2006

A Sage Who Leads Toward Shalom: Visions of Leadership from the Old Testament

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Recommended Citation

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"And do not be called leaders" (Matt 23:10; NASB). To a contemporary person involved in any aspect of the pastoral task, Jesus's words in this scripture must seem strange. Talk of leadership is everywhere in the church today! Scarcely a week goes by where today's pastor does not receive an advertisement for the latest conference or tape series on leadership, and the question that occupies the central place concerns the definition of a leader: "What is a leader and what does it mean to lead?" Or, perhaps better, "Should pastors think of themselves as leaders and, if so, what kind?"

This issue of leadership is one that the church and university share in common. Most Christian universities now feature centers, programs, and courses devoted to "pastoral leadership" or "Christian leadership." In both the church and university, the question of leadership primarily revolves around how three entities work together. For the church, these three entities are the senior pastor (with his or her staff), church board, and informal layperson leaders. For the university, these entities are the president (with his or her cabinet), faculty, and board of trustees.

This essay explores the visions of leadership that emerge from the Old Testament and how they might impact our view of what leadership is and how it is practiced in the similar settings of the local church and Christian university. But the Old Testament does not offer just one picture of leadership. As this essay aims to show, the Old Testament contains several different "offices" or trajecto-

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ries of leadership (king, priest, and prophet) that exist in a dynamic tension with one another. Through this tension, each trajectory shapes and critiques the others. The Old Testament then places these visions of leadership into conversation with a pervasive concept called "shalom," and thereby redefines the way each trajectory is practiced. In keeping with some of the ways that the thinking about leadership has developed in the history of both the church and university, these biblical pictures recast the notion of leader not as a single authoritarian person at the top of a hierarchy but as one office within a cooperative body of shared responsibility that produces "shalom." The office of leader is *interdependent with other offices and oriented toward the particular vision of shalom.*

Before exploring the impact of these biblical visions, let us consider the development of the concept of leadership in the church and university.

Visions of Leadership in the Church

The recent literature on pastoral leadership revolves around the interrelationship of the pastor (and his or her staff), church board, and informal layperson leaders, and proposes numerous models for leadership.[1] For example, among the models for the pastor, one can find styles such as Commander, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), and Entrepreneur.[2] The commander model envisions the pastor/leader in the military mold of a king or general and is often especially suggested for adoption in crises and unstable ministry settings. This "leader" is one who is convinced of a single, proper course of action, orders the commencement of that course, and presents followers with the options of obedience or expulsion.[3]

The CEO model emerges directly from the values and institutions of American capitalism and envisions the leader as one who sits atop a hierarchy of authorities. It views the local church as a corporation with assets and resources—human and otherwise—that need to be "managed" in order to ensure effectiveness. The pastor then becomes the chief executive of the corporation.[4] As in the

often-cited depiction of Moses and his judiciary in Exodus 18, the "leader-manager pastor"[5] is solely responsible for setting the corporation's general direction and then overseeing the performance of those to whom tasks have been delegated. Similarly, the entrepreneurial model envisions a leader who does not simply manage resources but develops dreams, builds enterprises, and launches projects.[6] In this model, the leader prefers not to engage in the daily management of existing organizations but to envision the creation of new ventures to be developed by others.[7]

At various moments in the history of thinking about pastoral leadership, these and related models have risen and fallen from prominence. And each of these is open to critique from a number of perspectives. It is easy to see, for example, that they are derived from and steeped in the values of militarism, individualism, and consumerism, and that these values can often run contrary to the witness of the gospels and the historic practice of the church. Additionally, those of us in the Wesleyan tradition are struck by the shallow biblical engagement represented by these models. It is not enough to draw an understanding of leadership from aspects of our experience, culture, or tradition with some biblical prooftexts attached as illustrations. Conceptions of leadership need to be forged out of a deep and sustained dialogue with scripture and to engage the biblical reflections of leadership in all their complexity.

For these and other reasons, the discussion of church leadership is changing. One can see overtures toward the conception of a leader as a servant figure that serves through collaboration and leads through shared authority.[8] These conceptions of church leadership are illuminated in interesting ways by the development of thinking about leadership in the similar setting of the Christian university.

Visions of Leadership in the University

Since the birth of universities, presidents (and their cabinets), faculties, and boards of trustees have been vying for power and

institutional control—or, at least, trying to figure out how to work together. Through most of the eras of American higher education, however, it was the president who often served as the primary and, at times, sole creator and translator of the institution's vision.

The so-called "College Era" (1636-1870), for example, was a time when institutions were usually small, poor, and in heavy competition for qualified students and faculty. The colleges of this era were led by presidents who were predominantly clergy and who oversaw the total operation of the college. These presidents even taught a required capstone course in moral philosophy for graduating seniors. Although presidents during this era have been referred to as gentleman-scholars, more often than not their leadership philosophy was to rule with an iron fist. According to one historian, for example, Eleazar Wheelock, the first president of Dartmouth, "regarded his subordinates as properly subject to his unquestioned authority....[H]e had so conceived himself of the righteousness of his projects that he came to regard opposition to himself as opposition to the cause of Christ."[9] The prevailing motto for leadership was: "Never retract. Never explain. Get the thing done and let them howl."[10]

The practices of leadership in higher education's second era, the so-called "Age of Titans" (1870-1910), were similar in many ways to those of the first era. This was an era of presidents with powerful personas, towering figures that built great institutions and took a very public role in education and society.[11] President William Rainey Harper, for example, convinced John D. Rockefeller to provide the finances that allowed the University of Chicago to emerge as America's first great research university, moving from inception to full operation in less than one year!

Yet unlike the previous era, these leaders were entrepreneurial administrators. They did not teach on campus. They were eloquent public speakers and prolific writers that cast great visions for higher education and its place in American society. Because these presidents became public personalities and national leaders,

they acquired financial and human resources and developed new academic and research programs that were impressive by any standard. But their prominence in the public eye resulted in a lack of presidential presence on the campus. Many trustees began to participate in operational and academic affairs, and faculty, often with presidential support, began to argue for a voice in university governance, including permanent seats on the board of trustees. The era gave birth to the early seeds of collaborative leadership and shared authority.[12]

The late 1800s into the 1900s may be called the "Era of Incorporation." There was a growing belief in many circles that a university was a business organization and should be managed like a business. Not unlike some models for pastoral leadership, presidents increasingly began to act as the CEO of a major corporation rather than the leader of an educational community.[13] The period from the end of the Civil War through World War II also saw the control of universities shift from clergypersons to laypersons, especially business professionals.[14] With these shifts, the most typical leadership style of the new CEO-type president once again became not collaborative governance but executive authority. In many settings, presidents treated faculty members "as if [they] could be hired and fired like any employee in one of their firms."[15] As an outgrowth of these developments, again not unlike some trends in pastoral leadership, CEO-type leaders in the period after World War II began to employ management fads from the business arena in university leadership. These fads applied business principles to the leadership of an educational community but garnered mixed results at best.

The inadequacy of this corporate model of leadership began to show itself over time. For example, in 1918, Thorstein Veblen, a prominent economist, wrote a scathing critique of businessmen running universities in which he charged that the leadership of the CEO-presidents focused only on expenditure and profit.[16] Ultimately, as thinking about leadership developed, the realization that certain business principles do apply to the university gave way to

the conviction that the university is a unique and complex organization that cannot be run as if it were a shoe store, automobile manufacturer, or technology supplier. History has shown that educational effectiveness does not result from viewing faculties as mere labor forces employed by an executive office and efficiency for profit as the highest value in a learning community.

As the above surveys show, there are similarities between the ways people have conceived of leadership in the church and university. More recently, there has emerged a conviction that leadership in both institutions is best when it is interdependent, collaborative, and shared. The Old Testament's visions of leadership not only provide specific models but also join this call for mutuality in leadership.

Visions of Leadership in the Old Testament

Similarly to the church's entities of pastor, board, and lay leaders and the university's entities of president, faculty, and trustees, the Old Testament describes three main offices or trajectories of leadership in ancient Israel: king, priest, and prophet. Yet the Old Testament subtly resists a hierarchical model and makes its visions of leadership interdependent, mutually-critiquing, and, ultimately, oriented toward a goal called "shalom."

The first office of leadership in the Old Testament is the king. On the surface, this is undoubtedly the trajectory that is most hierarchical, most CEO-like. In ancient Israel's world, the king functions as God's representative and vice-regent. He represents a picture of leadership that is monarchical, top-down, and authoritarian. The trajectory of kingship embodies the idea that someone has to make the final decisions about practical social and economic realities.[17] King David, for example, is lauded for his military, organizational, and political savvy. One also sees this trajectory in the texts often labeled "royal psalms." For instance, Ps 2:1-9 presents divine speech in which God uses the metaphor of "son" to refer to the established place of Israel's king: "'I have set my king on Zion, my holy hill.…You are my son; today I have begotten you. Ask of

me and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession'" (2:6-8; NRSV).

Perhaps the most important thing to notice about this first office of leadership, however, is that the Old Testament does not allow it to stand alone. The texts put two surprising restrictions on kings. First, they explicitly place kings under the Law (Torah). The book of Deuteronomy, for example, commands that the Law be read to the king annually, a reading that never allows the king to forget that he too is a subject of God, the divine king. Deuteronomy also contains the most explicit restriction and redefinition of the office of king. Deuteronomy 17:14-20 acknowledges the legitimacy of the office of king but commands that he must not "acquire many horses," "acquire many wives," or "acquire silver and gold…in great quantity for himself." Moreover, the restriction orders,

> When he has taken the throne of his kingdom, he shall have a copy of this law written for him.…It shall remain with him and he shall read in it all the days of his life, so that he may learn to fear the LORD his God…neither exalting himself above other members of the community nor turning aside from the commandment (*Deut 17:18-20; NRSV*).

The king, although holding a powerful office of leadership, remains only another Israelite in the eyes of God's Torah.

The other restriction placed on kings intersects with another leadership trajectory in the Old Testament: kings are placed under the word of the prophets. At many points, prophets criticize and even condemn the actions of kings from the divine point of view (see David and Nathan in 2 Sam 11-12). They call the kings to embody God's demand for justice for the poor and care for the needy (cf. Jer 22:15-16). Through these texts, the Old Testament not only restricts the king's authority but also subjects the highest human office to the righteousness and justice demanded by the Law and prophets.

The second office of leadership in the Old Testament is the priest. This trajectory represents a mediator, go-between, or representative. Priests in ancient Israel represent God to the community

and the community to God. Although contemporary readers often undervalue the priestly elements of the Old Testament as "primitive" religion, priestly-type leadership in ancient Israel provides for the regular rhythms of life with God and the daily maintenance of God's people.[18] It is not ad hoc; the careful enactment of rituals, sacrifices, etc., provides a steady, constant mediation of God's presence to the community, a mediation that primarily provides assurance and consolation rather than challenge and critique. This mediation continually makes God available to the community and repeatedly reconstitutes the community as God's people.

As with the trajectory of kingship, however, the Old Testament limits and critiques the priestly office. The texts hold the priestly trajectory in tension with the prophetic trajectory. The Old Testament is cognizant of the danger that the immediate and accessible divine presence that is enacted by priestly-type leadership can be usurped by those in power and used to lock the sovereign God into fixed categories, particularly categories that use God to legitimate unjust social, political, and economic practices.[19] So, for example, Isaiah, while not rejecting priestly religion as a whole, can proclaim:

> What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD; I have
> had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts....
> [R]emove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil,
> learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan,
> plead for the widow (*Isa 1:11, 16-17; NRSV*).

The third office of leadership in the Old Testament is the prophet. Unlike the priests, this trajectory is predominantly occasional, ad hoc, and situational. Prophets are spokespersons and orators, who attempt to persuade people by introducing an authoritative word into a specific situation. By speaking for God in the first-person ("I") and portraying themselves as God's messengers ("Thus says the Lord"), they appeal to an authority that is beyond their own. In so doing, prophets may serve to "criticize," that is, to stand against abuses of power and injustice, or to "energize," that is, to help the people create alternative visions of life as God's people.[20]

As with the preceding trajectories, however, the Old Testament recognizes the dangers with prophetic-type leadership. Not unlike the priestly office, prophetic words can be usurped by the centers of power and made to serve their own ends. One may think here of the "royal prophets" that function as "yes-people" to many of the kings of Israel (cf. 1 Kgs 22). But more basically, the texts assume that prophetic leadership alone cannot be sufficient for the life of God's people. The life of the covenant community cannot always be ad hoc, living from crisis to crisis. The prophetic vision of life needs the priestly trajectory that provides maintenance, constancy, and regularity.

Each of these Old Testament offices can be a useful model for pastoral or university leadership. At times, one needs the kingly model of firm decision and practical action. The priestly model calls one to serve as a constant and steady mediation for the community. The prophetic model equips one to proclaim authoritative words in unexpected and ad hoc situations. Yet the Old Testament consistently emphasizes the *interdependence* of these models, as well as their ability to *critique and limit each other*. There is, however, an additional aspect to the Old Testament's visions of leadership. These texts contain a vision of reality that cuts across and redefines all three trajectories. Using the Old Testament's terminology, we may label that vision of reality "shalom." The term "shalom" represents God's central vision of the world: one community of righteousness and justice. Shalom here entails not simply "peace" but "wholeness." All creation is one and should be characterized by justice, harmony, and well-being among all creatures.[21] In the Old Testament, this vision emerges from the affirmation that Abraham is the father of all Israelites, so every person is his child. In the New Testament, the affirmation is that all people are drawn under the lordship and fellowship of Jesus, the descendant of Abraham.

Yet the shalom vision of the world is not a spiritual "pie in the sky;" it is radically material. Shalom represents well-being that is

physical and economic.[22] For example, from the prophetic voices, Ezekiel proclaims,

> I will make with them a covenant of peace [shalom] and banish wild animals from the land, so that they may live in the wild and sleep in the woods securely....The trees of the field shall yield their fruit, and the earth shall yield its increase. They shall be secure on their own soil....They shall no more be plunder for the nations, nor shall the animals of the land devour them; they shall live in safety, and no one shall make them afraid (*Ezek 34:25-28; NRSV*).

Similarly, the priestly trajectory links God's vision for society with material provisions and just existence:

> I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its produce....[Y]ou shall eat your bread to the full, and live securely in your land. And I will grant peace [shalom] in the land, and you shall lie down, and no one shall make you afraid; I will remove dangerous animals from the land, and no sword shall go through your land (*Lev 26:4-6; NRSV*).

Thus, the absence of shalom is economic inequality, judicial perversion, exploitation of the poor, and societal exclusivism: "For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the house of Israel...he expected justice, but saw bloodshed; righteousness, but heard a cry! Ah, you who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is room for no one but you" (Isa 5:7-8; NRSV). From the Old Testament's perspective, such actions do not simply represent ethical misdeeds but perversions of God's intention for a shalom reality.[23]

The concept of shalom adds another dimension to the Old Testament's visions of leadership. Not only do these texts envision offices that are interdependent and mutually-critiquing, but they orient all such offices toward God's vision of shalom for the world. And it is specifically the powerful, the leaders, the kings, priests, and prophets, who are held responsible for mediating shalom.[24] The pervasive concept of shalom effectively pushes all leadership to be that which produces equality, mutuality, and justice rather than hostility, competitiveness, and manipulation. Such are the Old Testament's visions of leadership: the shared work of offices that are interdependent, mutually-critiquing, and oriented toward shalom.

The Leader as "Sage": A New Vision of Leadership for the Church and University

Because the Old Testament does not simply give one model of leadership but a variety of images that exist in a dynamic tension with one another, how can one speak practically about leadership in dialogue with all these different biblical voices? In response to that question, we would suggest that another office of leadership from the Old Testament, an office that is less well known, may provide a helpful model: the diverse images of leadership call biblical readers to be "sages." The office of "sage," or "wise person," appears in ancient Israel's literature alongside king, priest, and prophet. It is most often connected with the so-called "wisdom books" of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. The sage in the Old Testament is a leader who seeks wisdom for the community by integrating experiences and situations into new constructions of knowledge and practice.[25] Since the biblical texts give more than one vision of leadership, they call contemporary readers to be sages in a similar way. Readers must learn how to integrate the different trajectories and explore their implications in different situations.

In so doing, however, we must remember two things. The Old Testament calls for a particular type of sage-leader. The picture of leadership that emerges from these texts is not that of an authoritative executive or corporate entrepreneur. Sage-leadership is interdependent and collaborative. Just as the offices of king, priest, and prophet exist together in a balanced tension and offer limiting safeguards to one another, so contemporary leadership forged in dialogue with these texts should be that in which all offices share in authority and responsibility and provide mutual critique and balance. Additionally, we must recall that the Old Testament reconceptualizes every notion of leadership with the pervasive concept of shalom. Every office of leadership must be undertaken with the goal of creating a community that can embody God's vision for the world—one community of righteousness, justice, and equality.

So what would this sage-leadership look like in practice at a

local church or Christian university? At the most basic level, like the Old Testament visions themselves, it would affirm the value of collaborative, shared leadership and would seek to establish an environment where mutual-critiquing is encouraged and appreciated. Of course, such an environment will not develop unless the pastor, board, and lay leaders (or president, faculty, and trustees) model this behavior. But the acknowledgment and practice of interdependence is not enough. If shalom is the goal, sage-leadership must be a "moral" act.[26] Leadership that is moral and oriented toward shalom emphasizes three aspects: identity, integrity, and servanthood.

Identity involves an emphasis on the special nature of the local congregation or university community. These are unique institutions with highly valued traditions and a persistent memory. The sage-leader will not treat the community as something it is not. A local church or Christian university is not a factory, or a shoe store, or a profit-making corporation, and the latest management fads or church growth strategies seldom prove to be effective. Hence, sage-leaders work to develop a mutual trust that they are cooperating to preserve the best of a community's special heritage and identity. Because they recognize how unique their church or university is, and how locally it operates, and because trust can be damaged in an instant, these leaders will not simply imitate some program or emphasis just because it is successful somewhere else. Moreover, sage-leaders recognize that it is not their institution but God's. They are called to be faithful stewards of their time, budgets, and efforts. The leader who starts out each day remembering that "this is not about me" and "this is not my money" will be well on the way to a shalom-filled community.

A shalom community is also not possible without sage-leaders who practice personal *integrity*, especially in the form of having honor, candor, and courage. Honor consists of having both the vision of what constitutes right action and the moral courage to act on that vision.[27] It is the ability to stay true to the mission, even when pressured by big givers, special interests, and personal agen-

das. Such honor also requires candor. One who follows the Old Testament's visions of shared leadership toward shalom must live openly so community members know that "what they see is what they get." A leader who works with candor builds trust, and a shalom community is built on a foundation of trust. Yet honor and candor require the courage to do the right thing even when it is unpopular, to say "I was wrong," to tell the truth in a room full of leaders looking for an excuse, and to report things as they are rather than how one would like them to be.

Finally, *servanthood* is the quality that helps an Old Testament type of leader avoid the seductive snare of arrogance.[28] Arrogance shows itself, for example, when leaders use their position for personal gain or special privilege. But selfless service is revealed in a humble approach and a gentle spirit. This spirit is more concerned about the mission of the institution toward shalom than it is about personal accomplishment. This spirit, in keeping with the Old Testament's visions, says "there is no hierarchy here," "there are no sides here," and "you do not work for me, but I work for you as you work for the mission of this place."

Thus, the Old Testament's trajectories of leadership call for leaders who will be sages. Whether pastor, president, or other, these will be leaders who seek to discern how to employ the different models of leadership and how to create a leadership that is interdependent, collaborative, and oriented toward God's goal of a unified community of righteousness and justice. If these sages will practice their leadership with a sense of identity, integrity, and servanthood, true shalom may not be far behind.

Notes

1.	For a full discussion of contemporary images of the pastor, see William Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 56-74.

2.	For examples of these models, as well as critiques of some of them, see Robert D. Dale, *Pastoral Leadership: A Handbook of Resources for Effective Congregational Leadership* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1986).

3. Dale, *Pastoral Leadership*, 42-44.

4. For a clear example of this model, see Carl F. George and Robert E. Logan, *Leading and Managing Your Church* (Grand Rapids: Fleming H. Revell, 1987).

5. George and Logan, *Leading and Managing*, 16.

6. Dale, *Pastoral Leadership*, 50.

7. For a general example of this approach, see Dale Galloway, ed., *Leading with Vision* (Beeson Pastoral Series 1; Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 1999), esp. 70-71.

8. For expressions of this, see Willimon, *Pastor*, esp. 275-281 and Thomas Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (San Francisco: Harper, 1983), 49-81.

9. L. B. Richardson, *History of Dartmouth College, Vol. I* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Publications, 1932), 191; quoted in W. H. Cowley, *Presidents, Professors, and Trustees* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1980), 57. Cowley (*Presidents*, 57) notes that this approach was characteristic of a "sizeable portion" of presidents during this era.

10. L. A. Tollemache, *Benjamin Jowlett* (New York: Arnold, 1895), 117; quoted in Cowley, *Presidents*, 59.

11. Examples include Charles Elliot at Harvard, Andrew Dickson White at Cornell, James Angell at Michigan, and Daniel Coit Gilman at the University of California and later at Johns Hopkins University.

12. For example, the American Association of University Professors was organized at the end of this era.

13. This shift in leadership emphasis paralleled the development of management as a professional discipline throughout the 1900s. It is interesting to note that 1910 is the year often listed as the date for the advent of the Research University Era in higher education, and 1911 saw Frederick W. Taylor, the father of scientific management, publish his groundbreaking book, *Principles of Scientific Management*.

14. For example, while ninety percent of the college presidents in 1860 were trained for the ministry, only twelve percent had such training in 1933. See John S. Brubaker and Willis Rudy, *Higher Education in Transition* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 365.

15. Brubaker and Rudy, *Higher Education*, 371.

16. Thorstein Veblen, *The Higher Learning in America* (repr. New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1965).

17. Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 600-601.

18. Brueggemann, *Theology*, 650.

19. Brueggemann, *Theology*, 675-679.

20. Brueggemann, *Theology*, 622-627.

21. Walter Brueggemann, *Living Toward a Vision: Biblical Reflections on Shalom* (New York: United Church Press, 1976), 15-16. The discussion of shalom here is primarily drawn from Brueggemann's work.

22. Brueggemann, *Living Toward a Vision*, 16.

23. Brueggemann, *Living Toward a Vision*, 18; see also 15-20 for additional scripture texts related to shalom.

24. Brueggemann, *Living Toward a Vision*, 21.

25. Brueggemann, *Theology*, 685.

26. E. Grady Bogue, *Leadership by Design: Strengthening Integrity in Higher Education* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1994), 145.

27. Bogue, *Leadership*, 15.

28. After a noteworthy career in public higher education, Bogue (*Leadership*, 133) writes: "The leader who neglects or abandons the servant ideal will sooner or later fall victim to arrogance, and the departure of her or his nobility will manifest itself in destructive behavior."