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FORMS OF LEADERSHIP IN THE NEAR REALM OF GOD: GOOD NEWS FOR PENITENT VISIONARIES FROM MARK'S GOSPEL

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In my experience, pastors casting visions unilaterally for their congregations can create conflict. Statistics suggest that vision casting by pastors, in spite of literature advocating them to do so, can lead to dissolution of the pastoral relationship. I examine the vision of the kingdom or realm of God cast by Jesus according to the gospel of Mark, specifically in Mark 8:22–10:52. From this vision, I attempt to identify three forms of leadership that I believe are implied by Jesus, those being selfless, hospitable, and empowering leadership. I compare these three forms to current leadership theory. Finally, I assess the identification of leadership with vision casting, and I conclude that Jesus' teaching in Mark on the realm of God does not lead to vision casting by pastors as a unilateral activity.

Are pastors and the congregations they serve helped or hindered by the pastors casting vision for their congregations? In 2002, I answered a call to provide visionary leadership to a congregation. Building upon the congregation's past and surrounding culture, I invited the staff and congregation into the goals, strategies, and consequences that the vision I cast entailed. By the summer of 2007, in spite of the realization of the vision cast, congregational conflict had erupted over it and other issues. By Christmas 2007, saddened and sick with pneumonia, for the peace of the congregation and my own sake, I felt I had little choice but to resign.

The failure of my ministry shook me with doubt as to my presuppositions for ministry. Specifically, my role in casting vision appeared to be the root of my difficulty.

This realization led me to reassess the question as to whether or not pastors should cast vision for congregations.

Kleinsasser addressed the writing strategy practiced by qualitative researchers in order for them to disentangle their personal biases from phenomena observed.¹ In this spirit I initiated this study on leadership forms in the kingdom or realm of God, as the latter is interpreted broadly within the Christian tradition. The study represented an anguished attempt to release pain, anger, and disappointment; and to redeem the failure, both for others caught in the same bind of vision casting and for me. As I hope the reader perceives, I wrote to address my own shortfalls rather than to blame the congregation for our mutual experience.

My experience and subsequent study, done in communion with scholars, colleagues, God, and my own conscience, convict me that pastors casting vision unilaterally for their congregations does not jibe well with the modesty identified with effective leadership,² or with other qualities associated with contemporary emerging leadership theory. Furthermore, I believe now that the unilateral casting of vision runs contrary to what Jesus, as found in the gospel of Mark, taught and exemplified behaviorally.

I. THE EQUATION OF VISION WITH LEADERSHIP

I suspect that current pastors and congregations accept as conventional wisdom that pastors require the ability to cast vision in order to lead their congregations competently. It is a quality that leaders can develop through contemplation.³ As an activity advocated in popular literature available to pastors, vision casting includes both the means and ends of church direction.⁴ Judicatory executives lament the lack of vision in pastors.⁵ But consider the following statistical report:

Where there is tension between pastors and lay leaders today, nearly 4 in 10 pastors see conflicting visions for the church as the greatest source of that tension. But this conflict was even more pronounced among pastors who were forced out—46% cite conflicting visions as the precipitating cause of their termination.⁶

¹ Audrey M. Kleinsasser, "Researchers, Reflexivity, and Good Data: Writing to Unlearn," *Theory Into Practice* 39 (2000): 155-162.

² Lucia M. Hamilton and Charlotte Knoche, "Modesty in Leadership: A Model of Level Five Leadership," *The International Journal of Servant-Leadership* 3 (2007): 139-176.

³ Leonard Doohan, "Servant Leadership and Reflection," *The International Journal of Servant-Leadership* 3 (2007): 281-301.

⁴ Rick Warren, "The Purpose-Driven Pastor: How Big Is Your Vision?," *Rick Warren's Ministry Toolbox*, #243, January 25, 2006, <http://www.pastors.com/RWMT/?ID=243>

⁵ Adair T. Lummis, "Research Report Series 4: Getting Pastors for Churches and Clergy for the Judicatory," *Hartford Institute for Religion Research*, <http://hrr.hartsem.edu/denom/Research%20Rpt.%204.doc>

⁶ J. C. LaRue, "Forced Exits: A Too-Common Ministry Hazard," *Your Church*, 42 (2006): Reasons for forced exit section, ¶1.

The LaRue study suggested that even if the vision is not problematic, the source of vision may lead to variation in leadership effectiveness.⁷

This begs a question: Does vision created and shared between leaders and followers increase the possibility of vision acceptance? A comparative quantitative analysis of formal and informal leadership by Pielstick, in which these categories were defined primarily by the presence or absence of positional authority, found informal leadership to be more effective. As Pielstick stated it, the study demonstrated that:

While both formal and informal leaders develop shared visions, these initial data suggest informal leaders are more likely to include a moral and inspiring purpose, provide for the common good, and create meaning. It appears that the shared vision of informal leaders is more likely to be based on shared needs, values and beliefs than the vision of formal leaders.⁸

One reason offered by Pielstick for this difference lies in the use by informal leaders of listening and empathetic understanding in the context of interactive dialogue.⁹

In another study incorporating qualitative and quantitative methods, what is termed a bi-cycle model for leading organizational change emphasized the use of participative and transactional leadership (the two cycles) to empower vision. The use of participative leadership methods led to the discovery of visions, embedded latently in the organization. These visions were articulated by leadership, and then negotiated with followers in the mutuality of transactional leadership.¹⁰

Shared vision found mention also in one pastor's exploration of leadership theory: "Shared vision clearly arises from and expresses beliefs that are deeply and widely held."¹¹ Shared vision emerges gradually and constitutes a goal for ministry, also according to popular literature available to pastors.¹²

It appears that vision, as a product of a pastor's unilateral perspective, is less desirable than the shared vision that arises from mutual negotiation efforts by leader and followers. But is shared vision as a solely human phenomenon sufficient for the church? In the context of Christian community, as it is based on the Lordship of Christ and informed by the Bible, Jesus shares his own vision for the church with his disciples. Does Jesus' vision of the realm of God circumscribe the forms of pastoral and visionary leadership found in the church, and if so, how might these forms look in the contemporary ecclesiastical context?

⁷ Ibid., Reasons for forced exit section, ¶1.

⁸ C. Dean Pielstick, "Formal vs. Informal Leading: A Comparative Analysis," *Journal of Leadership Studies* 7 (2000): 111.

⁹ Ibid., 111.

¹⁰ Charles Manz, David Bastien, and Todd Hostager, "Executive Leadership During Organizational Change: A Bi-Cycle Model," *Human Resource Planning* 14 (1991): 275-288.

¹¹ Carl C. Green, "Leadership Theory of a Protestant Minister," *Journal of Leadership Studies* 8 (2001): 77-95.

¹² Carol H. Merritt, *Tribal Church: Ministering to the Missing Generation* (Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2007).

II. THE VISION OF THE REALM OF GOD

The background for the aforementioned citations is leadership in human institutions. For pastors and congregations, this means the church as bound by membership, denominational affiliation, sacred orders, worship, programs, missions, and the like. But in the opening chapter of her text on the realm of God, theologian Harkness observed this equation: "Jesus preached the kingdom of God. We preach Jesus. But can we preach Jesus or even understand him without understanding God's kingly rule, the central note in all his preaching?"¹³ In his evaluation of N. T. Wright's New Testament theology, Hays stated:

Finally, Wright's portrayal of Jesus performs a signal service for New Testament ethics by emphasizing Jesus' agenda of building a community that will put his vision of the kingdom of God into practice. The community of Jesus' followers is to be characterized by a strong sense of communal life; they are to forgive, to share their goods, to reach across ethnic and national boundaries and, of course, to live as a non-violent community. This vision cannot be carried out by isolated individuals seeking to cultivate a private spirituality; instead, all these practices are essentially relational.¹⁴

These quotations suggest that the ecclesiastical context for pastoral or any church leadership extends to the boundaries of the realm of God proclaimed by Jesus. Jesus' vision of this realm appears to transcend, exceed, and precede the establishment of the church's boundaries. The vision of the realm of God may be viewed as normative for all church functioning, including pastoral leadership.

Three key questions arise: What does Jesus' vision of the realm of God mean for forms of leadership in the church? How does the leadership defined by the realm of God compare to the unilateral visionary leadership or the shared visionary leadership espoused in the popular contemporary literature readily available to pastors? How does realm of God leadership connect to contemporary leadership theory? As I seek my own answers to these questions, I invite the reader to evaluate the validity and reliability of my conclusions. Perhaps I can spare his or her ministry and congregation the trauma that my congregation and I endured.

III. MARK'S GOSPEL, THE REALM OF GOD, AND LEADERSHIP

To what resource can pastors turn to find best expressed the forms of leadership in the realm of God? In my opinion, the equation espoused by Harkness above¹⁵ finds its clearest articulation in the gospel of Mark. Of the four canonical narratives about Jesus, Mark alone self-describes as a gospel (1:1).¹⁶ In translation, Mark announces in

¹³ Georgia Harkness, *Understanding the Kingdom of God* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), 17.

¹⁴ R. B. Hays, "Victory Over Violence: The Significance of N. T. Wright's Jesus for New Testament Ethics," in *Jesus & the Restoration of Israel: A Critical Assessment of N. T. Wright's Jesus and the Victory of God*, ed. C. C. Newman (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity, 1999), 153-154.

¹⁵ Harkness, *Understanding the Kingdom*, 17.

¹⁶ New Revised Standard Version is used in this paper.

the opening of his narrative that he is sharing “the good news of Jesus Christ” (1:1). John the Baptist prepared “the way” (1:3) for the authoritative core of the gospel, Jesus Christ. Jesus proclaimed that “the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near” (1:14, 15).

What does this proclamation mean for the anticipated praxis of the disciples, including leadership praxis, as they live as intentional citizens of the realm of God? The answer is believed to be found in the middle three chapters of Mark’s gospel. Depending on the commentator, the Markan scripture passage (pericope) describing discipleship praxis is identified as 8:22-10:52¹⁷ or 8:27-10:52.¹⁸ Exegetically, it makes some sense that the section on suffering and discipleship should be sandwiched between two stories of Jesus healing the blind.¹⁹ In Mark’s gospel, Peter’s confession, followed by his expression of profound misunderstanding of his confession, signals Peter’s initial blindness to the meaning of Jesus’ messianic status and the implications of following the messiah (8:29-33). Consistent with this metaphorical story, the next few chapters see Jesus opening gradually the eyes of the disciples to the true content of praxis in the realm of God.

Arguably, the entire gospel of Mark contributes an understanding to the nature of the human phenomenon of leadership as informed by the realm of God. Searching for insight about realm of God leadership as a sub-category of discipleship, that is, within 8:22-10:52, I believe makes sense as a leap of faith. Leadership in the realm of God takes on the character of a learned discipline and it reflects a discipleship orientation. Granted this leap of faith, three selections from 8:22-10:52 in particular suggest leadership lessons that might connect to contemporary leadership theory: 8:31-37, 9:30-35, and 10:32-45. Immediately surrounding these texts nest additional ones that suggest illustrative expansions on the aforementioned three. My own outline of the entire pericope of Mark 8:22-10:52, in which these texts rest, lies below:

Introduction: Gradual healing of blind man at Bethsaida (8:22-26)

Theme: Peter’s confession of Jesus as messiah as revelatory (8:27-30)

- I. First teaching on discipleship and leadership (8:31-9:29)
 - A. Son of man must die (8:31)
 - B. Rejection of the teaching (8:32-33) on the basis of clinging to self
 - C. General principle (8:34-37)—losing and finding self
 - D. Resistance to teaching (8:38)
 - E. The promise of the Kingdom (9:1-29)
 1. The transfiguration as fulfillment—the dialogue (9:1-8)

¹⁷ Lamar Williamson, “Mark,” in *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, eds. James. L. Mays, Patrick D. Miller, and Paul J. Achtemeier (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1983), 147-200.

¹⁸ Pheme Perkins, *The Gospel of Mark: Introduction, Commentary, and Reflections*, in *The New Interpreter’s Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes*, eds. Leander Keck et al. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), 8:621-656.

¹⁹ Williamson, “Mark,” 147-200.

2. Teaching on Elijah (9:9-13)—reinforcement of selflessness
3. Exorcism of the demon from the boy and conflict with the teachers of the law, the crowd, the disciples, and the father (9:14-29)
- II. Second teaching on discipleship and leadership (9:30-10:31)
 - A. Son of man must die (9:30-31)
 - B. Rejection of the teaching (9:32-34) on the basis of personal prestige
 - C. General principle (9:35)—practicing hospitality
 - D. Teachings on treating others as included and significant (9:36- 10:31)
 1. Welcoming children (9:36, 37)
 2. A stranger/colleague in ministry (9:38-41)
 3. Warning about placing impediments to faith (9:42-50)
 4. Refraining from causing others to be excluded from community (10:1-31)
 - a. Divorcing wife (10:1-12)
 - b. Welcoming children (10:13-16)
 - c. Solidarity with the poor (10:17-31)
- III. Third teaching on discipleship and leadership (10:32-45)
 - A. Son of man must die (10:32-34)
 - B. Rejection of the teaching (10:35-41) on the basis of power
 - C. General principle (10:42-45)—empowering others

Conclusion: Immediate healing of Bartimaeus's blindness as act of empowerment and symbol of revelation (10:46-52)

According to this outline, Mark presents Jesus offering three teachings on discipleship and leadership. Three times Jesus warns of his impending death, the disciples reveal their lack of understanding, and Jesus states a general principle that is elaborated by subsequent interactions. Only after the third statement of principle might the reader conclude that resistance to Jesus' teaching subsides, this conclusion based on the immediate healing of Bartimaeus. The healing suggests metaphorically that the teaching is completed and accepted, readying the disciples for events in Jerusalem. Hoping that the outline represents the organization of the pericope fairly, I characterize the three forms of leadership arising from discipleship as selfless leadership (8:31-9:29), hospitable leadership (9:30-10:31), and empowering leadership (10:32-45).

IV. JESUS' TEACHINGS AND CONTEMPORARY THEORY: INTRODUCTION

I believe, as this paper will suggest, that the entire notion of the realm of God signifies open-ended fluidity. This leads me to the conclusion that Jesus' three leadership forms, while distinct, flow into and amplify one another and should not be treated as exclusive schools or bodies of theory. Does this discovery find symmetry with contemporary leadership thinking? The bi-cycle model presented two interactive models

of leadership.²⁰ Anne Kezar contended that the move from hierarchical definitions of leadership to more participatory ones means that multiple leadership belief systems held by organization members come into play.²¹ In her article on servant leadership, Geany introduced an additional leadership metaphor, the steward leader, which complements the metaphor of the servant leader.²² On the basis of these citations of precedence, I submit humbly that multiple models of leadership can find joint root in an understanding of the realm of God.

V. JESUS' TEACHINGS AND CONTEMPORARY THEORY: EXPLORATION

I label above the three forms of leadership in the realm of God, offered by Mark's Jesus, as selfless, hospitable, and empowering. I believe contemporary leadership theory gives helpful elaboration to these three forms. Furthermore, I believe the teachings of Jesus offer possible nuances to this same body of theory.

Selfless Leadership

According to Mark, after Peter's confession that Jesus is the messiah, Jesus explains "that the Son of Man must suffer many things" (8:31). Peter rebukes Jesus, apparently for Jesus' assessment of the outcome of his messianic mission. It violates Peter's own convictional universe,²³ and in this regard he serves as a representational figure for all those who insist on perceiving the messiah and the realm of God in a triumphal manner.²⁴ Jesus lays down, for both the disciples and the crowd, the first principle of discipleship and leadership to be examined:

If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? (8:34-37)

The Christian tradition of practiced self-denial as a solitary spiritual pursuit finds its basis in this and similar texts. As Kempis says:

For our worthiness, and the proficiency of our spiritual estate consisteth . . . in thoroughly enduring great afflictions and tribulations. . . . For both the disciples that followed Him, and also all who desire to follow Him, He plainly exhorteth to

²⁰ Manz, Bastien, and Hostager, "Executive Leadership During Organizational Change," 275-288.

²¹ Adrianna Kezar, "Reconstructing Static Images of Leadership: An Application of Positionality Theory," *Journal of Leadership Studies* 8 (2002): 94-110.

²² M. Geany, "Servant and Steward: The Steward Leader Model for Unleashing Human Potential," *The International Journal of Servant-Leadership* 4 (2007): 331-348.

²³ Perkins, *The Gospel of Mark*, 624; Williamson, "Mark," 153.

²⁴ Brian K. Blount, *Go Preach: Mark's Kingdom Message and the Black Church Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), 132.

the bearing of the Cross, and saith, "If any will come after Me, let him to deny himself, and take up his Cross, and follow me."²⁵

Does Mark 8:34-37 allow for a less individualistic and perhaps less mortifying interpretation than offered by Kempis, one that leans toward human interaction? I believe that it does. In Mark 9:1, Jesus promises that there will be some who will not taste death before experiencing the realm of God. Immediately thereafter the disciples see him transfigured suddenly and in dialogue with Moses and Elijah (9:2-8). Mark's gospel does not tell us the nature of the dialogue. It appears open-ended in light of Peter's interruption. But the gospel does tell us that God rejects the attempts of Peter, James, and John to congeal the dialogue into cultic activity. Rather than enshrining the interaction of law and prophets, God instructs the disciples to continue the dialogue with Jesus as they travel down the mountain. The structure of the text, that is, promise (9:1) and fulfillment (9:2-8), suggests that in open-ended dialogue that includes the Christ, through whom the law and prophets find interpretation and expression, lies the church's foundational experience of the realm of God. But this experience is quickly followed by other conversations and praxis that provide a foil to the mountaintop experience.

After Jesus' brief discourse on Elijah, Jesus then leads his disciples into another conversation (9:14-29). On this occasion the disciples and Jesus face a crowd, hostile religious authorities, a distraught father, and a demon. Hardened attitudes and diminished faith make this conversation a taste of hell. Later, once the demon is dismissed, the disciples ask Jesus how they might escape embroilment in such controversies. He responds that praxis requires prayer (9:29), the latter being conversation with God.

Defining the realm of God as based in dialogue between Jesus' disciples, and with Jesus himself, begs some deliberation of the myriad ways that individuals have interpreted the realm of God image. These range from Tolstoy's insistence on individual conversion to social truth, nonviolence and justice,²⁶ to the realm's connection to Christian mystic experience,²⁷ to an appreciation of the inherently tension-creating use of the image by Jesus,²⁸ to apocalyptic warning,²⁹ to name a few examples. The reason for this diversity may be best expressed by Jewish scholar Geza Vermes:

In retrospect, it is hardly necessary to stress that Jesus nowhere distinctly spells out his concept of "kingdom"; even in the metaphorical language of the parables his approach is oblique and his outline hazy. The Kingdom of God is a mystery attainable only with human cooperation.³⁰

I believe that Mark's gospel emphasizes openness to human agency embedded in the realm of God. In Mark, Jesus self-refers frequently as the Son of Man, a

²⁵ Thomas A. Kempis, *Of the Imitation of Christ* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker House, 1973), 76.

²⁶ Leo Tolstoy, *The Kingdom of God is Within You*, trans. Constance Garnett (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2006; Orig. pub. 1894).

²⁷ Tom Chetwynd, *Zen and the Kingdom of Heaven* (Boston: Wisdom, 2001).

²⁸ Thomas Keating, *The Kingdom of God is Like . . .* (New York: Crossroad, 1993).

²⁹ Emily Griesinger, "The Shape of Things to Come: Toward an Eschatology of Literature," *Christianity and Literature* 53 (2004): 203-231.

³⁰ Geza Vermes, *The Religion of Jesus the Jew* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993), 146.

messianic title implying both humanity and human generation.³¹ The realm of God both emerges through and activates human interactions.³² Even the vision of the resurrected Jesus in the original text of Mark, does not come to full expression unless the disciples travel to it (16:1-8) and proclaim it.³³ Perhaps this emphasis on human agency expresses the nature of vision, that is, it requires interaction between the divine and human. This reliance on human agency opens the question as to how to understand humans as acting selves.

If in Mark's gospel the foundational experience of the realm of God (9:1-8) is represented as the disciples's dialogical interaction with Jesus Christ and one another in the act of interpreting the law and the prophets, then perhaps the denial of self can be recast as something other than individual self-mortification. Rather, the calling may be to recognize that the self is a momentary, emerging, alterable being that arises through the dynamics of dialogical interaction with the divine and human Other. Griffin, basing his thought mainly on George Herbert Mead but calling upon brain research, spoke of the self in self-organizing interactions. He argued against the existence of a fixed, isolated self in favor of a responsible one "emerging in social interaction, forming and being formed by that social interaction."³⁴ Buddhist psychology contends that the fixed, isolated self is illusory and results from psychic pain and resistance.³⁵ Insistence on the fixed, solitary self leads to conflict and loss of communication.³⁶ If the sense of self can be suspended, however, communication can occur directly without the distortions created by a defended self. Release of self leads to communication that can create something new altogether.³⁷ Forgiveness that allows for dialogue, one that produces world understanding and positive change across disciplines, also promotes an understanding of self in relation to others.³⁸ I might posit that if forgiveness and reconciliation relate intrinsically to dialogue, and they imply the willingness to change through growth in relationship, then these healing interactions between persons may run counter to a too-human defense of a fixed, isolated definition of self.

I suggest that entering into dialogue with Jesus Christ and other disciples requires the suspension of a fixed, isolated self so as to enter into a new relational complex shared with one Lord and the larger community (Eph 4:5). We might hypothesize that within this participatory relational complex, Christ functions analogically as a partnering strange attractor who brings new order to the chaos of human

³¹ For example, see Mark 10:45.

³² Vermes, *The Religion of Jesus*, 146.

³³ Williamson, "Mark," 286.

³⁴ Douglas Griffin, *The Emergence of Leadership: Linking Self-Organization and Ethics* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 142.

³⁵ Mark Epstein, *Thoughts Without A Thinker* (New York: BasicBooks, 1995).

³⁶ Kenneth J. Gergen, Sheila McNamee, and F. J. Barrett, "Toward Transformative Dialogue," *International Journal of Leadership Studies* 24 (2001): 679-707.

³⁷ David Bohm, *On Dialogue* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

³⁸ Shann R. Ferch and Matthew M. Mitchell, "Intentional Forgiveness in Relational Leadership: A Technique for Enhancing Effective Leadership," *Journal of Leadership Studies* 7 (2001): 70-83.

relationships, in the same way that in chaotic nonlinear dynamical systems order emerges due to physical strange attractors.³⁹

What does this definition of self, as one shaped by emergent interactions between people and the Risen Christ, mean for the classical expression of the Lordship of Christ and the formation of a congregation? Griffin used language that suggests new understanding: "In other words, an individual, or a group of individuals, powerful or otherwise, can make gestures of great importance but the responses called forth will emerge in local situations in the living present where an organization's future is perpetually being constructed."⁴⁰ On this basis, perhaps lordship may be qualified as interactive, participative, and mutually constructive of the future with freely engaged humans.

I propose that selfless leadership in God's realm creates opportunities for dialogue, teaches the nature of dialogue as a self-suspending activity,⁴¹ and introduces the mechanisms by which Christ communes dialogically with gatherings of persons according to church tradition. On this list of mechanisms are the study of scriptures, participating in the worshipping community, and interaction with the poor, as examples. Through all these strategies emerge the local, present interactions in which people share with Christ in the construction of an envisioned future. While the pastor shares in this construction with people, I conclude personally that a unilaterally imposed pastoral vision contradicts notionally the emergence of vision as a shared enterprise.

Hospitable Leadership

Another way of expressing my conclusion above is that, from my perspective, the pastor must play host to emergent possibilities opened through dialogical interactions between Lord and people. In recent decades scholars have emphasized hospitality⁴² as a non-negotiable core value in the Palestinian culture of Jesus' day.⁴³ According to Mark, the disciples's competitive conversation about personal greatness leads Jesus to teach that "if anyone wants to be first he must be the very last, and the servant of all" (9:35). Jesus then places a child in their midst. "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me," Jesus asserts (9:36-37). How does this ethic of welcoming hospitality relate to greatness? Greatness measured as hospitality recognizes the vulnerability of others, even the least, and provides for them even at

³⁹ Margaret Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1999), 115-134.

⁴⁰ Griffin, *The Emergence of Leadership*, 173.

⁴¹ Bohm, *On Dialogue*, 83-95.

⁴² Hershey H. Friedman and Mitchell Langbert, "Abraham as a Transformational Leader," *Journal of Leadership Studies* 7 (2000): 88-95.

⁴³ G. T. Byamungu, "Grace as Subversive Surprise: A Reading of Psalm 130 and Luke 19:1-10," *The Ecumenical Review* 56 (2004): 334-341.

great inconvenience according to Luke's gospel (Lk 11:2-8). By implication great leadership embraces inclusively the presence, participation, and gifts of the least.

Jesus continues by admonishing the disciples to accept the ministry of another exorcist who calls on the name of Jesus. Jesus tells them that any who do ministry in Jesus' name will be rewarded. Those who diminish the gifts of others and drive them out of the faith community will find themselves cut off. Jesus ends with an exhortation to live peaceably with diverse gifts (9:38-50). Jesus extends this inclusive vision by speaking of welcome to those perceived culturally to have no value, that is, divorced women, children, the poor, and the apostles (10:1-31). While the contemporary church may struggle over the limits of hospitality, such as welcoming evil, Jesus focuses chiefly on pushing against the culturally exclusive boundaries of his day that denigrate the good. Hence, Jesus' teaching focuses attention on finding good in all persons and welcoming this good into community as made incarnate in persons.

Appreciative inquiry, as a contemporary strategy for leadership, exhibits similarities to hospitable leadership.⁴⁴ Appreciative inquiry insists on seeing the beauty in all circumstances and people, and using beauty observed as the basis for building a new and better future.⁴⁵ Similarly, magis leadership emphasizes discerning and choosing the best option, the "more," among alternative actions in order to achieve the greatest good. It includes seeking and discovering the greatest good already lying in circumstances, people, and organizations. To reach wholeness, individuals and organizations must connect to their sundry parts, even those parts previously discounted.⁴⁶

It feels to me that any distinction between appreciative inquiry and magis leadership, and hospitable leadership, lies in nuance. From my perspective, hospitable leadership grants the presuppositions of appreciative inquiry and magis leadership, and then presses against the farthest ecumenical borders in order to affirm the value and gifts of all people, especially those persons previously excluded. Because as an activity it excludes others, my conviction is that unilateral vision casting by the pastor finds no support in hospitable leadership.

Empowering Leadership

How does the inclusivity of hospitable leadership in the realm of God relate to the conditionality of unequal power relations, that is, to those power relations associated with hierarchical institutions such as the church that can feel so unwelcoming? Jesus' final teaching on discipleship and leadership espouses servanthood. In Mark 10:42-45, Jesus frames it this way:

⁴⁴ D. L. Cooperrider and S. Srivastva, "Appreciative Inquiry in Organizational Life," *Research in Organizational Change and Development*, 1 (1987): 129-169 <http://www.appreciative-inquiry.org>

⁴⁵ Gail Johnson and William Leavitt, "Building on Success: Transforming Organizations Through An Appreciative Inquiry," *Public Personnel Management* 30 (2001): 129.

⁴⁶ Karen Norum, "Toward An Active Ontology of the Heart Through Appreciative Inquiry and Servant-Leadership," *The International Journal of Servant-Leadership* 2 (2006): 455-482.

⁴² You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ⁴³ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ⁴⁴ and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. ⁴⁵ For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

The Greek root for the words “servant” and “serve” implies providing support to table fellowship, suggesting both the work of a waiter and the liturgy spoken by a priest presiding over the sacramental table.⁴⁷ Servants empower participants to obtain sustenance, but they also provide linguistic and physical boundaries around hospitality. They serve with authority.

Additional key wording in this text concerns a life given as a ransom. The expression possesses a secular origin. Slaves, prisoners of war, and criminals could have their freedom purchased, a process well-translated as redemption. Jesus frames his ministry as an exchange of his life for the liberation of many, with the possible implication being all. The Bible describes the outcome of redemption for the redeemed in diverse ways, including receiving a new, refreshing form of servitude (Mt 11:28-30) and the freedom to serve in love (Gal 5:13-14).⁴⁸ This explains my election to call this leadership orientation empowerment rather than liberation. It appears to me that empowerment implies, for the redeemed, choice in participation but not the absence of a calling and an obligation to serve. Jesus contrasts the servanthood exercised by his disciples with the practice of the Gentiles who dominate their subordinates. By corollary, Jesus urges realm of God leaders to use their authority to empower others for service rather than to dominate them. Speaking to this distinction, Greenleaf posed these questions to leaders:

Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And what is the effect on the least privileged of society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived?⁴⁹

The experience of my last pastorate raised a serious challenge to Greenleaf: Can servant leadership function authentically in all organizations? One author wondered if servant leadership practiced within a structure of overt command such as found in business doesn't create a confusing bi-polar organizational culture.⁵⁰ In a congregational setting, my experience lies in the antithetical situation. Often congregations presume behavior explained with language reminiscent of servant leadership, yet they can struggle against a notion of leadership that involves task

⁴⁷ Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1978), 3: 544-551.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 177-200.

⁴⁹ Robert Greenleaf, *Servant-Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 13-14.

⁵⁰ Deborah Eicher-Catt, “The Myth of Servant-Leadership: A Feminist Perspective,” *Women and Language* 28 (2005): 17-25.

orientation, mission goals, and accountability. Nevertheless, I believe that a vision arising from any source needs these organizational components for successful implementation. In my opinion, Mark's Jesus creates the dilemma as to how leaders exercise oversight, that is, with the presumption of task orientation, mission goals, and accountability, yet without reliance on the dominance implied by hierarchical position.

A key ingredient to unraveling this dilemma in Jesus' teaching may be his presumption of covenant based in his Jewish context. Whereas contracts commit people to one another voluntarily and temporarily for task performance and then end, Anderson explained that covenants can be initiated as voluntary but then they seal people to God and to one another throughout changes in circumstances. In general terms, arising as they do in the Hebrew Scriptures and yet preceding them historically, covenants do not preclude unequal power held by the covenantal partners. Indeed, the initiation of covenant by one partner begins often with a powerful act of salvation for the other, with the other in turn being gratefully responsive to the saving partner. Nevertheless, all partners are bound by mutual obligations which, when fulfilled, represent a type of love. Due to the ephemeral quality of gratitude, covenants require regular remembrance of the saving narrative and renewal through recommitment to a shared future.⁵¹ In covenants, commitment to relationships weighs as heavily as outcomes. Furthermore, covenants carry the presumption of permanence.⁵² Greenleaf came close to the language of covenant:

A new moral principle is emerging which holds that the only authority deserving one's allegiance is that which is freely and knowingly granted by the led to the leader in response to, and in proportion to, the clearly evident servant stature of the leader. Those who choose to follow this principle will not casually accept the authority of existing institutions. Rather, they will freely respond only to individuals who are chosen as leaders because they are proven and trusted as servants.⁵³

Based on the notion of covenant, we might frame empowering leadership as a corollary of servant leadership in this manner. The leader possesses the authority to commit freely to serve and empower others. These others respond by using their freedom to commit to serve and empower others as well. Whatever unequal power relationships exist prior to the creation of the covenant, the covenant itself modifies these relationships. Within the context of committed, lasting relationships shared tasks are performed and leadership strives to mitigate implied unequal positional authority, that is, through the active empowerment of those once regarded as mere subordinates. Francovich said that however we "describe the general position of the servant-leader, servant-leadership nonetheless remains a fundamentally populist or bottom-up

⁵¹ Bernhard Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, 5th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2006).

⁵² Joann Spillman, "The Image of Covenant in Christian Understandings of Judaism," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 35 (1998): 63–84.

⁵³ Greenleaf, *Servant-Leadership*, 10.

approach.”⁵⁴ These citations suggest that pastors committed to empowering leadership should view vision casting as a means to empower others to share their own diverse visions.

VI. CONCLUSION

This study addressed three key questions. First, what does Jesus’ vision of the realm of God mean for leadership in the church? A warning surfaces: Vision casting toward the end of setting and inspiring church direction constitutes an exercise of power. Akin to other professionals, pastors should heed the exhortation that character development limits the use of unilateral power.⁵⁵ This warning leads to the second question: How does the leadership defined by the realm of God, as expressed by Jesus according to the gospel of Mark, compare to the unilateral visionary leadership or the shared visionary leadership espoused in the popular contemporary literature available to pastors? In my opinion, none of the three leadership forms advocated by Mark’s Jesus permit the unilateral imposition of the pastor’s vision. Jesus’ vision of the realm of God found in Mark’s gospel, specifically in 8:22–10:52, allows only for shared vision creation, but neither solely among church members nor even as a strictly human phenomenon. Vision creation is accomplished dialogically with Christ and other people, in a manner hospitable to divergent perspectives and persons, with the goal of eliciting vision through empowerment within a covenant rather than through dominance. Third, how does realm of God leadership identified in Mark connect to contemporary leadership theory? My analysis suggests rather than exhausts. Parallels can be drawn between selfless leadership and theory on self-adaptive interactions and dialogue. In particular, I believe that the surrender of self commanded by Jesus makes sense as a prerequisite for leadership once lifted out of its medieval, pietistic interpretation. Similarly, hospitable leadership and the positive valuation it gives to the least of our brothers and sisters (Mt 25:31-40) appear to be an expression of appreciative inquiry and magis leadership. Finally, empowering leadership makes sense to me within a covenantal context as an expression of servant leadership, focused as it is on both persons and task.

⁵⁴ Chris Francovich, “Book Review: Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations,” *The International Journal of Leadership Studies* 4 (2008): 373-378.

⁵⁵ Ray Blunt, “Leadership in the Crucible: The Paradox of Character and Power,” *The Public Manager* 32 (2003): 35-39.

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