TOWARD A RESTORATIONIST THEOLOGY OF LEADERSHIP: ELDERSHIP IMPLICATIONS

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For several decades, Restoration studies have noted deficiencies in the treatment of the theology of leadership and of practical ecclesiology. This paper responds to the lack of research linking ecclesiology to organizational design and to the theology of leadership in the Church of Christ tradition by building upon the ecclesiological framework composed of theological tradition, church metaphor, worldview, and organizational leadership perspectives. Elder role and congregational structure are considered in light of these perspectives, showing the ecclesiological framework as a broad scale and functional approach to these issues. This paper concludes that democratic congregationalist and corporal congregationalist church structures are most in line with Church of Christ theological emphases. Elder function is collocated within these structures as pastoral leadership, emphasizing the spiritual development of both individual members and the local body.

Two decades after John Wilson's diagnosis that Churches of Christ suffered from both an identity and a leadership crisis,[1] little scholarship has offered a response to either the question of a practical doctrine of the church or the need for a theology of leadership. Although, as indicated by Thomas Olbricht, Ferguson and Shelly and Harris have made contributions to the Church of Christ's ecclesiological field, there is no

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[1] John F. Wilson, "Saints, Shepherds, Preachers, Scholars: Leadership Crisis in Churches of Christ," *Restoration Quarterly* 34 (1992): 129-134.

strong linkage from theology to ecclesiology and from ecclesiology to leadership.[2] Likewise, scholarly focus on ecclesiological leadership is limited to a handful of works.[3]

The concern over leadership issues in our churches has been said by James Thompson to underline an "uncertainty and controversy over ministerial role models and the desire for the contemporary church to find appropriate paradigms in the New Testament."[4] According to Thompson, many of our ministry questions are not issues that the New Testament even sought to address as the New Testament does not offer a singular view of ministry. This conclusion must be understood according to Restoration interpretation, particularly that of the primary inquiry through the search for Biblical pattern or example.[5] By New Testament paradigm, Thompson refers to a clear example or pattern of leadership in New Testament practice. This methodological limitation and its fruit thus present a watershed: Does the apparent silence of the scripture justify a pragmatic approach to leadership or should theological reflection and a more systematic theology of the church and leadership direct our inquiries?

In the instance of pragmatic methodology, the best case scenario was Joseph Crisp's approach.[6] Crisp based his study on three tenets: (1) some principles of New Testament theology, (2) Restoration conception of ministry, and (3) the actual practice of ministry. Although the New Testament concepts addressed may be relevant and even necessary to a philosophy of ministry, they are not sufficient and are in no way systematic. Crisp found that in Church of Christ ministers, the focus on preaching was the only clear binding principle and subsequently offered it as the organizing principle for a Church of Christ theology of leadership. This can at best be considered a bottom-up approach, attempting to fill the gaps in a theology of leadership by what ministers actually do. As such, it situates itself among the pragmatic approaches to leadership and ministry.

A competing approach to a theology of leadership is based on systematic theological reflection. As Wilson perhaps unintentionally suggested, theology of leadership is at least influenced if not determined by ecclesiology.[7] Other theologies of leadership and ministry, such as that of McClendon, have consequently demonstrated the strong connection between ecclesiology and theology of leadership.[8] A top-down approach should thus firmly and systematically root the theology of leadership and ministry in ecclesiology.

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[2] Thomas H. Olbricht, "The Theology of the Church in Churches of Christ," *Restoration Quarterly* 50 (2008): 34.

[3] Most significant are Willis's discussion of elder authority, Berry's treatment of a Pauline leadership model, and Crisp's description of the practiced philosophy of ministry.

[4] James W. Thompson, "Ministry in the New Testament," *Restoration Quarterly* 27 (1984): 143.

[5] A. C. Smith, "Searching for the Hidden Church: William Jones and the Common Roots of Landmarkist and Restorationist Ecclesiology," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 36 (2009): 421-431.

[6] Joseph Crisp, "Toward a Theology of Ministry for Churches of Christ," *Restoration Quarterly* 35 (1993): 9-19.

[7] Wilson, "Saints, Shepherds, Preachers, Scholars," 129.

[8] James William McClendon Jr., *Doctrine: Systematic Theology,* vol. 2 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994).

I have elsewhere[9] proposed an ecclesiological framework, based on Mannion's, Olbricht's, and O'Meara's work.[10] This framework, in linking practical ecclesiology to systematic theology, considers the perspectives of: (1) church image or metaphor, (2) our theological tradition, (3) worldview, and (4) behavioral sciences. The framework allows a broader study of ecclesiogical issues in relationship to a widespread array of theological constructs. The expansion of this framework to the theology of leadership must then include two subsequent elements: organizational design (a sub-element of ecclesiology known as second-order ecclesiology) and a theology of leadership. In this way, theological reflection, rather than pragmatism, may inform our theology of leadership. This paper adopts this framework to draw some elements of a theology of leadership relevant to a particular leadership issue: the role of elders in Churches of Christ.

I. ELDER ROLE: A TEST CASE

According to Everett Ferguson, scriptural information regarding elder duties do not derive from New Testament example, but from the names, qualifications, and instructions given them.[11] This approach is in many ways traditional, echoing Restoration tradition and previous works such as Ferguson and Roberts's articles,[12] along with Cogdill's *The New Testament Church* and Brownlow's *Why I Am a Member of the Church of Christ*. Although Ferguson's approach is similar to others, it is notably more advanced as it roots the work of church leaders, elders included, in the model of Christ's work. Yet, despite positive notes, two weaknesses in our traditional approach are evident.

A first weakness in the description of elders' work according to qualifications emerges with a consideration to social intertextual. Social intertexture is a method of socio-rhetorical criticism that considers the relationship of Biblical texts to synchronic social elements.[13] Already by 1932, the list of qualifications of elders (1 Tm 3; Ti 1) was noted to have a strong relationship to other, secular texts.[14] Easton noticed the resemblance of elder qualifications to the pagan virtue lists, most particularly to that in *The General* by Tacitus Onasander.[15] This list is striking for two reasons. First, it was written for a known, specific occasion (circa 50 CE, for the consular Q. Veranius) and is

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[9] Michael Mahan, "Extending Olbricht's Proposal: A Framework for a Church of Christ Ecclesiology" (paper, Regent University, 2011).

[10] See Gerard Mannion, *Ecclesiology and Postmodernity* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2007); Olbricht, "The Theology of the Church," 15-34; Thomas O'Meara, "Philosophical Models in Ecclesiology," *Theological Studies* 39 (1978): 3-21.

[11] Everett Ferguson, *The Church of Christ: A Biblical Ecclesiology for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996), 324.

[12] Everett Ferguson, "Authority and Tenure of Elders," *Restoration Quarterly* 18 (1975): 142-150; J. W. Roberts, "Eldership," *Restoration Quarterly* 17 (1974): 54-60.

[13] Vernon K. Robbins, *The Tapestry of Early Christian Discourse: Rhetoric, Society and Ideology* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

[14] B. S. Easton, "New Testament Ethical Lists," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 51(1932): 1-12.

[15] Aeneas Tacticus, Asclepiodotus, and Onasander, *Aeneas Tacticus, Asclepiodotus, Onasander* (London: Heinemann, 1962).

dated at least 10 years prior to all estimates of the writing of 1 Timothy.[16] Second, the text is markedly similar to the that of 1 Timothy 3:2-3, reading, "the general should be chosen as . . . soberminded, self-controlled, temperate, frugal, hardy, intelligent, no lover of money, not (too) young or old, if it may be, the father of children, able to speak well, of good repute."[17] Although similarity does not denote provenance or necessarily even mutual influence, the coexistence of these texts has an impact on the interpretational scheme applied by Ferguson. If Ferguson's thesis that elder duties derive from qualifications is correct, then first-century Christian elders and pagan Greek generals fulfilled essentially the same duties—a highly questionable proposition. This, of course, does not question the importance of the virtues inherent to those aspiring to leadership within the church, or the other sources of elder duties described by Ferguson.

The second difficulty with the interpretation scheme adopted by Ferguson is the lack of a practical balance within the duties ascribed to the elder. Although Ferguson's approach highlights the leadership's focus on the threefold work of the church (pastoral, evangelistic, and diaconal work),[18] the exact relationship between these is difficult to ascertain. The relationship of these foci to administrative tasks is also very unclear and the affirmation that the title of bishop or overseer left room for development says little normatively about actual modern leader practice or congregational direction.

The difficulty of balancing spiritual elements and administrative tasks is not exclusive to ecclesiology or to church practice. Organizational leadership has shown a constant emphasis on the task/relational equilibrium since some of the earliest studies conducted by Ohio State University and the University of Michigan in the 1950s. It seems likewise a popular worry that elderships may tend to a board of director mentality rather than to any type of spiritual leadership. Empirical research I recently conducted among southern congregations of Churches of Christ indicated that the overall weakness of elderships was putting congregants first and helping others grow and succeed, while task elements faired substantially better.[19] The concern for a balance between administrative and relational (or spiritual) elements of elders' service underscores the need to revisit ecclesiology and the theology of leadership—and provides a limited scope for the application of the ecclesiological framework.

Theological Influences on Ecclesiology: Theological Tradition and Church Metaphor

Whereas a full development within an ecclesiological framework would in all likelihood address the methodological weaknesses of our traditional approaches to the theology of leadership, partial consideration of the constituent elements of the framework are relevant to elder role and practice. Earlier works such as those previously mentioned deal specifically with exegetical concerns in relationship to elder,

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[16] D. A. deSilva, *An Introduction to the New Testament: Contexts, Methods and Ministry Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2004).
[17] Easton, "New Testament Ethical Lists," 10.
[18] Ferguson, *The Church of Christ*, 317.
[19] Michael Mahan, "The Effect of Servant Leadership on Volunteer Engagement in Ministry" (paper, Regent University, 2011).

allowing us to focus on Church of Christ tradition, church metaphor, worldview, and organizational leadership perspectives in relationship to our theology and Biblical texts.

Theological tradition

Theological tradition shapes ecclesiology primarily through the tradition's founders. Thus, the theological influence of Alexander Campbell (and Barton W. Stone, secondarily) continue to have implications for Church of Christ ecclesiology and theology of ministry, despite, as has been noted, we have a strong tendency to ignore our historical heritage.[20] Although it is well known that Campbell outlined the threefold ecclesial ministry (evangelist, elder, and deacon), other elements of Campbell's theology contribute to congregational structure and leadership philosophy as well.

In Campbell's view of the church, a laity–clergy distinction did not exist.[21] Although he later developed an ecclesiological understanding of particular ministry, Campbell was against political power as a reaction to the Protestant clergy that he frequently criticized.[22] Campbell's view of ministry and eldership thus may have been influenced by his views of government, as it has been said that he loved democracy.[23] Despite this preference for democratic congregational structure, Campbell let elders govern decisionally and in worship,[24] according to Richard Harrison, also as a continuation of presbyterian practice.[25] Harrison found that Stone shared this view of ruling elders, with the only stipulation being that elders necessarily be involved in preaching, teaching, and administrating the sacraments.[26] In fact, the central theme regarding elders in both Campbell's and Stone's thought was the necessity of a teaching role.[27] This theme is so developed that they actually did not fully consider presiding, governing, or ruling.

Although Campbell and Stone's teachings and direct influence on elder practice may be important, in the larger ecclesiological scheme, other concepts regarding the church are fundamental. For Campbell, the purpose of church was the same as the purposes of Christ. According to Ferguson, these purposes in Jesus' ministry were teaching, preaching, and healing, corresponding to the church's edification, evangelism, and benevolence.[28] One particular is noticeably absent in the discussions of both Ferguson and Campbell at this point. Although Jesus' purposes they have noted are the obvious product of Bible study, the lack of connection to the Father is noticeably absent. Jesus was obviously concerned about glorifying the Father personally (Jn 11:4; 13:31-

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[20] Kent Ellett, "A Scandalous Particularity: Theological Reflection and the Future of 'Our' Churches," *Encounter* 69 (2008): 19-28.

[21] Weldon Bennett, "The Doctrine of Ministry in the Thought of Alexander Campbell," *Restoration Quarterly* 16 (1973): 240-249.

[22] Alexander Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger,* 1 (September 1830): 427-428.

[23] Bennett, "The Doctrine of Ministry," 240-249.

[24] Alexander Campbell, *The Christian System* (Nashville: Gospel Advocate, 1956), 79-80, 86-87.

[25] Richard L. Harrison, "The Understanding of Ministry in the History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)," *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 37 (2002): 14.

[26] Ibid., 10.

[27] Ibid., 15-16; Bennett, "The Doctrine of Ministry," 241-242.

[28] Ferguson, *The Church of Christ*, 283-289.

32; 17:1-5) and he desired that his followers bring glory to the Father (Mt 5:14-16). Ephesians 1:9-12, 1 Peter 4:11, and other material in the epistles sustains at least partially the doxological purpose of the body of Christ. These purposes are fundamental in outlining second-order ecclesiology (church structure) and a theology of leadership.

The body metaphor

Ecclesiological texts such as Paul Minear's *Images of the Church in the New Testament,* Avery Dulles's *Models of the Church,* and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen's *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical & Historical Perspective* have highlighted the importance and profound influence of Biblical metaphors as defining the church. The influence of metaphor is impossible to deny, although, as pointed out by Brian Flanagan, there may be limited to a particular metaphor, particularly if all other metaphors are left unconsidered.[29]

Alexander Campbell left a heritage regarding church structure through church metaphor, although it is less often noted. For Campbell, the preferred description of the church is the body metaphor[30] and judging by Church of Christ texts and articles, the body continues to dominate our thinking. In Campbell's view, power also resided in the united, local church.[31] The church as the body thus exists first as a local body, and every local congregation should be complete. The connection of the belief in locally determined structure and power to democratic congregational polity is obvious. A possible residual indication of Campbell's belief in the body and democracy is the congregational business meeting, still practiced in some of our congregations.

The influence of the body metaphor that permeates our thought on the nature of the church is best revisited scripturally. Among the clearest scriptural explanations of church structure from the body metaphor is 1 Corinthians 12:

> For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ. . . . If they were all one member, where would the body be? But now there are many members, but one body . . . it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; and those members of the body which we deem less honorable, on these we bestow more abundant honor, and our less presentable members become much more presentable, whereas our more presentable members have no need of it. But God has so composed the body, giving more abundant honor to that member which lacked, so that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.[32]

Although a full exegesis of the passage is beyond our scope, the collocation of individual elements (members) within the unified body is obviously in discussion. According to David Garland, the metaphor emphasizes unity, symbiosis, and

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[29] Brian P. Flanagan, "The Limits of Ecclesial Metaphors in Systematic Ecclesiology," *Horizons* 35 (2008): 32-53.

[30] Campbell, *The Christian System*, 74-86.

[31] Ibid., 84-85.

[32] 1 Cor 12:12, 19, 22-25. All scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible unless otherwise noted.

interdependence.[33] Although Garland notes that 1 Corinthians 12 is not Paul's definitive ecclesiology, the passage at least illuminates the relationship of the individual to the entire body. N. T. Wright has also noted that the body metaphor was already at use by political theorists of the first century, emphasizing the emperor as the head and the different parts that citizens played.[34] Garland, though, underlined the Biblical text's emphasis on the relationship of one member to another, pointing to Paul's main concern of diversity in unity, emphasizing the interdependence of body members.

Leadership Perspective on Ecclesiology

Organizational leadership is a behavioral science that may illuminate ecclesiology by focusing our attention on issues of second-order ecclesiology that are not often considered in first-order ecclesiology. Some particular issues in organizational leadership that may relate to second-order ecclesiology (church structure) and theology of leadership (particularly elder role/function) are task–relationship considerations, power theories and models, and organizational design models.

Task–relation issues

As previously noted, task–relationship issues came to the forefront very early in behavioral research and have since continued to frequently influence leadership thought. Although an outline of the multitude of studies influenced by the task–relationship dimensions would be impossible, Gary Yukl notes that in the bulk of research, when relation-oriented behavior improves, so does subordinate satisfaction and performance, whereas task-oriented behaviors have not been shown to positively affect others.[35] The body of research on task–relation dimensions thus highlights the importance of relational behaviors relative to organizational structure and leadership.

What is most interesting regarding task–relationship balance and eldership roles and functions is a particular perspective taken by many studies regarding leadership and management. An important viewpoint held by many leadership experts pits management against leadership, when management is defined as including "planning, budgeting, organizing, staffing, controlling and problem solving" and leadership as "aligning people with a vision [of the future] and inspiring them to make it happen."[36] In research such as that by John Kotter, it is evident that successful development of the organization and of employees is best achieved by only 30 percent management and 70 percent leadership. For the church, the question of leader role and function then pits leadership (relation orientation) and management (task orientation) against the purpose of the church. The issue obviously begs the question of church and elder purpose. Where the church exists as the locus of believer development and elders play a vital

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[33] David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 588-562.

[34] N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: 1 Corinthians* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2004), 160.

[35] Gary Yukl, *Leadership in Organizations,* 7th ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2009), 58.

[36] John Kotter, "Successful Change and the Force that Drives It," in *Leading Organizations: Perspectives for a New Era,* ed. Gill Hickman (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1998), 463.

role in that development (as indicated by Eph 4:11-16, for example), elder function should necessarily be notably relational, based on leadership. Where the church is an institution to be developed, elders slip into management and purely administrative functions.

Power theories

The issue of power and authority in Churches of Christ have been most recently addressed by Timothy Willis.[37] Willis seems to have possibly been influenced by a descriptive study previously published by Reed Nelson,[38] dealing with Max Weber's threefold power typology, although Willis's work is normative and based on scriptural considerations. Unfortunately, Weber's power taxonomy is considerably dated, based on his work from 1947 (although fully elaborate in 1967). More modern power theories are more exhaustive and are frequently based on French and Raven's power taxonomy.[39] The more useful of these theories is Yukl and Falbe's integration of positional and personal power, incorporating two factors and seven components.[40]

In this power taxonomy, power is first understood as the capacity of someone to influence another, although influence is often conceived of as absolute. Others may react to power by commitment, compliance, or resistance. Positional power types derive influence from the perception of one being in a position of control or of authority; subdimensions of positional power are legitimate, coercive, reward, information, and ecological power. Legitimate authority derives directly from overseeing the work activities of others, as do reward and coercive power. Information and ecological power likewise derive from privileged positions; those of controlling resources, such as the flow of information or the environment. Positional power, deriving from office, thus more often than not strongly emphasizes control over others.

Personal power, like information power, is derived from knowledge, but does not focus on control but on contribution to others' needs. Referent power derives influence from those whom one knows; expert power is influence based on what one knows. Expert power thus represents the benevolent twin of information power. Personal power is thus not based on position, but on personal resources that may benefit others.

Biblical discussions of the body metaphor respond to the question of power, circumscribing the types of power that church leaders may yield. Ephesians 4 is among the chief of these passages:

> And he gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ . . . speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies,

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[37] Timothy M. Willis, "Obey Your Leaders: Hebrews 13 and Leadership in the Church," *Restoration Quarterly* 36 (1994): 316-326.

[38] Reed E. Nelson, "Authority, Organization and Societal Context in Multinational Churches," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 38 (1993): 653-682.

[39] J. French and B. H. Raven, "The Bases of Social Power," in *Studies of Social Power,* ed. Dorwin Cartwright (Ann Arbor, MI: Institute for Social Research, 1959), 150-167.

[40] Gary Yukl and C. M. Falbe, "The Importance of Different Power Sources in Downward and Lateral Relations," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 76 (1991): 416-423.

according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.[41]

The final verses of this text again indicate the interdependence of body members, yet the initial verses demonstrate the positional roles of certain members. According to the purposes of these roles (equipping the saints and building up the body) and the interdependence of all members, it is difficult to conclude that positional power typologies, including the legitimate typology, are appropriate to the body context. It is precisely the legitimate power type that Willis refutes in his textual analysis of Hebrews 13:17 (although in Marx's power taxonomy it is described as legal–rational). Legitimate or legal–rational authority derives from office and Willis effectively demonstrated that in Hebrews 13; elder power does not derive from office. Likewise, if the legitimate typology is not applicable to the pastor–teachers of Ephesians 4:11, neither are reward, coercive, information, or ecological power, that depend upon legitimate (positional) power.

Leader power within the church thus becomes a question of power based on knowledge of Jesus and of his word, yet not on knowledge control. Ephesians 4:11 collocates these leaders in relationship with Jesus and could well be indicative of influence based on referent power, as they have been chosen (called) by him and, as their role is formative for the body, their relationship to him is closer than those that they develop. The formative aspect towards both saints individually and to the body as a whole underlines expert power—personal capacity and knowledge that are useful to others. Personal power is thus characteristic of the leaders in Ephesians 4, and as a type of power that persuades and encourages the body to grow, it is analogous to the persuasive–oratorical based power discussed by Willis.

Systems theories also provide significant input into power considerations. Among the more recent theorizations, Coleman's research[42] has a strong relationship to some elements of Yukl and Falbe's power taxonomy, basing power in the individual's location within relationships. Yet in systems models, influence (and power) is not only exercised from above. Coleman successfully demonstrated top-down, middle-out, and bottom-up sources of power. Although the theory lends itself very practically to congregations in which authority issues are problematic, middle-out and bottom-up influence, based on relational elements rather than attempts to change others, are clearly indicative of the potential to lead without the need for authoritarian offices or positions.

The consideration of power is not only useful for Willis's purpose. Roberta Satow showed how the relationship between a specific power type (value–rational) inherent in many churches influences organizational structure.[43] Although this research was based on the implications of Weber's theorization, the conclusions are shared with the bulk of power theories: there is a correlation between organizational structure/design and the power model utilized. In the case of ecclesiology, the model of church government is directly related to the type of power exercised by church leaders.

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[41] Eph 4:11-12, 15-16.

[42] P. T. Coleman, "Conflict, Complexity and Change: A Metaframework for Engaging with Protracted, Intractable Conflict—III," *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 12 (2006): 325-346.

[43] Roberta Satow, "Value-Rational Authority and Professional Organizations: Weber's Missing Type," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 20 (1975): 526-531.

Organizational design models

Leadership literature regarding organizational design models in churches continues to be based almost exclusively on the work of Douglas Allen.[44] Allen's work established a correlation between certain doctrinal beliefs and church organizational structure. Most pertinent to the issue of elder function and role is the organizational model. Organizational design, in Allen's theory, may be congregational, denominational, or hierarchical. Hierarchical design, though, should not be pertinent to Restoration tradition but to Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions. In the congregational structures, church decision processes are either fully democratic or corporate (in which elders make decisions based on congregational desires). In the denominational structure, elders make decisions based on respecting doctrine rather than congregational wishes.

The distinction between corporate congregational and denominational structure underscores a fundamental doctrinal issue regarding the responsibilities of leaders. Elders may be first responsible to God, to the brothers, or even to theological tradition. Theological reflection and scriptural responses to this issue may prove difficult. Whereas Hebrews 13 considers leaders as responsible for the souls of the brothers to God, it says little about the delicate balance between the responsibility to God and to the brothers. The good shepherd paradigm of John 10:2-15 may be more relevant, where good shepherds seek to satisfy the needs of the flock and are even self-sacrificial. The practical answer to the structure issue is likely a delicate balance: leaders consider the needs and desires of their followers, along with God's desires.

Allen's hypothesis, as recently as 2002 confirmed by further studies,[45] was that church structure is highly correlated with the control of doctrine (i.e., interpretation of scripture). Although Allen outlined three possibilities, the individualistic and confessional categories are most relevant to Restoration tradition. In individualistic (free or limited) interpretation, the individual is free and responsible to interpret scripture personally. In free individualistic interpretation, the individual is allowed to hold any view informed by scripture, with the exception of Biblical commands. In limited individualistic interpretation, the individual is free to interpret scripture, but must adhere to certain church doctrines. According to Allen, in limited individualistic churches, adherence to a statement of faith is often a requisite for membership. Confessional interpretation, instead, indicates that the denominational or congregational founders have established doctrine and emphasis. Although change in doctrine may be possible, it would involve the entire range of members.

Allen's thesis thus introduces another underlying doctrinal issue regarding the interpretation of scripture and the relationship of individuals to the congregation as a whole. Whereas in Churches of Christ, we emphasize the unmediated relationship with God (1 Tm 2:5) and the priesthood of all believers (1 Pt 2:5-10), "being of the same

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[44] Douglas W. Allen, "Order in the Church: A Property Rights Approach," *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* 27 (1995): 97-117.

[45] Wen Mao and Charles Zech, "Choices of Organizational Structures in Religious Organizations: A Game Theoretic Approach," *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* 47 (2002): 55-70.

mind" is a concern (Phil 2:12) and some degree of doctrinal conformity is obviously an objective of church growth (Eph 4:14-16). This equilibrium is delicate and underlines the importance of frequently neglected ecclesiological elements. Like the discussion of elder responsibility, the issue itself deserves in-depth study in order to arrive at credible conclusions.

Worldview Perspective on Ecclesiology

The final perspective in ecclesiology is the worldview perspective. Although many worldview elements could illuminate ecclesiological considerations, recent studies focus highly on the influence of postmodernity. A full analysis of worldview perspectives on ecclesiology is well beyond the scope of this article, yet recent studies have highlighted modern tendencies, some of which surprisingly string a harmonious chord with Restoration values. Particularly, tendencies toward autonomy and individualism, and nondenominational church structures represent interesting points of convergence.

Religious studies attribute the decline of churches to several effects of postmodernism, chiefly the doubt of absolute truth and of history.[46] Dale Meyer described the difficulty of the truth issue, while indicating an interesting connection to initial Restoration beliefs.[47] According to Meyer, there is now a popular doubt regarding truth claims and thus a difficulty with propositional expositions of the gospel. Yet there is also an evangelistic possibility with strong connections to personal witness. The postmodern tendency is to identify with stories and, thus, according to Meyer, personal accounts of salvation and retelling of personal encounters with the Biblical story may be particularly effective. According to Crisp, though, in Alexander Campbell's view, testimony and personal witness were crucial to evangelism and a main duty of evangelists.[48] Unfortunately, a conflict in Campbell's theology was the equilibrium between the personal witness and pure speech (i.e., using only the Bible's language).[49] A strategic rebalancing of these two aspects, as suggested by Kent Ellett, could effectively respond to postmodernism's difficulty with truth.

The postmodern worldview also emphasizes autonomy and individualism. Although often this tendency pushes people toward an individualized religion in which they worship their own god in their own homes, representing a difficulty for churches, it also influences church structure. According to Joseph Williams, the tendency toward autonomy actually favors nondenominational church structures.[50] For Williams, the positive elements of the nondenominational church are numerous: (1) the congregation can determine its own ministries, (2) congregations can make changes without consulting a governing board, and (3) congregations aren't obligated to a denominational theology or polity for teaching and preaching. In William's analysis,

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[46] Joseph Williams, "The New Ecclesiology and the Post-Modern Age," *Review and Expositor* 107 (2010): 33-40.

[47] Dale Meyer, "Why Go to Church?" *Concordia Journal* 36 (2010): 89-96.

[48] Crisp, "Toward a Theology of Ministry," 18.

[49] Ellett, "A Scandalous Particularity," 22.

[50] Williams, "The New Ecclesiology," 33-40.

then, Church of Christ theological tradition should predispose our congregations favorably, depending on the ideological commitments of the individual congregation.

A final consideration of postmodernity regards how churches outside our circles are dealing with the issues. Because of the emphasis on individualism, autonomy, and equality, congregations with Free Church ecclesiologies are growing on a global scale[51] and, according to Earl Zimmerman, are actually an important step toward world evangelism.[52] Although we do not usually identify ourselves with the Free Church movement, Churches of Christ conform to most Free Church elements: (1) congregationalist church constitution, (2) belief in separation of church and state, (3) some heritage from the Radical Reformation, and (4) unmediated access to God.[53] For these definitions, Restoration churches fall into the Free Church category, and like most of the Free churches, rely heavily on the body of Christ church metaphor. Perhaps not coincidentally, a number of prominent ecclesiologies from the denominational world rely on the body metaphor as well.[54] In some senses then, Church of Christ heritage has positioned us ahead of current ecclesiological trends. Yet, differently from Cox and Zimmerman's pragmatic reasoning that congregationalist church structure is needed to meet global social conditions, the Church of Christ's foundations are based upon theological reflection.

In the light of worldview consideration, Church of Christ tradition has positioned us very favorably. Campbell's approach to the conveyance of truth through witness and testimony, if recovered, compares favorably to the postmodern disposition. The focal points of autonomy and individuality also relate well to the common mindset. Finally, many aspects of our congregational structures are presently being duplicated strategically, indicating a practicality of portions of our ecclesiology.

Organizational Design and Theology of Leadership (Elder Role)

The ecclesiological framework (body metaphor, theological tradition, worldview, and organizational leadership perspectives) allows the opportunity to address questions scripturally and theologically in a way that shapes congregational structure and theology of leadership. The focus on elder role and function limits the conclusions,[55] but provides an effective and concise demonstration of the potential of the ecclesiological framework.

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[51] See Harvey Cox, *The Silencing of Leonardo Boff: The Vatican and the Future of World Christianity* (Oak Park, IL: Meyer-Stone, 1988), 17.

[52] Earl Zimmerman, "Church and Empire," *Political Theology* 10 (2009): 471-495.

[53] Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical & Global Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2002), 8, 58-63.

[54] John Zizioulas, *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985); Hans Kung, *The Church* (New York: Image Books, 1976); Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology,* vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998).

[55] Church purposes in scripture and in Restoration tradition, for example, would provide a number of descriptions of possible leader roles consonant with Church of Christ ecclesiology.

The body metaphor and congregational structure

Elements of the body metaphor constitute the general form of congregational design. The body metaphor, in scripture and ecclesiological studies, is indicative of member interdependence and the sole headship of Christ. Although member interdependence does not indicate role equality, it does indicate a flat organizational structure. A primary conclusion deriving from the body metaphor is, thus, the limitation of congregational structure to congregationalist or possibly denominational designs. The body metaphor seems to preclude hierarchical church designs; it is therefore not surprising that Catholic organizational design is not based on the body metaphor but on the people of God metaphor, or that Orthodox design is based on not on the body but on the icon of the Trinity.

Member interdependence in the body metaphor bears a striking resemblance to a particular group in organizational leadership studies. In leadership definitions, a group characterized by shared resources, shared objectives, and member interdependence is a team.[56] A team, as opposed to just a group, also indicates the involvement of all members, an important goal for church structure and a fundamental of grass roots movements such as our own. The visualization of the body as a team addresses the free rider problem (a concern in socio-religious studies in the 1990s) and also indicates a chief purpose of many congregational leaders: member involvement. As components of the body, all members desire other members to be present and active. To borrow the language of 1 Corinthians 12, the entire body desires and needs the active participation of the others; a paralyzed leg may not destroy the body, but it does cripple it.

In the body metaphor, mutuality is a chief interest in relationships within the church. First Corinthians 12:22-26 proposes mutual comfort, suffering, honor, and joy, while Ephesians 4:11-16 proposes mutual edification and growth as the purposes of relationships within the body. Although both passages acknowledge leadership roles, they are indicative of every member's need of the others and of togetherness. For church structure, this indicates close cooperation and the active search to meet others' needs. These primary body purposes are also notably spiritual rather than physical in concern. Whatever the role of elders or even administrators in this church structure, their concern should flow from the scriptural purposes of these relationships.

Church metaphor points toward some form of congregationalist organizational structure, not in disaccord with Campbell's initial preferences. In the terms of leadership theory, these foundational elements of ecclesiology point toward organizational structures varying from democratic congregationalist to denominational structure. New Testament scriptures, though, do indicate an administrative role of elders,[57] seemingly excluding a pure democratic congregationalist structure. Congregational structure in this view would be limited to only two possibilities: (1) corporal congregationalist or (2) denominational structures, depending on the balance of responsibility of church leaders.

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[56] Greg Steward, Charles Manz, and Henry Sims, Jr., *Team Work and Group Dynamics* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1999), 3.

[57] See 1 Cor 12:28 and Willis's discussion of επισκοπης.

Unfortunately, this conclusion may be hasty; leadership theories and decision-making models, in which a limited number of individuals lead effectively while utilizing consensus and democratic polity, have existed and been exercised in the secular world for decades.[58] In such models, leaders focus on relationships and persuasion, while facilitating group consensus (mutual contribution) in democratic decisions.

Church of Christ ecclesiology would seem opposed to denominational church structure for four reasons. First, the body metaphor, emphasizing member interdependence and not complete body dependence upon a limited group of leaders, seems minimally predisposed against a denomination structure. Even the Ephesians 4 explanation of particular roles in relationship to the body would seem to indicate cooperation and join edification rather than dependence upon a decisional body. Second, the denominational model is correlated with confessional views of church doctrine. In Allen's original theorization, doctrine and truth are conceived of as spiritual goods. In confessional congregations, church leaders thus control these spiritual goods. In Church of Christ tradition, although the church is "the pillar and support of the truth" (1 Tm 3:15) and the truth is "present with you" (2 Pt 1:12), at neither a congregation nor a leadership level is the truth possessed or controlled. Because for us relationship with God is unmediated, leaders that stand in a mediatory or controlling position are not a part of our ecclesiology.

The third factor standing against the denominational model in Church of Christ ecclesiology emerges in respect to power theory. Denominational congregational structure is based on the conception of positional power; elders or a board of directors or trustees make decisions for the congregation that potentially affect the entire local body. The correspondence of Biblical interpretation and established doctrine with centralized, positional power is therefore no coincidence. Collocating congregational power in offices essentially predisposes the body to both confessional interpretation and to denominational structure. Willis, though, has already demonstrated textually that church leader power does not reside in office and the body metaphor likewise seems opposed to such a conception of positional power.

The final difficulty of the denominational congregational structure is one of the Church of Christ's fundamental ecclesiological tenets. From the onset, Church of Christ ecclesiology was against a clergy–laity distinction. Alexander Campbell was adamant about the lack of this distinction; as a nondenominational church, we are a grassroots movement. The lack of a distinct clergy continues to be fundamental to our movement and the move toward a ruling eldership whose function is not primarily spiritual leadership violates this principle.

The elimination of hierarchical and denominational models leaves the possible options of democratic congregationalist and corporal congregationalist church structures in Church of Christ second-order ecclesiologies. Campbell has been shown to prefer the former, yet not necessarily for purely theological concerns. Worldview concerns, namely the adaptability of nondenominational congregations, would indicate, however, corporal congregationalist models. In the corporal congregational structure, the lack of the

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[58] Victor Vroom and Philip Yetton, *Leadership and Decision Making* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973).

necessity for the complete consensus of the entire body (while relying on the body's needs and desires within the limits of scripture) allows for more rapid reaction to changing social settings.

Implications for the theology of leadership

The interdependence of relationships within the church and the focus on spiritual concerns (edification, growth, shared suffering, and joy) are characteristic of the purpose of the church and congregational structure conforms to church purpose. According to Campbell and Ferguson, elder function also derives from church structure;[59] thus, as church structure is primarily concerned with spiritual matters, elders' primary concern is also the spiritual existence of the church. Church structure and purpose thus circumscribe the primary type of leadership exercised by elders, limiting it to pastoral leadership. These elements of the ecclesiological framework thus draw elder role and function back to those initially described by Campbell and Stone. In the Church of Christ ecclesiology, elders focus on teaching and persuasion, facilitating the growth of the brothers. The decisional board as the primary function of elders does not derive from the body metaphor, but perhaps from an institutional conceptualization of the church. According to the theological reflection on second-order ecclesiology, Campbell and Stone seem correct to insist that administrative elders, without a teaching/spiritual role, have no place in the body of Christ.

Task and relation orientation within church leadership is an area of delicate balance. Leader participation in the Ephesians 4 body-development process, though, tends to collocate elder function primarily within relational orientation rather than task or administrative duties. Although other scriptures indicate some administrative possibilities, those appear secondary and subservient to spiritual and relational development. In the Restorationist tradition, elders are conceived of as leaders (relationally-oriented) rather than managers (task-oriented); as pastoral leaders rather than a board of directors.

Task and administrative duties can likewise be conceived of as existing exclusively for relational ends. In this perspective, Jesus' actions such as physical healing as illustrative of spiritual healing (e.g., Mk 2:1-12) or expiatory physical sacrifice for the salvation of souls could indicate the clear need of church leaders to constantly subjugate administrative and task duties to the spiritual development of individual members and the body as a whole. According to Ferguson's affirmation that elders follow Christ and function as examples to the body of believers, spiritual matters can be of prime concern without neglecting task function, yet spiritual development is the ultimate concern for Christ's mission (Jn 3:16) and for the body of Christ (Eph 4:11-16).

Conceptualization of elder power as expert or referent power further indicates the leadership potential of the elder role. Willis's position that elder authority should be based on persuasion and oratory skills is not to be taken lightly. In the body, power or authority derive from relationship to the Lord and his word and not from office. Because of these two sources of power, elders have a great possibility to influence both

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[59] Campbell, *The Christian System*, 84-85; Ferguson, *The Church of Christ*, 317-324.

individuals and the body as a whole, whether in a democratic or corporal congregationalist structure.

II. CONCLUDING ARGUMENTS

The ecclesiological framework (addressing body metaphor, theological tradition, worldview, and organizational leadership perspectives) offers some advancement in second-order ecclesiology for the Church of Christ tradition where Biblical theology has yet to touch until this point. Rather than providing a new basis for ecclesiology, this framework presents new perspectives from which to consider scripture, indicating possible applications of our theology in organizational design and the theology of leadership. As a theological framework, it also allows us to consider congregational structure and leader roles on a theological rather than pragmatic basis.

The application of the ecclesiogical framework to the issue of elder role and function demonstrates, on a limited scale, the usefulness of structured, theological reflection on an issue previously untouched due to methodological limitations of traditional approaches. Elder role and function need not vary according to the background of the individuals aspiring to church leadership; if approached from sound ecclesiological perspectives, scriptural concerns can be indicative of elder function and congregational design, even beyond the models examined herein.

Regarding congregational structure, a Restoration approach to ecclesiology is indicative of little leeway. Virtually all elements of the ecclesiological framework point toward a singular choice, between democratic and corporal congregationalist structure. Although deeper probing into the scriptural responses to organizational leadership elements could provide further illumination, these two possibilities are indicative of positive and empowering congregational designs for a true nondenominational church.

Regarding elder role and function, two of many issues in the theology of leadership, the ecclesiological framework confirms the frequent, popular notion of elders as pastoral leaders. Rather than propose novel elder functions, this study provides a wider basis for behaviors described in earlier textual studies. The elements presented herein should serve to crystallize elder function as persuasive leaders, considerate of the desires and needs of individual member and the body as a whole. These behaviors on the whole correspond to leader behaviors that empower followers and maximize involvement (engagement) and follower performance as well.

This study also paves the way for future inquiry into role dimension of a Church of Christ theology of leadership. The purposes of the church outlined in scripture and noted by Campbell and Ferguson could very well be indicative of specific roles within congregational leadership. Future research based on an ecclesiological framework may indicate the relationship of spiritual formation ministers, benevolence ministers, and worship leaders to a veritable theology of leadership rather than a simple pragmatic imitation of leadership models and roles borrowed from other traditions. Our heritage as people of the word would demand no less than developing a theology of leadership faithful to our tradition and scripture, even if by updated methodology.

About the Author

Michael Mahan is a missionary in Italy, where he has served for the last 16 years. Mike is a frequent speaker at national church conferences in Italy and has presented scholarly papers on Biblical perspectives in leadership and servant leadership at international roundtables. He holds an M.A. in Biblical Interpretation from Lubbock Christian University and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Organizational Leadership, majoring in ecclesial leadership at Regent University. He and Antonietta, his wife of 13 years, are the proud parents of two beautiful children, six-year-old Pietro and 10-year-old Miriam.
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