LEADERSHIP, AUTHORITY AND POWER IN THE LIGHT OF BIBLICAL ECCLESIOLOGICAL MODELS

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The twenty-first century opens with a crisis in the exercise and recognition of figures of authority. This crisis makes up one of the many facets of what is known as postmodernism, which has generated a need to rethink the polarized contemporary leadership models, embodied in a strong dose of abuse on the one hand, or in other cases, with the lack of authority.

The church of Christ is not immune to this crisis because ecclesiastical leadership models were adopted largely from the legacies of cultural worldviews and secular management models. With this in view, some of the causes of this paradigm are due to the absence of serious reflection on biblical models of authority, on the one hand, and the tension between the theory of pseudo-biblical models and their practice in the development of mission on the other hand. As a result, church leaders have not followed these models, bringing disappointed on one hand, due to abuse of authority, lack of integrity and dubious behavioral patterns, or, indifference and lack of real leadership resulting in ineffective attempts in contemporary mission on the other hand.

A serious study of the Scriptures reveals the antagonism and tension between the secular and the Christian concept of authority and power in the exercise of leadership. Jesus refers to this antagonism in Matthew 20:25-28, denoting that the secular model of authority and power in his time were not compatible with the vision of the Kingdom of God. The manipulation and alienation of the dignity and freedom of human beings is very different from the humility and service required in the development of a ministry which brings reconciliation, healing and the restoration of the image of Christ in mankind.

Faced with this leadership crisis in the church, we need to ask ourselves: Are we as the church of Christ, not gathering the fruit of an illegitimate model of leadership? What are the changes that need to be made in order to revitalize the exercise of legitimate authority and power in the life and mission of the church?

To achieve leadership, which is consistent with the divine vision, the church needs to revise their theology of leadership, considering biblical ecclesiological models with a view to building a healthy church and mission.

Leadership, authority and culture

One point to consider in this issue of leadership and authority is the influence of culture and tradition in shaping them. Historically in Latin America, the exercise of power and authority has been given within the framework of conquests, revolutions, dictatorships, among others, which have marked social understanding and the exercise of leadership giving rise to the emergence of the figure of the "boss" prototype or the corporate leader. In relation to this, although we have seen how the action of the church has influenced societies, we must admit as well that social culture somehow has shaped the worldview of the church. Reinforcing this view, Aguera Ibañez says that: "leadership cannot be understood without understanding its nature, its implications and reasons for being in the group in which it operates, and vice versa, a society cannot be understood without understanding the character of its leadership. So the leader, is understood through the society where he/she acts, but it is also true that, society cannot be understood fully, without looking at the fabric of its agreements and, of course, of its leaders " [1].

As has been already said, the church is not immune to this influence. This type of leadership, with its secular values and principles, has led to a blurring of the exercise of authority, making it in many cases authoritarian, alienating leadership from administrative efficiency and creative performance. Gareth Morgan, a smart organizational analyst has noted that:

> Although we usually think of organizations as rational enterprises pursuing aims that will meet the interests of society, there is too much evidence to suggest that this view does not always correspond to reality. From large construction projects of antiquity to the modern public or private corporations, whether they are armies, churches, unions, educational institutions, the mass media, small and medium business or even a family business, we find asymmetrical power relations that can acquire dysfunctional manifestations and are risky for the welfare of the members of the organization and society. [2]

This perspective has also created tensions within the church, from the biblical perspective on authority, as it is difficult to reconcile authority and service as "the boss" who serves, rather than is served; all this results in a blurring of the biblical image of the ministry

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[1] Agüera Ibáñez, Enrique. Liderazgo y Compromiso Social. Editorial BUAP. México. 2004. Pág.24

[2] Gareth, Morgan. Imágenes de La Organización. 1998. Edit. Alfa Omega. México, D.F. Pag.189.

and giving birth to a *filoprimatosis* leadership syndrome (love in the first place) and polarizing leadership-church relationships.

One of the most controversial dimensions, as far as interpersonal relationships are concerned, is the competition for positions of authority over others. Today there are techniques and methodologies that teach how to influence people and get results that feed self-centeredness. The motivations are varied: looking for a better self-image, affirming their identity, imposing personal criteria, covering feelings of guilt or underestimation, pride, jealousy, envy or even something a little nobler like the satisfaction that comes from philanthropy.

The confrontations and power struggles are reflected with tragic and significant results in our history, in many cases, catastrophic for those who end up as victims of intolerance, authoritarianism, despotism and outrage. Undoubtedly the use and abuse of authority is the cause of many problems, not only within nations, but also within the Christian community.

In this framework the church has been waking up to the reality of rethinking models more in accord with the Bible that will give orientation to the life and mission of the church in a more healthy and healing context. One of the most immediate figures that has emerged is the need to rethink the Servant-Leader, following the leadership style of Jesus Christ.

In his proverbial teaching about authority in the church in Matthew 20:25-28, Jesus made it clear that the secular paradigms are not always compatible with the principles of the Kingdom of God, "Not so with you…" challenges the church to a continuous redefinition of the administrative model. Samuel Neri expresses it well:

> Jesus calls us not to overvalue our balconies, chairs, pulpits and all the symbols of power that keeps us from serving the people; he calls us to dedicate ourselves to be "servants" of our neighbors and of our brothers.
> We are called to a service that is concrete, not in words, but in the attitudes, gestures, in a commitment to the good of others. Those who assume the position of "servants" simultaneously assume authority to direct, guide, feed, teach, exhort, etc., without tyranny. May God give us grace and wisdom not to ever forget those principles which will keep the Christian community safe; we need to save "His" church from infighting which is competing, rather than serving.[3]

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[3] Neri Samuel. Siervos o Reyes: ¿Quién manda?. www.compromisocristiano.com/autoridad/siervos-o-reyes-¿quien-manda.html. Diciembre de 2009.

One of the aims of this study is to review some principles that emerge from the exercise of leadership in the New Testament so as to outline the style of a leader based on the authority of Scripture and relevant for the people of God.

Biblical ecclesiological models for healthy leadership

The image of the servant leader has introduced agreements and disagreements in the exercise of leadership in the Christian church. The issue at hand is where do we draw the fine line between authority and authoritarianism or service and servility?

This tension occurs because the church as a corporate institution needs men and women to empower its mission in the world. This is where ministerial ethics plays an important role where the leader carries out his task within the balanced framework of character and conduct defined in biblical terms.

When John and James claimed a privileged position, Jesus said: "You do not know what you want," showing clearly that among Christian leaders, privileged positions and authority are not got through influences, fame, appearances or through seniority. Only the cloak of the "servant" makes someone suitable for a position of authority in the community of Christ, the church. Any other attribution sought after to fill this position will create conflicts and is out of place. Not even the Son of God came to be served, but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many.

We understand then that even in the early church, these tensions were present, and the leaders and congregations worked to achieve the balance proposed by Christ for his church, so the church must review contemporary leadership styles under the microscope of the Scriptures and critically rethinking.

Jesus: humility and service

For Christ the fundamentals of leadership were marked by humility and service. This is how Jesus confronts the power structures of his time denouncing the passion to control hidden in them, proposing an alternative. The alternative policy proposed by Jesus is the creation of a new community modeled on the King-Servant. A community in which leadership is based on service, as "the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45).

As we have seen earlier, there were those in Jesus' inner circle, who considered the idea that the authority and power had to be given by appointment following the mores of society. The disciples, in secret, wanted to be a part of the leadership in the social structure of

the Kingdom of the Messiah, believing that this Kingdom would have the same characteristics as the kingdoms they were familiar with. Jesus will banish this way of thinking about power and authority. The Kingdom will have a different structure. The way to the throne, to glory, will change because now people get to sit on the throne through the serving.

It is in this context that Jesus uses the word "*diákonos*" not to designate ministries, but an attitude of openness to the needs of community members. The attitude of serving opposes the attitude of the person who wants to dominate; servants are in a dependent relationship, in humility and willingness they offer their lives to "minister" to their peers. Oswald Sanders states clearly:

> True greatness and true leadership is not achieved by reducing men to one's service but by giving oneself generously to serve them. And this is never achieved without a price ... The true spiritual leader cares infinitely more for the service rendered to God and his followers that the benefits and pleasures that can be drawn from life. He aims to give more to life than what they are taking away from it. [4]

For Christ, *diakonia* is identified with the breaking of bread, serving at the tables, caring for the poor, preaching, shepherding and guiding. We can say that every work in the community can be called *diakonia*. The leader is the *diakono* of the community. This lifestyle and way of exercising authority will bring opposition from the world. The twelve disciples, who are the authority for the community, should be servants whose lifestyle shows the example of the Kingdom. In this way for Jesus there was no conflict between authority and humility, authority and service; for him rather these confirm authority within the Christian community.

The challenge then for contemporary leadership clearly is to attempt to return to a more biblical model of leadership, with a needed review of the practice of leadership in the church. In this review, questions need to be asked regarding how can we reconvert the exercise of ministerial authority as an end in itself to a means of building up the church through service. How can we refocus the aims and objectives of Christian leadership from personal and local interests to attend to the vital and essential needs of the church and the accomplishment of the purposes of the Kingdom of God?

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[4] Sanders, J. Oswald. Liderazgo Espiritual. Editorial Portavoz. Grand Rapids, Michigan, E.U.A. 1995. Pag.13

James and the Jerusalem Council:
Leadership that adapts to paradigm shifts

Possibly, some of the most challenging aspects for Christian leadership are the paradigm shifts that occur in the life and work of the church in interaction with the context. Profound changes, both within the church and in the world and society, require leaders to make relevant decisions and take pertinent actions. The Scriptures present us with the fact that the early church was making its history amidst constant changes.

I would like to use the Jerusalem council as an example of this point. In the transition of the advance of the gospel towards the gentiles and the formation of Jewish-Gentile churches there was a need to produce a paradigm shift in order to structure the new community.

James emerged as the model of a special leader, who operated at a crucial time for the new developments. Known as "the Lord's brother", he was a leader with a rather low profile, but he played a fundamental role at that moment. Because of his ability to listen, build a consensus, to lead, to make decisions in the midst of conflict and evaluate evidence, he was able to play a cohesive role. He was a leader who declined to do only what everyone expected of him, daring to take his own position and become a channel for the expression of a group agreement.

Another important feature is the credibility conflict which James enjoyed in both sectors in which allowed him to become the bridge. And finally, he had the ability not only to propose a conciliatory agreement, but to give concrete counsel with necessary prudence, assuming the risks for pastoral care to those affected by the problem.

Faced with the abrupt social and cultural changes facing the church in the present century, we urgently need leadership willing to adapt and lead the church to find its identity and relevance in the context of ministry.

One of the perspectives that contemporary leadership must recover has to do with the purpose of the authority that Christ has delegated to ministers, that of building up the body of Christ (2 Corinthians 10:8). Amid realities such as moral relativism, hedonism, captivating religious pluralism and alienating globalization, the body of Christ needs to be guided and become aware of these realities so that those who have been called to this commendable work should understand this challenge. In this regard Gerald A. Arbuckle notes that:

> In organic cultures there are few rules and regulations, the emphasis is on
> innovation, creativity and a "feedback" evaluation, so that the organization can

continue to respond appropriately to a changing world. In organic cultures, leadership fosters an atmosphere of transformative participation in which people feel they can create and be supported by other members of the group. Decision making is fundamentally *proactive* rather than *reactive* or crisis management. This means that organic management is made up of "people who anticipate"; when they see that changes are going to happen, they make plans to adapt to them, recognizing the need to create and manage change, instead of just being passive agents. [5]

Power is defined as the ability to influence behavior, and authority is power legitimized and institutionalized. This raises the imperative of reflecting on how we are taking advantage of this for the good and health of the Church, and how we are using the gift of real authority to guard and guide the church to live within the God given parameters, and minister appropriately in the postmodern society.

Antioch: The exercise of corporate authority

The proper exercise of authority and power in leadership needs to have the backing of the church, so that to exercise Christian leadership and authority involves being submissive to the body of Christ, who in turn is subject to its Head.

The text I want to share is Acts 13:13-14. The Hispanic World Bible Commentary states that: "The imposition of hands indicated the recognition of three things: 1) The existing presence of a special gift or ministry; 2) a continuing intercessory prayer for the gift of the Holy Spirit; and 3) the willingness of both, the church and the ordained person, to accept the new responsibility." This was how Paul and Barnabas were sent to new mission fields with the authoritative backing of the church in Antioch. [6]

The Antiochian model, backed by the rest of the New Testament, suggests a divine purpose and direction for ministry. The authority is important because it claims the right to carry out the ministry to which one is called. Ministers who are leaders have a right, a legitimacy to accomplish the task that the Holy Spirit has put in front of them. The church concedes ministerial authority affirming the call and providing a place of service.

The purpose and direction of the minister come from God, but they take place in terms of human interaction. Both dimensions are included from which it follows that the leader has

[5] Gerald A. Arbuckle. Refundar la Iglesia: Disidencia y Liderazgo. Editorial Sal Terrae. Cantabria. España. 1998. Pags. 91-92
[6] Carro Daniel y Otros Editores. Comentario Bíblico Mundo Hispano, Tomo 18: Hechos. Editorial Mundo Hispano. El Paso, Texas. E.U.A. 1994. Pag.90.

"the power or right of a minister granted by the church for the purpose of fulfilling God's calling." In other words, the Church´s authority legitimizes the leadership enabling him/her to fulfill their mission.

In the face of the big institutional breakdowns that have occurred in the area of leadership and structure within the evangelical church, it is relevant to point to the need to take stock and review our ministry and its activities comparing them with the biblical challenge of recognizing, accepting and incorporating the importance of supporting and covering the church in the development of effective and healthy leadership.

Corinthians: Challenges intrinsic
to the exercise of power and authority in the church

At some point all leadership and authority are confronted in the very essence of their reason and praxis. The Scriptures put us face to face with the reality that divine authority is still included in this issue on a daily basis. That is why we must reflect on this double dimension of authority in leadership including, as we have already said, the exercise of authority, and on the other hand, the reaction to it.

The Corinthian church was possibly Paul's "thorn in the flesh". The perceptions that emerge from the letters, give the impression that the community response to his authority raised tensions in him. They weakened him, tempting him to "impose" military authority in the flesh, when divine intervention urged him to approach the situation differently.

How did the Apostle face this situation? The tone of Paul's letters, especially II Corinthians contains a variety of expressions. The false teachers in Corinth, shaped by the Greek culture at the time, had certain expectations of how a spiritual leader should be. They expected eloquent speakers with an attractive physical presence. The word weakness was not in their vocabulary. In their conception as spiritual "gurus", they believed that they had a hint of the "supernatural"; they declared that they had extraordinary mystical experiences and revelations that marked them out as special individuals. In the confrontation, his critics suggested that Paul was nothing more than a babbler, a non-impressive weakling who purporting to exercise authority in his letters but was really just a pushover. His passivity towards this, only confirmed their suspicions.

Paul`s appeal to the Corinthians in answer to their strong pressure had pure intentions (2 Corinthians 10:1). Paul prefers to address the issue from "tenderness and kindness" like

that of Christ. The Apostle wants to be identified with controlled strength of the incarnate Lord.

Facing opposition, do we want to win the argument, take way our opponents points or increase our reputation? It should be clarified that tenderness and kindness are not necessarily passive attitudes and that they stand out in the context of a humble attitude in leadership. From this perspective, sometimes the leader will need to speak from the front and act vigorously as Jesus Christ did and in extreme cases require church discipline in an attempt to correct situations that require it, as the apostle did. Loritts puts it this way:

> Being humble ... does not mean that the leader does not correct, rebuke, or if necessary fire someone. The leader with genuine humility and the authentic attitude of a servant does the right thing and does not live according to his own interests ... When those we serve refuse to act according to what God wants them to do, the choice is clear, and the best way to serve is to pass to another sphere of activity. It is not humility to refrain from doing what is difficult, but we must also do the correct thing. [7]

We understand then, that in the practice of authority we need to complement these doses of kindness and gentleness of Christ with the necessary energy required to maintain the health of the church.

In this respect, the contemporary scene presents us with nihilistic mentality that influences society and the church in postmodernity. Nihilism, which comes from Latin *nihil* (nothing) and *ismus* (doctrine, motion practice) is a philosophy of "attitudes", since it is not a strictly defined philosophical trend of denial of any principle, authority, and philosophical, religious, political or social dogma. Nihilism is a philosophical position which argues that the world, and especially human existence, objectively has no meaning, purpose, comprehensible truth, or essential value higher, so people do not need them.

In a subtle way, as culture has influenced the church leadership models, it has also made a dent in the Church of Christ with relation to the perspective of Church authorities. Somehow, nihilism has transfigured Christian leadership minimizing its importance and right delegated by God, and that as we all know, has led to struggles and internal divisions that disrupt and hinder, and even paralyze the mission of the church.

To have real authority, synchronism must be established between healthy authority and healthy subjection, so that the challenge which confronts us is how we face resistance to

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[7] Loritts, W. Crawford, Jr. Liderazgo perdurable. Editorial Portavoz. Grand Rapids, Michigan. E.U.A. 2011. Pag.130

the perspectives and decisions that concern us as leaders in the exercise of our functions and responsibilities.

Holiness as a framework for the exercise of healthy leadership

Ministerial authority, as we have said, is not imposed for it to be legitimate; somehow it needs to win, and in other words, it begins to express itself genuinely from the time that healthy relationships are built up within the interaction with the group.

We must deduce then, that the church adopts its leadership because of the quality of the leader in the interrelationship established. We need to speak about the vital subject of holiness in the exercise of authority in the church, as this influences substantially the relational dimensions of the Leader

I wish to clarify that the reference to holiness here will not be based on a biblical or theological analysis, but will be treated from the point of view of its implications for the practice of Christian leadership in any particular context.

The Apostle Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:16 that the plenary inspiration of Scripture serves the purpose of training the man of God in perfection, thoroughly preparing him to do good works, implicitly denoting the two dimensions involved in their vocation: character and conduct.

The Scriptures and especially the pastoral letters emphasize these aspects of the person of the leader when it comes to ministry. Here, we can also affirm that most of the requirements to be ministers relate to the character and conduct which a minister should have, rather than technical or intellectual capacities.

To become ministers, the aspirants should be blameless in character and in conduct, in the quality of their family and their relationship with others, who are to testify to their good conduct as a person. "Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. Now the overseer is to be above reproach…temperate, self-controlled, respectable…not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money… He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap" (1Timothy 3:1-7 NIV).

For God, coherence between these two dimensions of personality is essential, and as such, the issue of ministerial integrity as the foundation for ministerial authority becomes a very important aspect needed to be addressed.

The negative point of view can illustrate this in the case of the leader who loses authority when members perceive cracks in his character or unbecoming conduct and irresponsibility in the way he carries out his duties. While society is assimilating conduct which increasingly has moved away from biblical standards of ethical conduct, it becomes more important that ministers are challenged to support fully the proclamation of the values included in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Lamb refers to this when he says:

> When leaders at any level in which they work, stop living with integrity, 'the radioactive' rain is mortal. It poisons the community, destroys trust, devastates the unity and coherence of the mission, and, what is more serious, betrays the cause of the gospel of Christ and dishonors the God we serve. On the contrary, when Christian leaders practice what they declare, keep their promises and serve their community (in short, when they show us Jesus Christ), and then the Christian community strengthens and advances its mission. [8]

So, integrity, which is closely associated with the concept of holiness, is critical when the church adopts its leadership, since it establishes consistency between what a leader is and what he does in favor of the church's healthy life and mission.

Just as character is expressed through virtues, such as love and wisdom, the minister will find that to strengthen and build a personal character according to biblical principles, he should go to the Sanctifier and giver of virtue. He will need these virtues to exercise ministerial authority and influence in his leadership in an edifying manner: The Holy Spirit alone can produce fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-25) , which express not only good deeds, but are born in the very heart of the man or woman of God.

A leader that demonstrates the fruit of the Holy Spirit in his life also discovers that he can choose the alternatives for correct actions and responsibility for service, when guiding and leading the group in question. So, the authority of a leader is also based on ethics of conduct which everyone can see, which will be a determining factor in how much moral authority he has to exercise corporate authority.

Conclusions

The conception of contemporary Christian leadership has been permeated by a secular understanding taken from the cultural patterns of society. Ministers should be challenged to

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[8] Lamb, Jonathan. Integridad: Liderando Bajo La Mirada de Dios. Ediciones Certeza Unida. Buenos Aires, Argentina. 2010. Pag. 22.

revisit models of a more biblical perspective and the Christian values embodied in them. Jesus presents us with the style of leadership of the king-slave, a leadership model steeped in the minister's own influence, as he assumes a humble attitude and service to the church and the world.

Some New Testament ecclesiological models also provide essential features relevant to the exercise of ministerial authority. The challenges faced by the leadership in the Counsel of Jerusalem present a model of openness to adapt to cultural changes in order to develop an appropriate and contextual ministry. Antioch provides the basis for corporate backing of leadership from which mission and ministry can develop. Corinthians poses the need to integrate authority and subjection within the framework of humility and church discipline. Finally, it addresses the issue of holiness as the essence of effective and authoritative leadership.

In an attempt to build a model of leadership with a more biblical exercise of authority and power within the church, models of responsible leadership and values that are described in the Word of God are needed, so as not to fall into the adoption of inadequate secular structures which could delay or paralyze the mission and advance the Kingdom of God. On the other hand, the church is challenged to prepare leaders for change in the twenty-first century. Theological education needs to adopt the challenge of training ministers with keen insights into future realities, in order to carry our contextualized mission.

At the same time, a healthy environment for the development of authority will enable the church to establish rapport between the minister and the church leaders, giving rise to a dynamic duo of mutual support and submission for the development of the mission and building up the body of Christ.

Another important aspect to underpin in this conclusion is the fact that the church in its administrative practice should strengthen its perspective about biblical discipline, learning how to balance authority and reaction to it. It is healthy to readdress not only the foundations of church discipline, but also its practice for the good and health of the church and the vindication of a legitimate Christian authority.

Finally, holiness in the exercise of leadership is vital to the spiritual authority of leadership, and it requires leaders to deepen and live in this divine perspective, addressing the challenges of moral relativity in which we minister, enhancing the transformative essence of the gospel of Christ and glorifying our exalted God.

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