direction is identified and progress is made in that direction. Rather than directing others, ministers should empower them.

After centuries of neglect, Ephesians 4⁷⁰ is increasingly being seen as offering a missional model for ministry that fits the world in which the church finds itself. In verse 11,

⁶⁸ Eugene H. Peterson, *Run with the Horses* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1983), 163.

⁶⁹ William H. Willimon, “Why Leaders Are a Pain,” *Christian Century* (February 17, 2016): 20.

⁷⁰ Alan Hirsch and Tim Catchim, *The Permanent Revolution* (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 2012), 6.

Paul⁷¹ says, “Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers”⁷² whose role is “to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.” New Testament scholar Clinton Arnold explains:

Christ has given gifted leaders to the church not merely to do ministry, but to invest their time heavily in developing and preparing fellow believers to engage in ministry in the body. The model Paul presents is therefore one of mutual service in the community and not one of professionals serving a group of consumers.⁷³

This view is contested. The Greek can be read in a different way. Verse 12 in the King James Version, for example, is “for the perfecting of the saints for the work of the ministry, and for the edifying of the body of Christ.” Those who hold to this view believe that the text is saying that “the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers not only bring the saints to full maturity, but they also do the works of ministry.”⁷⁴ While debate remains, the fact that most contemporary English translations of the New Testament adopt the first view⁷⁵ persuades me, following Frank Thielman, that Paul is saying that “the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers of 4:11 equip all believers to do the work of ministry for the edification of Christ’s body.”⁷⁶

The role of the parish minister is neither simply to teach people nor to care for them. It is also to equip them so that they can play their part in God’s mission to the world. That is why one of the essential characteristics of ministerial

⁷¹ While I hold to Pauline authorship (in some form) of Ephesians, the argument here does not depend on this.

⁷² A great deal has been written in recent years about these different roles, including my article, “Not Simply Pastor-Teacher, but Also Apostle, Prophet and Evangelist: The Changing Role of the Church of Scotland Parish Minister,” *Theology in Scotland* 22(2) (Autumn 2015): 39–58.

⁷³ Clinton E. Arnold, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2010), 262.

⁷⁴ Frank Thielman, *Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2010), 277.

⁷⁵ Arnold, 262.

⁷⁶ Thielman, 279.

leadership is that of empowering. The role of a minister is to empower God's people to understand that, by virtue of their baptism, they are part of the body of Christ and have a role to play in it, and that, because they have received the Holy Spirit, they have the gifts and the capacity to play this role.

Empowering God's people will involve *explaining* to them what is happening and why it matters; *engaging* them, that is inviting and persuading them to become involved; *energizing* them, that is inspiring and motivating them; *encouraging* them (since none of this is easy or quick, so people will flag and want to give up); *emboldening* them by giving them real responsibility and not trying to control everything; and by *experimenting*, that is creating a culture that says "let's give it a go and see what happens."

Effective empowering will equip God's people for ministry. It can be done in formal and informal ways: by preaching, praying, coaching, and chatting—and by getting out of the way. The result is that people will become engaged because "people will be accountable and committed to what they have a hand in creating."⁷⁷

The complex nature of effective empowering was expressed in some survey responses. One minister said, "That will sometimes mean taking the initiative and taking people with you. At other times it will mean providing encouragement for people to take the initiative."⁷⁸ Another commented, "The minister should be prepared to set an example but that doesn't always mean leading from the front."⁷⁹ A third explained:

Leading is about walking the way with others. It means sometimes, that at certain junctions, you have to stop and point out the direction of travel. At other times you can walk at the back keeping an eye out for all that is going on. At other times you can simply be part of the crowd secure in the knowledge that those who are in front are guiding the rest.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Block, 24.

⁷⁸ Dougall, *Parish Ministers and Leadership*, 144.

⁷⁹ Dougall, *Parish Ministry and Leadership*, 144.

⁸⁰ Dougall, *Parish Ministry and Leadership*, 156.

Conclusion

Views on leadership constantly evolve because “what constitutes good leadership varies according to the situation. The different leadership styles adopted by various organizations, nations, and cultures can be understood in part by considering the specific challenges posed by their particular physical and social environment.”⁸¹ I have, therefore, been specific. The model of ministerial leadership that I have outlined is what I suggest is needed within the Church of Scotland at the moment. An assessment of the extent to which the features outlined are more widely applicable can be made only by those who find themselves within other churches in other cultures.

Leadership is desired yet feared. It can be life-giving and life-denying. Both have been, and still are, present in the Church, which helps explain some of the ambivalence regarding leadership. That is why it is not sufficient to say that the Church requires leadership. The kind of leadership that is required must be defined.

Many models of leadership that are practiced are either partially or completely flawed. I have argued that rather than superhero leadership, ministers should offer adaptive leadership; rather than being tyrants, ministers should be servant-leaders; rather than being autocrats, ministers should collaborate; rather than simply moderating, ministers need to discover how to facilitate; and that far from being marshmallows, ministers need to empower other Christians. As ministers offer leadership that is adaptive, servant-like, collaborative, facilitative, and empowering, God’s people will be equipped for service and the body of Christ built up.

⁸¹ Van Vugt, 43.