

CHURCHES NEED LEADERS! A RESPONSE TO TED HALE'S ARTICLE IN THE Baptist Times 11 March 2011: 'Ministry and leadership: the two are not the same – and the leadership cult is deeply un-Baptist'

An excerpt published in *Baptist Times* 1 April 2011

I was – and still am – ‘gob-smacked’. I had expected some to question the pattern of governance advocated by Brian Winslade in his recent book *21st Century Church Governance: how should large churches be run?*, but I had not anticipated Ted Hale's strong tirade against the concept of leadership in the local church. I had thought that it long been accepted that as Baptists we believe in the ministry of all and the leadership of some. My own conviction is that leadership is a key function of those God has called to be pastors in his church. Since Ted has attacked me in particular, it only seems fair to answer some of the questions and issues he raises.

What does the Bible say?

Ted asks the question: ‘What does the Bible say about leaders?’, but then strangely seeks to answer the question by reference to the Old Testament rather than the New. The New Testament has a good deal to say about leadership. For instance, in all three list of spiritual gifts in Paul's writings, the gift of leadership is to be found.

So leadership is one of the seven gifts itemised in Romans 12.6-8. According to the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) “the leader” should exercise God gift “in diligence”. A similar translation is found in the New International Version (NIV): if your gift is “leadership, then govern diligently”. A slightly different emphasis is found in the Revised English Bible (REB): “If you are a leader, lead with enthusiasm”. The Good News Bible brings out a slightly difference nuance: “Whoever has authority should work hard”. Less true to the text, but nonetheless true, is Eugene Peterson's paraphrase in *The Message*: “if you are in charge, don't manipulate”.

In the context of Ted Hale's pejorative approach to the term ‘leader’, it is worthwhile pointing out that the Greek word Paul used for leader (*proistamenos*) is a very positive term, and could mean both ‘to lead’ and ‘to care for’. Although all modern versions believe the former meaning is to the fore, , the old Revised Standard Version (RSV) went for the latter meaning and translated this phrase in Rom 12.8: “He who gives aid, with zeal”. The fact is that there is an interrelationship between the two meanings. Pastoral leadership is not about the exercise of power, but about the exercise of care. Interestingly, at one stage the noun derived from the verb used here originally denoted the powerful Roman ‘patron’ who had ‘clients’. The word then came to be applied to any person of wealth and influence, who used their position to benefit the less fortunate. It was, for instance, this word which was applied to Phoebe in Romans 16.2: “She has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well” (NRSV)

Leadership is also to be found in Paul's list of spiritual gifts in 1 Cor 12. There, however, a different Greek word is to be found: ‘*kubernesis*’ (12.28). This is a fascinating word which gives further insight into the meaning of leadership. Unfortunately the NIV is somewhat misleading: it speaks of “those with gifts of administration” (similarly the old RSV,

“administrators”) which gives the impression that this is somebody good at paper and process – “organizers” as The Message puts it. However, the general scholarly consensus is that this refers to “leadership” (so the NRSV). The GNB translates; “those who are given power to direct”. Similarly the REB talks of those with; “power to guide”.

The fact is that the underlying Greek noun literally means ‘helmsmanship’. It was a term often used metaphorically in Greek literature of the art of government: the statesman guiding the ‘ship of state’. Here, of course, the ship in question is the church. Leaders are those who keep their hand on the tiller, who ensure that the ship is kept on course. So Roy Ciampa and Brian Rosner in their 2010 ‘magnum opus’ on 1 Corinthians speak of “effective governance or leadership... that guides a community through difficult waters [times/challenges] as a strong and harmonious unit”. On the basis of this metaphor we may surely say that ‘ministers’ are not just called to chair church meetings, but rather to give wise leadership!

The third list of spiritual gifts in Ephesians 4.7-13 is equally instructive, for here Paul uses another word to describe those who have been given oversight of the church: the ascended Christ has given to his church ‘pastors’, or perhaps more strictly ‘pastor-teachers’ (4.11). Again Paul is using a metaphor: for literally the word ‘pastor’ means ‘shepherd’ (*poimen*). Now in the ancient world ‘shepherd’ was a title for a ‘king’. The word ‘pastor’ is primarily a leadership term. As shepherds go ahead and lead their flocks, so too pastors are called to go ahead and lead God’s people.

Leadership is non-coercive

Contrary to what Ted Halle appears to suggest Christian leadership does not involve “subservience to some authority and power other than that of God”. Christian leadership is always a servant ministry which leaves people free to accept or not accept its direction. It can never force others do to something over which they are basically unhappy. There is a difference between leadership and ‘lordship’ (see 1 Peter 5.2-3). Leaders may have authority (see 1 Thessalonians 5.12 & Hebrews 13.17) but they can never be authoritarian. Christian leadership exhorts, rather than coerces (see 1 Timothy 5.12). Servant leadership is never from ‘above’, it is always from ‘below’. This is brought out by Paul in 1 Corinthians 16.15-16: ‘You know that the members of the household of Stephanas ... have devoted themselves to the service of the saints; I urge you to put yourselves at the service of such people’ (NRSV).

Leadership is accountable

Again, contrary to what Ted Hale suggests, Christian leadership remains accountable to the church. However, this does not mean that every decision is taken by the church meeting: clearly the larger a church grows, the more the church meeting has to delegate decisions to those who they have appointed to lead the church. Matters of major policy, however, always come to the church. Let me illustrate the relationship between the church and its leaders with the following policy statement taken from my own church:

Spearheading the mission and ministry of the church are the ministers together with the other members of the ministerial staff team. Their task has been defined as to “excite fresh hope and faith in God, encourage God’s people to embrace others with love of another kind, enable individuals to change and to grow, and empower the church for witness and service”. To a large extent the ministers are responsible for the operational life of the church. In one way or another all the ministers are engaged in preaching and teaching, leading worship and pastoral care. Other responsibilities include study and personal development, administration and organisation, community engagement, working with teams, and the development of vision and direction. In addition the senior minister, as team leader, is responsible for managing the ministerial team.

The leadership team is made up of the ministers and 12 deacons, who provide direction to the church. A key role of the deacons at leadership team meetings is holding the ministers to account for the way in which they define and implement the agreed vision and strategy of the church. The ministry of deacons also includes the important role of considering applications of new people for membership. In their dealings with members in general the deacons are called to be ‘champions’ of the church and its values. Where necessary, deacons seek to resolve difficulties within the church, and in so doing free the ministers for their particular ministry.

Like other Baptist churches, we are congregationally governed in that ultimately both the ministers and deacons are accountable to the church meeting. The church meeting adopts the annual budget and is ultimately responsible for the mission and ministry of the church. In calling ministers and appointing deacons the church delegates much of its authority to its leaders.

Leadership is a form of service

Ted Hale is wrong to contrast leadership with service. Christian leadership, rightly understood is a form of service.

On a number of occasions Jesus emphasised the necessity of the servant role if a person would be a leader. Thus when James and John asked if they might sit at his right and left hand in glory, Jesus replied: “You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you: but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all” (NRSV Mark 10.42-44; Matthew 20.25-27; see also Luke 22..24-26). However, this emphasis on servanthood does not stand in opposition to leadership. If leadership is undertaken for the sake of others, rather than for the sake of one’s own personal ego, then such leadership is service in the cause of Christ.

Indeed, leaders do the Lord and his church a disservice if they do not exercise their gifts and offer leadership. Where would the church of God be without its leaders? As Richard Foster

rightly pointed out: “An infantile anarchy in church life is no better than oppressive dictatorship”.

Furthermore, leadership is a key to church growth. One reason why many of our Baptist churches have declined, if not died, is that ministers have failed to respond to God’s call to lead their people. This was confirmed in a survey of 350 Baptist churches in 1978, when Alan Wilkinson and I established that in churches where the minister’s prime gift is leadership and/or vision, there is a bias toward growth.

Leadership has nothing to do with status

Ted Hale is wrong to suggest that leadership is about “titles or positions”. My own ‘title’ is that of ‘senior minister’, but when I am leading a wedding or a funeral, I will often introduce myself as ‘one of the ministers of the church’. My own preference could be to call myself the ‘senior pastor’, a term which is common in the USA. Unfortunately, as far as some people in the UK are concerned, the word ‘pastor’ connotes an untrained minister as over against an ordained minister. On official documents, I am listed as ‘Rev Dr Paul Beasley-Murray’ – but this is when I deal with people in the church: in the family of the church, I am known to all as ‘Paul’.

Ted Hale asks the question: “Should there be people called ‘leaders’ amongst a people of God?” and proceeds to answer that question by quoting from Matthew 23.8-11, which in the GNB version quoted by Ted has Jesus saying: “Nor are you to be called ‘leader’, for you have one leader, the Christ”. But this is misleading on two counts.

Firstly, the word translated “leader” in Matthew 23.10 is a very rare word, which in other versions is translated as “teacher” (NIV and REB) or “instructor”. John Nolland in his commentary on the Greek text of Matthew says that “*kathegetes* is used of a personal or private tutor. This is a special kind of teacher whose role is personalised and individualised for the particular student”, In no way was Jesus saying people should not be called leaders.

Secondly, the issue Jesus was addressing, was the desire for status. In this respect Jesus could have just as much attacked those who love to use the term ‘Reverend’ and to be known as ‘the Minister’!

There is no leadership cult

Finally, I find the suggestion highly offensive that I am in the business of developing a leadership cult, in which I seek to encourage people to follow me, rather than Jesus. Ted, we may differ on our understandings of ministry, but this accusation is unjust. As a boy I belonged to the Crusader Bible class movement, whose motto was: “Looking unto Jesus” (Hebrews 12.2). The leadership I seek to exercise is to encourage God’s people to “keep our eyes fixed on Jesus on whom our faith depends from beginning to end” (GNB 12.2).

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