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# **SENIOR CHURCH LEADERSHIP**

**A RESOURCE FOR REFLECTION**

**Faith and Order Commission**

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# 1 Introduction

1. At times, it can seem as if everyone in the church is talking about leaders and leadership. There are, for instance, tens of thousands of examples on the internet of people saying ‘the church needs leaders who . . .’. Type the phrase into a search engine, and you will quickly find people saying that the church needs leaders

- who are bold and alert,
- who can energise people,
- who can cherish and communicate vision,
- who have the skills to lead people through transition and change, and
- who can ensure that we hand the church to the next generation in better shape than we found it.

You will just as quickly find people saying that the church needs leaders

- who are biblically literate and faithfully orthodox,
- who are compelled to minister out of love for God’s Word,
- who know their purpose in Christ,
- who have a personal relationship with God, and
- who live out gospel values.

2. This talk about leadership in the church is very varied. Much of it expresses a need or desire for leadership, for the sake of the flourishing of the church’s ministry and mission – though there are many different accounts of the kind of leadership that will lead to flourishing, and many different accounts of the kind of flourishing hoped for.

3. Much of the talk is about the qualities or characteristics that leaders will need if they are to be faithful leaders, deeply rooted in the faith – though here again there are many different accounts of the nature of that rooting, and many different descriptions of the ways in which we can expect it to be displayed.

4. There is also, however, a good deal of talk that comments critically on all these proposals for leadership, and expresses concern at the very fact that talk about leadership has come to be so prominent in the life of the church – though here too there are many different forms of criticism offered, on many different grounds.
5. This widespread and varied talk forms the background against which we have written this report.

### **1.1 Questions about senior leadership**

6. We had a particular remit to focus on *senior* leadership in the Church of England.<sup>1</sup> ‘Senior leadership’ is not itself a category that is used in formal documents from the Church of England,<sup>2</sup> but for our purposes we have taken ‘senior leadership’ to refer to those who exercise some kind of ministry of oversight (that is, ‘*episkope*’) that extends beyond a particular congregation, especially when it extends regionally or nationally. We have focused most directly on the leadership provided by bishops, but we have tried at various points, and especially in the central biblical exploration, to set that focus against a wider background.
7. Our intention to focus on ‘senior leadership’ arose in response to a cluster of concerns that have surfaced repeatedly in recent years. These have included:
  - tensions between legal accounts of church governance that focus on the office of the diocesan bishop in relative isolation, and the collaborative practice of leadership in dioceses by senior staff teams;

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<sup>1</sup> General Synod in July 2009 passed a motion requesting a report ‘bringing together existing material in the Church of England and the Anglican Communion relating to the exercise of senior leadership in the Church’ and ‘setting out biblical and theological perspectives to inform the Church’s developing patterns of senior leadership’ (See <https://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2009/07/gsjul120709.aspx>).

<sup>2</sup> Unlike the Methodist Church, for instance; see <http://www.methodist.org.uk/links/contact-the-connexional-team/connexional-team-senior-leadership-group>.

- tensions between accounts that focus on the diocesan bishop in relative isolation, and the collegial practice of leadership at national level through the College and House of Bishops;
- questions about the relationship between the leadership of the church by its bishops and the institutional management of the church by its central administration;
- questions about the roles played in cathedrals, dioceses and the national church by senior lay people in key positions, and the need for both recognition and reflection in this area;
- questions about the role of suffragan bishops, and about the roles of archdeacons, and about the relationships between the two, and a lack of consistency between dioceses in the understanding of these roles;
- questions about the processes by which the Church of England encourages, identifies and prepares men and women for senior clergy appointments, and supports them appropriately while in post; and
- questions about the teaching role of the bishops, and about the best means to support and develop it.

8. Those specific issues are, however, surrounded by more general questions sparked by the term 'leadership' itself.

- What is the relationship between the leadership of individuals and leadership distributed across an institution? Are leaders there to do the leading themselves, or do they enable leadership to emerge at various levels?
- Is leadership always collaborative, and if so who are the partners? To what extent does such partnership need to be expressed in role descriptions and formal frameworks as well as in informal commitments and good intentions?
- Where in a collaborative and collegial vision of ministry and mission is there room for prophetic and critical leadership, and for individual accountability and responsibility?

- To what extent are wisdom and expertise about senior leadership from other institutions (businesses, the public sector, academic research) directly transferable to the life of the Church of England?
- To what extent can the church’s wisdom and expertise about senior leadership be useful in other organisations and institutions in the world?
- Can the church be honest, transparent and rigorous in seeking to nurture the senior leadership it needs while giving proper ‘honour’ to every member of the body (1 Corinthians 12.12–31), and without discouraging those whose calling is in other spheres?

9. The main questions that faced us as we began our work were therefore:

- Is it right to make ‘leadership’ a central idea in the life of the church?
- If so, what are the underlying *theological* principles that inform the exercise of leadership within the church?
- How can these principles best inform the exercise of senior leadership in the Church of England today?

## **1.2 The purpose of this report**

10. In Section 2 of this report, we will examine both the rise of leadership language in the life of the church, and some of the criticisms that have been made of it. We recognise that this language is not going away any time soon. It has simply become too prevalent and too deeply embedded, and we acknowledge that this is in part because it can name important needs in the church’s life. Rather than arguing about whether we should stop using leadership language, therefore, we discuss how this language might be used *well*, and how the dangers involved can be recognised and avoided. Our initial, provisional answer to the first question therefore (‘Is it right to make “leadership” a central idea in the life of the church?’) is: ‘It is unavoidable – but we should treat it with caution.’

11. For the *second* question ('If so, what are the underlying *theological* principles that inform the exercise of leadership within the church?') we turn to the church's traditional resources of 'scripture, tradition and reason.' That is, we seek to shape our understanding of leadership by means of a reasoned engagement with scripture, in conversation with the on-going Christian tradition. In Section 3, we explore the practice of leadership in the New Testament – not because such a study can provide a simple blueprint for our practice today, nor because it can answer all the questions we might have, but because it witnesses to the deepest demands to which all attempts at faithful Christian leadership must respond. In Section 4 we offer a necessarily brief description of some of the ways in which Christians have responded to those demands through the history of the church, constantly adopting and adapting the practices of leadership they inherited from previous generations in the light of their changing context. In Section 5 we draw out a series of lessons for the contemporary exercise of leadership (especially senior leadership) in the church today.
12. We do not claim, however, to provide a detailed answer to the third question, 'How can these principles best inform the exercise of senior leadership in the Church of England today?' That is because compelling answers to that question aren't developed in the pages of reports. They are developed *in situ*, hammered out in context by Christians drawing deeply on the scriptures, engaging with the tradition, attending to their situations, questioning and challenging and encouraging one another, and discovering prayerfully over time what bears fruit and what does not.
13. In other words, good answers to this question are produced by *faithful improvisation*, in the never-ending diversity of contexts in which the church finds itself. By 'improvisation', we do not mean 'making it up as we go along', or 'bodging something together from the materials available'. Rather, we are drawing on the way 'improvisation' has been written about by a number of theologians in recent



years,<sup>3</sup> and are using the word in something like the sense it can have in musical performance. Musicians who are deeply trained in a particular tradition (who know its constraints and possibilities in their bones) draw on all the resources provided by that formation to respond creatively to new situations and to one another.

Compelling and faithful answers to the church's questions about leadership require something of the same deep formation and deep attentiveness *in situ*, and will be similarly diverse and creative.

14. A brief report from an official Commission, speaking about senior leadership across the whole Church of England, cannot provide a short cut through that process. We have not, therefore, tried to provide detailed practical recommendations about the shape that senior leadership should take in today's church, nor about the ways in which the challenges facing senior leaders should be tackled. What we have tried to produce, instead, is a 'resource for reflection': a prompt to those who are involved in the real process of answering that question in their own situation, that will help stimulate the improvisation that is needed, and help clarify some of the questions we should ask as we try to keep those improvisations faithful.
15. It is our hope that the report as a whole will encourage those involved in the process of faithful improvisation, and help them hear some of the questions they can and should be asking as they go about their task.

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<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Jeremy Begbie, *Theology, Music and Time* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical-Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2005); Samuel Wells, *Improvisation: The Drama of Christian Ethics* (London: SPCK, 2004); and Frances Young, *The Art of Performance: Towards a Theology of Holy Scripture* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1990).

## 2 For and against ‘leadership’

16. Recently, the need for leadership in the church has been in the news again, thanks to the findings of the Church Growth Research Programme. In a Church of England press release, Professor David Voas, one of the leaders of the research, said that ‘Growth is a product of good leadership (lay and ordained) working with a willing set of churchgoers in a favourable environment’.<sup>4</sup> In the same press release, ‘leadership’ tops the list of ‘common ingredients strongly associated with growth’, a list that also includes ‘clear mission and purpose’, ‘being intentional’, and ‘vision’. The Programme’s report, *From Anecdote to Evidence: Findings from the Church Growth Research Programme 2011–2013*, makes it clear that the ‘leadership’ in question is a matter of ‘motivating people, inspiring and generating enthusiasm to action’ (p. 8); that is what they have discovered is needed for growth.
17. This is only the latest episode in a history of increasing attention to leadership in the church over the past half-century. Although talk about leadership was not much in evidence in the Church of England in the nineteenth century or the first half of the twentieth, it began to emerge after the Second World War. It became noticeably more prominent in the 1960s (perhaps not coincidentally a decade in which there was a sharp decline in church attendance), and then really took off in the 1980s. That rise to prominence has, however, been accompanied by a chorus of questions about the appropriateness of a focus on leadership in the life of the church.

### 2.1 *The rise of leadership*

18. A marker of things to come can be found in the translation of 1 Timothy 3:1–2 in the New English Bible, published in 1961. Where the RSV had spoken about bishops and

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<sup>4</sup> Church of England Press Office, ‘Signs of Growth: Cathedrals, Fresh Expressions, and Parishes around the Country provide Grounds for Growth of Church of England’, 16 January 2014, <http://www.churchofengland.org/media-centre/news/2014/01/signs-of-growth.aspx>.

those who aspire 'to the office of a bishop', the NEB speaks about '*leaders* or bishops' and those who aspire 'to leadership'.

19. Nearly two decades later, in 1980, the language of leadership appeared in the *Alternative Service Book* ordinal. Using a term that does not appear in the *Book of Common Prayer* equivalent, it says that the ordained minister 'is to *lead* his people in prayer and worship'. There is no reference to this choice of word in the notes from the revision process, but that the word was increasingly 'in the air' in relation to ministry is demonstrated by the fact that two years later the major ecumenical report *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* could speak of ordained ministers 'called to exercise wise and loving leadership' (Ministry, §16), and of bishops having 'responsibility for leadership in the Church's mission' (§29).<sup>5</sup> As a term without obvious denominational baggage, its prominence in an ecumenical context should probably not surprise us.
  
20. Over the next decade and a half, talk of leadership became an essential part of discussions of ordained ministry in the Church of England. In 1993, the Working Party on Criteria for Selection for Ministry in the Church of England<sup>6</sup> introduced 'Leadership and Collaboration' to those criteria, and said that 'A basic ability required of leaders is to identify where the group or community stands and what it should aim to achieve. Leaders should then be able to set out the means to obtain the objectives, drawing the group or community towards the aim and motivating its members towards the goal' (§96). 'This ability includes the capacity to offer an example of faith and discipleship, to collaborate effectively with others, as well as to guide and shape the life of the Church community in its mission to the world' (§102).

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<sup>5</sup> *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper 111 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/faith-and-order-commission/i-unity-the-church-and-its-mission/baptism-eucharist-and-ministry-faith-and-order-paper-no-111-the-lima-text>.

<sup>6</sup> *The Report of a Working Party on Criteria for Selection for Ministry in the Church of England*, ABM Policy Paper No. 3A (1993).

21. Two years after that, in *Working as One Body: The Report of the Archbishops' Commission on the Organisation of the Church of England* (1995), the language of leadership is used prominently to describe the role of bishops. The church 'combines leadership by bishops with governance by synods representing bishops, clergy, laity', and such leadership is 'essentially the enablement of life and work in the dioceses' (§1.1). This is possible in part because 'God has given outstanding skills of leadership to particular individuals' (§1.24).<sup>7</sup>
22. Over the same period, leadership language has become increasingly common in evangelical churches, intentional communities, networks and agencies, where again its lack of denominational and traditional baggage has made it very useful. Its usage was cemented by events like the Evangelical Alliance's *Leadership '84* conference, a gathering of some 1,500 Christian leaders.<sup>8</sup>
23. By the time Steven Croft wrote *Ministry in Three Dimensions: Ordination and Leadership in the Local Church* in 1999, he was able to say that in a wide variety of church contexts 'leader' was becoming 'the most commonly used title for a person called to full-time Christian work' and that, 'if anything, leadership language is becoming even more predominant across the traditions.'<sup>9</sup>

## **2.2 The desire for leadership**

24. A full analysis of the rise of leadership language in recent decades would take many pages, and would take us well beyond our remit here. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify several themes that come up repeatedly when Christians talk about leadership in relation to the church's ministry and mission.

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<sup>7</sup> *Working as One Body: The Report of the Archbishops' Commission on the Organisation of the Church of England* (London: Church House, 1995).

<sup>8</sup> See below, §§158–160.

<sup>9</sup> Stephen Croft, *Ministry in Three Dimensions* (London: DLT, 1999) p. 203, n. 26.

25. There is a widespread desire for leaders who can inspire, encourage and sustain the people of God in their collective ministry and mission: leaders with a compelling vision for the growth and flourishing of the church. Sometimes calls for more and better leadership are framed by descriptions of the church as a flock without a shepherd. Those looking for leadership ask where we will find the shepherds of the people, capable of gathering God's people into the life and work that God has for them, and facing up to the urgent needs of the church in the world.
26. There is a widespread desire for leaders who can animate and inspire the church's worship of God. One sign of this desire is the increasing prevalence of the term 'worship leader', though the desire for leadership in worship stretches wider than that. There are calls for leaders who can preside over the people's worship, keeping God at the centre of the church's focus, and finding new ways in which that focus can be made palpable in every aspect of the church's life.
27. There is a widespread desire for leaders capable of compelling teaching. Often calls for more or better leadership in the church are framed by a description of the uncertainty of the church's voice, and by the contrast between that uncertainty and the great prophetic and teaching voices of the tradition. Those looking for leadership ask where that bold and captivating speech is to be found in today's church.
28. There is a widespread desire for leaders who can engage confidently and persuasively with the wider world. Descriptions of the church's uncertain voice often focus on the failures of its communication with the wider world: the lack of evangelistic passion, the lack of compelling apologetic, the lack of moral leadership, the failure to speak truth to power. Those looking for more and better leadership in the church are often asking for those who will be capable of speaking powerfully on the church's behalf in the world, and of working transformatively with others in the world.

29. There is a widespread desire for leaders who will take absolutely seriously their personal and public accountability, especially in relation to issues of abuse and safeguarding. There is a desire for leaders – especially diocesan bishops – who will acknowledge that the buck stops with them, and that their responsibility cannot be fudged or avoided.
30. There is also, and perhaps most fundamentally, a widespread desire for leaders who can respond creatively to change. Statements of the need for good leadership in the church are often framed by descriptions of the huge changes affecting the church and its position in society: changes in size, importance, activity, culture, image, legislation, and diversity. And they are often framed by an account of the need and opportunity for mission that those changes create. Those looking for renewed church leadership are often looking for those who will help the church respond creatively to all these changes so as to flourish in the new contexts that they create, and who will be capable of taking the church deeper into mission.
31. Each of these desires can be framed in many different ways. The visions of the church's ministry and mission that animate these hopes vary widely, as do the relative emphases placed on each of these elements. Any attempt to give more practical detail to these rather generalised descriptions of what leadership might mean would immediately invite debate, some of it fierce, and even the little we have already said no doubt rings truer to some readers than to others.
32. Nevertheless, one central point is emerging, and it is one to which we will be returning several times in this report. Our questions about leadership need to be asked in relation to the ministry and mission of the church, the ministry and mission given to it by God. We cannot hold a meaningful conversation about 'leadership' in isolation from the urgent and necessary conversations taking place within the Church about the mission and ministry of the whole people of God.

## **2.3 The problems with leadership**

33. The rise and rise of the language of leadership in the Church of England has generated a family of serious concerns.

### **2.3.1 The language of leadership**

34. We will be discussing in more detail below the fact that the use of leadership language to talk about Christ's church is not particularly biblical – and the fact that this is not itself necessarily a problem (since the church is always unavoidably involved in borrowing and transforming language from elsewhere). Nevertheless, it is a telling fact that the New Testament authors seem consciously to have avoided the most obvious words for 'leader' in their culture, presumably because they wanted to avoid buying in to the kinds of behaviour and organisation that were associated with that language.
35. In our time, too, the language of leadership was not minted in the church, but (in significant part) borrowed from elsewhere. The explosion of the field of leadership training and leadership studies is often traced to the work of John Adair, who drew on his military and business experience to write *Training for Leadership* in 1968, before going on to become the world's first Professor of Leadership Studies in 1979, at the University of Surrey.
36. There is little doubt that the church, in adopting the language of leadership, initially drew it at least in part from this and similar sources, and that it has gone on drawing from such sources as the secular leadership boom has advanced.<sup>10</sup> And it is not only

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<sup>10</sup> There has also been a borrowing in the other direction: numerous authors working in the field of leadership studies have drawn on models from the Bible and the history of the church. See, for example, John Adair, *The Leadership of Jesus and its Legacy Today* (Norwich: Canterbury, 2011); Richard S. Ascough and Sandy Cotton, *Passionate Visionary: Leadership Lessons from the Apostle*

the word 'leader' that has been borrowed, but a whole vocabulary for describing the leader's task and goals. We speak of targets, key performance indicators, behavioural competencies, competition, entrepreneurship, risk management, effectiveness, growth, and success. We can sound all but indistinguishable from our secular counterparts, at least from a distance, even to the point, at times, of echoing the high-octane glitz that accompanies some secular visions of the powerful leader.

37. Of course, the presence of language borrowed from secular sources is not itself proof that anything has gone wrong. Similarly, the fact that the language itself is a new borrowing does not mean that the practices and relationships that the language is now used to describe were previously absent from the church. New language can name existing realities, and do so tellingly. Nevertheless, the fact of this borrowing does pose, with considerable urgency, questions about what ways of thinking the church might inadvertently have borrowed when it took on this vocabulary, and whether in doing so it has bought into inappropriate patterns of behaviour, relationship and organisation. Has the appropriation of leadership language from secular sources been sufficiently critical?

### **2.3.2 The structures of leadership**

38. The very existence of leadership studies as a distinct field with its own internal dynamics has suggested one way in which this question of critical appropriation can be pushed further.
39. In order to frame this question more clearly, it is helpful to begin with an initial, low-key definition of leadership. We might say that a leader is someone who assists others in the performance of a collective practice. Such a leader is not necessarily one who himself or herself excels in the practice, though he or she certainly has to be competent in it. Rather, he or she will be good at participating in that practice in

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*Paul* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2006); David Baron, *Moses on Management: 50 Leadership Lessons from the Greatest Manager of All Time* (New York, NY: Pocket Books, 1999); and many more.



such a way as to draw others deeper into it. Such a leader needs to be fully involved in the practice alongside others, but he or she also takes on some additional activities for the sake of this specific leadership role.

40. A healthy account of leadership will focus first and most insistently on the nature of the collective practice concerned. In relation to the church, therefore, our starting-point is the whole people of God as they are called to serve God's mission in and for the world. The distinctive role of the leader can only be understood within and in relation to this calling of the whole people of God. The specific activities of leadership, together with the more generic processes of management, exist to assist, enable and inspire the people of God in their pursuit of this calling, and we should therefore take care that they are compatible with the church's purpose, and genuinely feed it. The processes that build a healthy organization (like finance and HR) are absolutely vital to maintain the conditions that can allow the whole collective practice to function in the service of God's mission, and their absence can seriously damage the church's mission and ministry – but they are not ends in themselves. They are there, like leadership as a whole, only for the sake of the ministry and mission of the church.
41. We need to ask, however, whether the rise and rise of leadership as a dominant idea in the life of the church has led to a failure of this ordering of our attention. As we draw deeply on accounts of leadership developed with no connection to the church's ministry and mission, have we ended up *starting* with the specific activities of the leader, or with the specific demands of efficient management, and rearranging our understanding of ministry and mission around them?

### **2.3.3 The tasks of leadership**

42. We need to ask, then, whether the church's increasing valorisation of leadership, because it has involved the adoption of generic accounts of leadership from secular sources, has led to a downplaying of the specific nature of the church, its ministry

and mission. As well as asking whether this has involved turning away from the specific structure of ministry within which senior church leadership sits, we should ask whether it has involved turning away from the specific tasks that have been central to that ministry.

43. The descriptions of episcopal ministry in Canon C18 and in the Common Worship Ordinal can provide a framework for asking this question. They do not describe a distinct activity of leadership, but rather distribute across several different headings the ways in which bishops will exercise what we might call leadership.<sup>11</sup> Bishops will
- be ‘an example of righteous and godly living’ (C18), fashioning their lives ‘according to the way of Christ’ and leading the people ‘in the way of holiness’ (Ordinal);
  - be the ‘chief pastors’ of the diocese, ‘knowing their people and being known by them’ (Ordinal), and being responsible for preserving and deepening the relationships of care that hold the church’s life together;
  - be teachers, whose task it is to ‘uphold sound and wholesome doctrine, and to banish and drive away all erroneous and strange opinions’ (C18) so as to ‘hand on entire’ the Christian faith (Ordinal) – to ensure, including by example, the vitality of proclamation and the richness of teaching and formation;
  - be ‘the principal ministers’ of the sacraments, called to ‘lead the offering of prayer and praise’ (Ordinal), and responsible for maintaining and developing the life of worship in the diocese, so that the focus of that life remains on God;
  - ‘discern and foster the gifts of the Spirit in all who follow Christ, commissioning them to minister in his name’ (Ordinal), and presiding over ordinations;

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<sup>11</sup> See <http://www.churchofengland.org/about-us/structure/churchlawlegis/canons/section-c.aspx#Head1-78> and <http://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-worship/worship/texts/ordinal/bishops.aspx>.

- be the people with responsibility for discipline, including the responsibility where necessary to ‘correct and punish’ (C18); and
- ‘proclaim the gospel boldly, confront injustice and work for righteousness and peace in all the world’ (Ordinal).

44. Should we think of leadership as a particular way of framing the tasks already on this list, or as an additional item to be appended to it, or both? And if it is an additional item, do we need to ask whether it proves, in practice, more important than some (or even all) of the other items on the list, and ends up vying with them for the limited time and energy that any one person has available. Is the idea of leadership the cuckoo in this nest?

#### **2.3.4 The ethos of leadership**

45. Some of the deepest questions about the increased focus on leadership in the life of the church have to do with the ethos of leadership. Has the focus on leadership led to a valorisation of attitudes and forms of behaviour and relationship that are not well suited to the church – that is, to the work of ministry and mission to which we are all called?

46. Do the virtues being demanded of senior leaders today sit uneasily with the virtues of discipleship? A Christian leader is, after all, a disciple first and a leader second, and that means that he or she is and remains a *follower* even while being a leader. Furthermore, as a disciple a leader is called to display the fruit of the Spirit – but some current models of leadership do not seem to place much emphasis on patience, kindness, gentleness and self-control, and might not sit easily with Canon C18’s description of the bishop’s ‘duty to set forward and maintain quietness, love, and peace among all’. How well do our descriptions of leadership cohere with our traditions of thinking (and arguing) about discipleship and holiness?

47. Do the relationships that leaders are currently being called to pursue conflict with the more basic patterns of relationship that the church is called to embody: patterns of gracious gift and reception amongst all God's people? 'Leader' is a relational term, but it is not always clear that the relationship envisaged between the leader and the led is the kind of relationship between members of the same body that Paul envisages in 1 Corinthians 12 and 13. How well do our descriptions of leadership cohere with our traditions of thinking (and arguing) about the nature of relationships in the body of Christ?
48. Do the expectations currently surrounding leaders focus on effectiveness and success in ways that undermine a distinctive Christian understanding of action, in which one's action is a gift that one receives more than it is something that one achieves; in which there can be no effectiveness without grace; and in which failure is one source of God's blessing? How well do our descriptions of leadership cohere with our traditions of thinking (and arguing) about the relationship between divine and human agency?
49. It is always worth asking whether our descriptions of leadership can leave room for a leader who was abandoned by all his followers, who was stripped of all dignity and power, and whose ministry was in every measurable sense defeated – and where that failure was nevertheless the foundation stone of God's mission. If Christ is our primary model of leadership, what does that do to our perception of the role? How well do our descriptions of leadership cohere with our traditions of thinking (and arguing) about the nature of Christ-like action?

#### **2.4 *For and against?***

50. We have been speaking as if there were a straightforward opposition between the desire for stronger leadership and criticisms of the increased focus on leadership in the church. That does not, however, do justice to the situation in which we find

ourselves. On both sides the same question is being asked: What is needed for the ministry and mission of the church to flourish?

51. That does not mean that there are no real differences between those who urge more focus on leadership and those who resist it, nor does it mean that the differences are trivial. It does mean, however, that these are differences that have arisen within a shared task – and it means that a response to both tendencies, the enthusiastic and the critical, requires the same thing: deeper attention to the nature of the church and its calling, and to the God who calls it. That is why it makes sense, at this point, to turn away from contemporary models for and claims about leadership, and turn back to the New Testament.

### **3 Leadership in the New Testament**

52. Scripture holds a prime place as the source and guide for our ‘faithful improvisation’ (see §13 above). It teaches us to see the reality to which any account of Christian leadership must respond: the reality of God’s call to the church. Attention to the New Testament church can provide a framework for faithful improvisation as we seek patterns of organisation, inspiration, and fruitfulness for the twenty-first-century church.
53. We must of course beware the hermeneutical trap of thinking we just have to rediscover the primitive truth of some notional ‘biblical pattern’ and think ourselves back into it. In fact one of the first conclusions we can draw from the study of the New Testament is that church order is never static: it keeps evolving to fit the ever-changing needs and challenges of a changing world. Arguably this is one of the prime tasks of ‘re-imagining ministry’: the task of listening with attentiveness and sensitivity to the needs of God’s world and the call of God’s Spirit. But that listening process must also be attuned to the roots of our tradition, and to the words of Scripture: we need to look to the Bible, not for a transferable, once-for-all blueprint of church order, but for the fundamental principles (‘canons’) by which we can order the life of the church in our generation, responding to our world.

#### **3.1 A triangular model of leadership**

54. Theologies of church leadership tend to operate in one of two directions. A theology that starts with ‘every-member ministry’, with the mission and ministry of the whole people of God, can find itself struggling to provide a rationale for the particular calling of ordained ministry.<sup>12</sup> Conversely a theology that starts with the ordained

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<sup>12</sup> This problem is endemic in discussions about Lay Ministry. It is discussed more fully in the Faith and Order Advisory Group paper, *The Mission and Ministry of the Whole Church: Biblical, Theological*

ministry can find itself caught in a defensive stance of making constant apologetic allusions to the mission and ministry of the whole people of God, without ever quite taking them seriously. Arguably, both models seriously distort the biblical pattern.

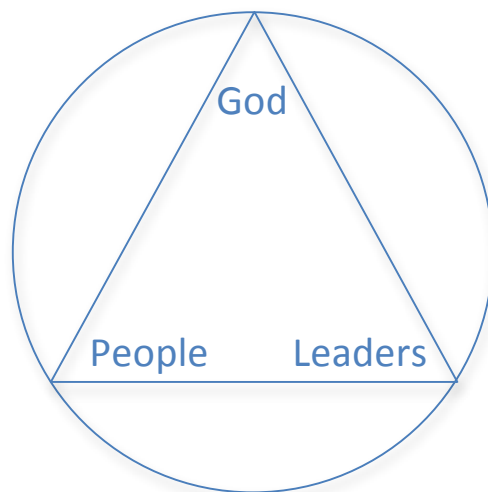
55. Rather than start with the church or its leaders, the pattern we propose starts with the action of God. It is God who calls and redeems a people to become a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19.6), and a light to the nations (Isaiah 49.6) – but it is also God who calls individuals to leadership within his people, starting with Moses who embodies the three strands that become differentiated over Israel’s history into kingly, priestly and prophetic leadership. Similarly, Jesus, the new Moses, is sent to be the pioneer (*archegos*) and shepherd of all God’s people, embodying all three modes of leadership – but he also selects and calls a smaller group of disciples, sends them out and gives them authority to act in his name as his witnesses and surrogates. And again: the gifts of the Spirit are given to the whole church – but that gifting is expressed in individual *charismata* (including the gift of leadership) exercised within the Body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12.27–30; Ephesians 4.11–12).
56. This divine agency is variously experienced through the long history of the people of God. Its fundamentally Trinitarian shape is already expressed in Paul’s classic formulation in 1 Corinthians 12.4–6: ‘There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of working, but it is the same God who inspires them all in every one.’ The leadership of Christ is the leadership of the Word become incarnate, the eternal Son, and therefore a leadership from and in and into the life of the triune God.
57. Thus any theology of leadership in the church must begin with God’s call: the primary exercise of leadership in the church is God’s. In the first place, this is the calling of the whole people, who are called not by human ‘leaders’ but by God. But

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*and Contemporary Perspectives* (London: Church House, 2007), available online at <https://www.churchofengland.org/media/1229854/gsmisc%20854.pdf>.

equally (and unapologetically), any theology of leadership in the church must acknowledge that God does call individuals to exercise leadership in and for the people of God. In turn, the leadership exercised by members of Christ's body is always a participation in his leadership of the whole people. The three — God, people, and leaders — are linked in an irreducibly three-cornered relationship.

58. At a very simple level, we can represent the triangular dynamic of these relationships in the form of an equilateral triangle enclosed in a circle. In this diagram, the two 'sides' of the triangle represent this double calling: God calls his people; God calls individuals to lead his people. The bottom line represents the complex two-way relationship between people and leaders — a relationship created by God's double call.



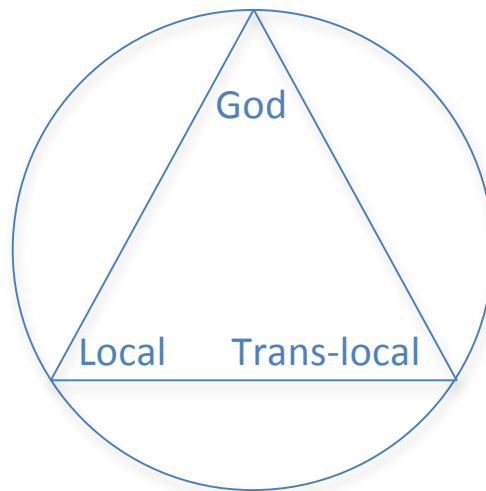
59. This first 'leadership triangle' offers a simple but fruitful template for analysing the grammar of ministry and leadership in the New Testament. It enables us to mine a rich vein of teaching material on leadership and ministry in the New Testament (especially, though not solely, in Paul's letters), and brings out the essential relationship between God's calling of God's people and God's calling of leaders for that people. It makes it clear at the outset that the narrower concerns of 'leadership training' (focusing on relationships between leaders and people, or interactions between leaders) form only one aspect of a multi-faceted relationship with the Lord of the Church, who calls both the church and its leaders to his service.



60. A fuller description would also need to take account of the external relationships of the church. In the diagram, the circle represents the world, touching the triangle at three points of contact. It is important to note that God's interactions with the world are not confined to the church; similarly, the meaningful interactions of Christians and their leaders with the world are not confined to their internal interactions with each other – though too often we speak and act as if they were.
61. Theologically speaking, of course, it is misleading to confine God to the apex of the triangle. This is a simplified diagram with a strictly limited theological remit. It does not attempt to represent every aspect of the life of God within the life of the church (how could it?). The people of God has the Spirit at work within it and Christ incarnate in their midst. They live in relation to the Father because they are being drawn by the Spirit to share in the Son's relationship to the Father. When we talk about God's calling of people and leaders, it is this triune action of God drawing us into God's own life that we have in mind.
62. A similar triangular pattern also offers a fruitful way of representing the interplay between the apostles and the leaders of local churches in the New Testament. The underlying three-cornered pattern remains constant: God calls and empowers both the church and its leaders, entrusting both with a *diakonia*, a commission to bring God's word and God's pastoral care to a world in need.<sup>13</sup> Right from the start, however, the New Testament presents us with a dual-focus picture of leadership, with one focus on the local congregations, and the other on the apostolic networks that operate at trans-local level. This dual-location leadership pattern can be seen clearly across the later writings of the New Testament (cf. Hebrews 13.7, 17, 24; 1 Peter 5.1–5). It is classically expressed in Paul's Miletus speech (Acts 20.17-35), where Paul, deeply conscious of his own calling as an apostle (20.24), reminds the Ephesian elders that their leadership too is derived from the Holy Spirit (20.28).

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<sup>13</sup> For this understanding of *diakonia*, see John N. Collins, *Diakonia: Re-interpreting the Ancient Sources* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1990).



63. We therefore need a second, supplementary triangle in order to do justice to the increased geographical complexity of the growing church.<sup>14</sup> Just as, in the light of God's call, there is a necessary interplay between leaders and people, so there is a necessary interplay between local and trans-local leaders in the light of the same call. In each case, understanding how that interplay works in relation to God's defining action is central to the task of understanding New Testament visions of leadership.
64. Historically speaking, this deep-seated duality may provide a more robust foundation for a theology of church leadership than mistaken attempts to read back the three-fold order of bishops, priests and deacons wholesale into the New Testament — or (equally mistaken) attempts to deny that the New Testament church has any order at all. But it may also provide an enduring thread for theological engagement with the shape of church leadership, a pattern that resurfaces time and again in church history, in new configurations but with the same underlying tension between local

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<sup>14</sup> Our two triangles are not the same. That is, the second triangle is not simply a re-labelling of the first. As we will be explaining, for example, leaders can be both local and trans-local. In a 3-D model, the two triangles could be combined as two faces of a pyramid.

and global.<sup>15</sup> It is the creative interplay (and tension) between these two that ensures both the locality of the church and what we call its 'catholicity' – that is, the fact that its various local manifestations are together parts of one body, the church catholic, and are called to live in deep communion with one another.

65. Such a leadership structure may seem impossibly complex: but in fact analogies are not far to seek. We might, for example, compare the structure of a modern orchestra, where the 'leader' of the orchestra is neither the owner nor the employer of the orchestra, but the (elected) leader of a collegial body of independent musicians. Another level of leadership (itinerant, trans-local, visionary, charismatic) is offered by the conductors who visit the orchestra and lead it in performance: their relationship is symbolized by the handshake between conductor and leader at the end of a performance. But both would claim to be operating in the service of a higher allegiance to the music itself, offering an interpretation, articulation or embodiment of the composer's designs. To quote the conductor Bernhard Haitink (interviewed on BBC Radio 3, June 2014), 'It's not about power . . . It's not about me imposing my wonderful interpretation on the music. . . . It's about motivating . . . making space . . . about practising musicianship with musicians.'

### **3.2 *The language of leadership in the New Testament***

*What terms are used for leadership roles in the New Testament?*

*What areas of secular life does the church mine for leadership models?*

*What analogies or metaphors are used to describe church leadership in the New Testament?*

66. This 'triangular' structure is deeply embedded in the language used for church leadership in the New Testament. New Testament writers consistently avoid using

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<sup>15</sup> Liberation theologians have done some helpful thinking on this: cf. for example Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 2008). See also *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church: Report of an Anglican–Methodist Working Party* (London: Church House, 2012).

words associated with political or military power to describe the church's human leaders. In the world of the New Testament, the word 'leader' (*hegemon*) is used only to refer to royal or imperial governors like Pilate (Matthew 27.2). If the church has a 'governor,' it is the royal Messiah predicted by the prophet Micah (Matthew 2.6), the 'pioneer (*archegos*) and perfecter of our faith' (Hebrews 12.2). Only in three passages do we find the related term *hegoumenos* ('one who leads / guides') used of church leaders: in the Epistle to the Hebrews (Hebrews 13.7, 17, 24), in Acts (Acts 15.22), and in Luke's Gospel (Luke 22.26).

67. The last passage is crucial for understanding the ethos of leadership in the church. Here Jesus at the Last Supper is responding to the disciples' quarrel over who should be the greatest: 'The kings of the nations lord it over them, and those in authority over them are called benefactors. Not so with you; instead the one who is greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the one who leads (*ho hegoumenos*) like the one who serves (*ho diakonon*).' Note that Jesus does not forbid the use of the term 'leader': he accepts that there are (or will be) differences of role and status among his followers. But his words show an awareness of the political connotations of 'leadership' language, and he offers a radical redefinition of what 'leadership' must mean in the context of his own servant ministry and forthcoming death (v.27). Right at the outset, then, we are faced with the paradox of leadership in the New Testament. There is leadership in the New Testament church — plenty of it, as we shall see in the next section. But there is already a sensitivity about leadership language, and the status associations it brings with it.
68. The terms used for church leadership are still very fluid in the New Testament, with an emphasis on function rather than title. Paul's famous list of ministries in 1 Corinthians 12.28 veers between recognised roles (apostle, prophet, teacher) and spiritual gifts (healing, miracles, tongues). Not all of these are leadership roles: the whole point of the body analogy is that the Spirit-gifted church exhibits a whole variety of 'ministries' (*diakoniai*, 12.5) working together for the good of the whole. In modern English translations, 'leadership' appears in the list as one gift among many: in the skills of the pilot (*kuberneseis*), often used by ancient writers as a metaphor

for political leadership; or in the advocacy and support offered by the skilled administrator (*antilempseis*, 12.28). In the parallel list in Romans 12.6–8, ‘leadership’ sometimes appears as a translation of *ho proistamenos*, the one prepared to ‘stand out’ in the assembly and to ‘stand up’ for the rights of weaker members.

69. If political power-terms are generally avoided, what areas of contemporary life does the New Testament mine for leadership models? Language is never neutral: the terms used by the early church reflect the social models that form the matrix of the church’s formative years. Some of these are obvious. From the contemporary Jewish community comes the *presbyteros* (‘elder’ or ‘senior’), and perhaps the *apostolos*, which may be a distant echo of the *shaliach* or ‘delegate’ used by the High Priest to keep in touch with scattered Jewish communities. The teacher and the disciple (or ‘learner’) come from the world of the schools. Some are less obvious. The *diakonos* (Romans 16.2) taps into the ‘upstairs–downstairs’ world of the household, the primary unit of business as well as family life in the ancient world.<sup>16</sup> The *prostatis* (Romans 16.2) taps into the world of ancient patronage, a world where people with status and wealth were expected to use it on behalf of others.<sup>17</sup> And what of the *episkopos* (Philippians 1.1, 1 Timothy 3.1)? A number of different backgrounds have been suggested for this (perhaps deliberately) colourless term: the ‘inspector’ or ‘overseer’ on a large estate, the financial officer of a voluntary association, or even the *Mebaqqer* or spiritual overseer of the Essene communities in Damascus.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Collins argues that ‘the underlying notion of *diakonia* is that of a “go-between”’, with the focus on ‘fetching or bringing things on call’ rather than on menial status. But the evidence he assembles demonstrates that the word never loses the sense of a household attendant: see Collins, *Diakonia*, pp. 87–89. Cf. Loveday Alexander, ‘*Diakonia*, the Ephesian Comma, and the Ministry of All Believers’, in Jason A. Whitlark et al. (eds), *Interpretation and the Claims of the Text: Resourcing New Testament Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), pp. 159–76, at p. 164.

<sup>17</sup> On the *prostatis*, cf. Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 74–110; Caroline Whelan, ‘*Amica Pauli*: The Role of Phoebe in the Early Church’, *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 49 (1993), pp. 67–85.

<sup>18</sup> For a survey of recent scholarship on the *episkopos*, cf. Alistair C. Stewart, *The Original Bishops: Office and Order in the First Christian Communities* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014).

70. A similar variety of social worlds is reflected in the analogies and metaphors used by New Testament writers to capture the ethos of leadership in the church. Paul describes himself in turn as father (1 Thessalonians 2.11), as nurse (1 Thessalonians 2.7), and as steward (1 Corinthians 4.1-5) to the churches he has founded — all household terms. The architect and the gardener (1 Corinthians 3.5-10) belong to the world of the great estates. Rather more unusual is the matchmaker or marriage broker (2 Corinthians 11.2) and the ambassador, pleading on Christ's behalf (2 Corinthians 5.20) to effect a reconciliation between God and his wayward people. What is striking about many of these terms is the way they draw attention to an essential aspect of the self-understanding of Christian leaders in the New Testament. They are used to distance the authority of the leader from any sense of ownership or mastery, and to deflect attention back to the Lord of the church, who is the real source of the leader's authority. They reflect what we may call a *refracted* authority, seen through a triangular prism that resists the construction of top-down management structures.
71. Particularly important in the emergent vocabulary of Christian leadership are two metaphors which already have a long Old Testament pedigree. When Paul describes himself and Apollos as 'stewards of the mysteries of God' (1 Corinthians 4.1), he is stressing that he is not the master of the household (the employer, in modern terms) but a fellow-employee, tasked with supplying his fellow-servants with all they need to carry out the master's orders. This imagery (echoed in many of the Gospel parables, cf. esp. Luke 12.41–48) carries with it a strong sense of accountability. The idea that the steward will ultimately have to 'give account' when the master returns is linked with a strongly eschatological view of the church (cf. Hebrews 13.17; Luke 16.1–13; Matthew 25.14–30). Behind it lies a long association of leadership with stewardship (cf. Isaiah 22.15–25).
72. A similar pattern of relationships underpins the familiar image of the leader as 'shepherd' or 'pastor' (Ephesians 4.11). The Gospel image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd who seeks out the lost and leads his sheep in and out to find pasture (John

10; cf. Luke 15.3–7, Matthew 18.10–14) echoes the Old Testament language of God as shepherd of his people (e.g. Psalm 77.20; 78.52–3; 80.1; 100.3), and especially Ezekiel’s prophecy that God himself will shepherd his people, pasture them and bind up their wounds (Ezekiel 34). In John 21.15–17, Jesus invites Peter to be his under-shepherd (‘Feed my sheep!’) — a role which will eventually be shared with other, local leaders (1 Peter 5.2–4, cf. Acts 20.28). The image of the shepherd has been richly mined in Christian reflection on leadership, offering a model of leadership that is at once active and bold (cf. David in 1 Samuel 17.34–35), tender and caring (Psalm 23; Ezekiel 34.4), and ultimately sacrificial (John 10.11). In Christian thought, the image of the Shepherd is never very far from that of the servant who offers himself ‘as a lamb to the slaughter’ (Isaiah 53.7; cf. John 1.36; Revelation 5.6).<sup>19</sup>

### **3.3 *The structures of leadership in the New Testament***

73. The church has always adapted its structures in response to changing needs, and the New Testament reflects the still fluid structures of the church’s first decades. The New Testament gives us a dual-location leadership structure of local and trans-local leaders, working in partnership and each owing allegiance to the Lord who calls and empowers both. This is represented diagrammatically in our second triangle above. Neither of these is more ‘essential’ than the other.<sup>20</sup> Both are equally exercised within the body of Christ and derive their validity from the only ‘essential’ leadership within the Church, which is that of Christ himself.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Paul Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2007), pp. 84–89.

<sup>20</sup> Kenneth E. Kirk (ed.), *The Apostolic Ministry: Essays on the History and Doctrine of Episcopacy* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1946), pp. 7–14.

<sup>21</sup> As T.W. Manson observed many years ago. See Manson, *The Church’s Ministry* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1953), p. 30.

### 3.3.1 Leadership in the local church

74. We begin with Paul's letters, which provide our earliest first-hand records of the inner life of the early church. In order to understand how Paul's theology of leadership works, we need to begin with his ecclesiology, his theological vision of the church as the people of God. Fundamental to this ecclesiology is a three-way relationship between the apostle, the *ekklesia* (which for Paul mostly means the local church), and the God who calls and empowers both. This triangular set of relationships is deeply embedded in the grammar of the letters. Each local *ekklesia* is a local instantiation of the people of God, called into being by God and sanctified by his grace. Paul's letters are grounded in the confidence that the whole *ekklesia* is the recipient of the gifts of the Spirit; the whole *ekklesia* is called to be God's holy people, the visible sign of the presence of God in a particular locality (1 Corinthians 1.2–9).
75. But right from the start there are signs of a progressive differentiation of functions and ministries. 'There are varieties of gifts (*charismata*), but the same Spirit; there are varieties of ministries (*diakoniai*), but the same Lord; there are varieties of working (*energemata*), but it is the same God whose energy (literally 'in-working') produces them all in every one'.<sup>22</sup> As the body of Christ, the church *embodies* the active presence of Christ in the world, doing the things that Jesus did: teaching, healing, preaching the Kingdom. But these activities are now distributed among many 'members', rather than being concentrated in one person (1 Corinthians 12; Romans 12.3–8).
76. These varied ministries (*diakoniai*) are not the preserve of an ordained ministry or a leadership elite but were the responsibility of the whole church. The lists of *charismata* are dominated by the **ministry of the word**: wisdom and knowledge, teaching and instruction, encouragement and exhortation, prophecy and revelation, the gift of tongues and their interpretation. Alongside this is the **practical, pastoral**

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<sup>22</sup> 1 Corinthians 12.4–6 (our translation).



**work** of the church: healing and miracles, financial aid and almsgiving, advocacy and social support. The **worship** of the church is enriched by contributions from all its members, whether in words of prophecy and exhortation, in psalms and hymns (1 Corinthians 14, Colossians 3), or in sharing the bread and wine of the Eucharist (1 Corinthians 10, 11).

77. Where does 'leadership' fit into this dynamic picture of the local church? Paul's letters provide clear evidence that certain people within the congregation perform a range of functions that we would associate with 'leadership' (1 Thess. 5.12–13; 1 Cor. 16.15–18; Phil. 4.2–4; Rom. 16). Many of these local leaders, it is fair to assume, were the hosts of house-churches. This is where we find the church's first *episkopoi* and *diakonoi* (Phil 1.1; Rom 16.2). This leadership is fluid and flexible, part of the gifting and energizing activity of God in the local church. Here we see the pattern represented by our first leadership triangle above. God's call and gifting are the source from which flow the whole ministry and mission of the church; within that ministry and mission, God calls some to specific ministries of leadership.
78. The book of Acts gives us a more comprehensive picture of local church leadership. Acts 6 sees a division of labour between the apostles and the local officers selected by the congregation to 'serve tables,' i.e. to oversee the church's charitable activities — though two of those appointed, Stephen and Philip, prove to have a wider role in mission (Acts 7, 8). The church in Antioch has its own leadership of 'prophets and teachers'; it is they who appoint Saul and Barnabas as *apostoloi* or delegates of the church, sent out on mission (13.1–3) and reporting back to the church on their return (14.26–28). The churches of Lycaonia and Ephesus have 'elders' (*presbuteroi*), the former at least appointed by Paul (14.23; 20.17). So does the church in Jerusalem, sitting under the presidency of James — though how these elders were appointed, and who gave them their authority, is never stated.
79. Thus the first 'order of ministry' in the church of the New Testament is the *laos*, the people of God, living out their calling to be God's people in the particular locality where they live. This 'locality', localization in a particular place, is part of the essence

of what it means to be the church, something essential to its well-being. Within these local churches there is a proliferation of multiple forms of local ministry, the concrete evidence and outworking of the divine energy: *because* God is at work in you, there are varieties of gifts, and varieties of ministries (1 Corinthians 12.4–6). And among those gifts is the gift of leadership. The church needs a leadership that is rooted in, listening to, and answerable to a particular *local* community.<sup>23</sup>

### 3.3.2 Trans-local leadership: apostles

80. But leadership in the New Testament is not limited to the local church. Right from the start, Paul's letters testify to the exercise of spiritual leadership over distance and over time, maintaining and building up contacts over time and space. This **trans-local** dimension is reinforced through the greetings at the end of each epistle, as well as through practical projects like the collection for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem, which absorbed so much of Paul's energies in the latter years of his mission (2 Corinthians 8–9).
81. Paul is not alone in exercising this trans-local apostolic calling. Other travelling apostles, including Peter (Cephas) exercised a right to hospitality and subsistence at the expense of the local church (1 Corinthians 9.5). The travelling apostles are not delegates of other local churches, or even of the Jerusalem church (Galatians 1–2): their authority is in some way behind and above that of the network of local churches. Neither is their authority tied to particular regions, like the bishops of later centuries. Paul has a clear view of his own calling to the Gentiles (Galatians 2.1–10) and of his own segment of the map (Romans 15.19). But this demarcation does not prevent Peter from visiting Corinth, or Paul from planning to visit Rome (Romans 15.22–24). Their apostolic oversight (*episkope*) is exercised across the whole church of God. And it is derived not from a church (not even the church of Jerusalem) but from Christ himself.

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Steven Croft, *Ministry in Three Dimensions*, pp. 70–72.

82. The Gospels and Acts provide the narrative basis for this apostolic calling. The narrative of Acts is dominated by the risen Christ, instructing ‘the apostles whom he had chosen’, eating with them, and commissioning them: ‘You shall be my witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth’ (Acts 1.1–8). With the dispersal of the growing church (Acts 8.1ff), the apostles assume a more itinerant *episkope*, leaving it to James and the elders to look after the affairs of the Jerusalem church. Acts also testifies to other forms of trans-local ministry: Agabus the prophet, Philip the evangelist, and Apollos the wisdom teacher (Acts 11, 8, 19). But these charismatic offices (like the ‘apostles and prophets’ of the *Didache*) offer itinerant *ministry* rather than itinerant *leadership*: they have their own spiritual gifts, but they do not have the trans-local authority that marks the *episkope* of the apostles.
83. Thus there is no place in biblical ecclesiology for the go-it-alone church: **catholicity**, connectedness, is built in to the church’s DNA right from the start. This connectedness may be expressed in different ways in different traditions: ‘But that it should happen cannot be open to discussion, for in it a dimension of the church is expressed which belongs to its essence: its catholicity, that is to say its unity in the truth through space and time. This dimension of catholicity is given with the Gospel itself and therefore with the ministry of proclamation in preaching and sacrament in itself.’<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Dorothea Wendebourg, ‘The Reformation in Germany and the Episcopal Office,’ in Ingolf Dalferth and Ruper Hoare (eds), *Visible Unity and the Ministry of Oversight: The Second Theological Conference Held under the Meissen Agreement between the Church of England and the Evangelical Church in Germany* (London: Church House Publishing, 1997), pp. 49–78, at p. 54.

### 3.4 *The tasks of leadership in the New Testament*

*What do New Testament church leaders do? What tasks are they expected to perform? How is the role of leader conceptualized, and how does it change and develop over time?*

#### 3.4.1 Leadership and ministry

84. Leadership is first and foremost a form of *diakonia* (1 Corinthians 16.15). It is one of the multifarious forms of ‘ministry’ that mark the Spirit’s continuing gift to the church (1 Corinthians 12.4–6; Ephesians 4.11). All leaders are ministers, but not all ministers are leaders. Leadership is a gift of the Spirit, but not all those with spiritual gifts are leaders. Thus in Paul’s vision of the spiritually gifted church, ‘leadership’ is one ministry among many. As Matthew Henry puts it: ‘our Lord Jesus Christ, when he ascended on high, left something for all his servants to do. . . . *All* are appointed to work, and some authorized to rule.’<sup>25</sup>
85. Many of the tasks that we now associate with church leaders (worship, word, and work) were in the Pauline churches regarded as the responsibility of the whole church. With the passing of time, more of these ministries came to be concentrated in the person of the local leaders. It is important to keep in mind the distinction between the specific task of ‘leadership’ and the varied ministry tasks that church leaders have accumulated over time.
86. This distinction can be helpfully formulated in terms of *episkope* (‘oversight’). For St Paul, teaching and exhortation, healing and tongues, practical aid and pastoral care are all gifts of the Spirit to the whole people of God. When the sacred assembly (*ekklesia*) is convened, any one of the congregation may lead in worship (1 Corinthians 11.4–5; 14.5, 26). But there is a downside to this charismatic fecundity.

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<sup>25</sup> Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (1721), on Mark 13.28; available online at <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/henry/mhc5.Mark.xiv.html>.

Paul's comments in 1 Corinthians 14 show the apostle's concern for what is missing: the need for clarity of message (vv.6–12); the need to make the church a space where outsiders can recognise the presence of God (vv.20–25); and, crucially, the need for 'building up' the *whole* church (vv.1–5; 27–33). Paul's critique is not of the charismatic freedom of Corinthian worship but of its self-centredness: prayer, praise and prophecy are not matters for spiritual self-indulgence but need to be directed to the life of the whole church.

87. We can see here in embryo one of the basic criteria for leadership: leaders respond to God's call not merely to fulfil their own ministry but to 'build up' the ministries of others. Leadership lies precisely in that wider vision, that looking out for the needs of the whole church — what later generations would call 'oversight' (*episkope*). Leadership has a vision for clarity of message, openness to the world, and the 'building up' of the whole church. Leaders (in other words) are distinguished not so much for performing distinct tasks as for ordering and building up the ministries of the whole congregation on behalf of and in the interests of all, both inside and outside the church. Thus the fundamental task of leadership is to 'preside', to take charge, to become 'the one who stands in front' (*proistamenos*: Romans 12.8; 1 Thessalonians 5.12).<sup>26</sup> Leadership is prepared to take responsibility, to take the risk of 'standing out' from the crowd, but knows that this can only be done 'in the Lord'.

### 3.4.2 The tasks of local leadership.

88. Already in this early period we can see a process of change and development in the way different ministries are distributed between the people of God (the *laos*), the local *episkopoi*, and the trans-local leadership of the apostles. For convenience, we can divide these tasks into four areas: **word**, **worship**, **work**, and the wider **world**.

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<sup>26</sup> In Justin (c. 150 CE) the same verb is used of the one who 'presides' at the Eucharist, in *First Apology* 65.3-5. See Denis Minns and Paul Parvis (eds), *Justin, Philosopher and Martyr: Apologies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

89. **Word:** Ministries of the word played a large part in the worship of the Pauline congregations: prophecy and teaching, tongues and revelations. Within this wider ministry, leaders are specially entrusted with a ministry of exhortation (*paraklesis*), for the building up of the body of Christ; and admonition or moral discipline (*nouthesia*). Their task is to take responsibility for the moral and spiritual welfare of the whole body — ‘to lose sleep over your souls’, as Hebrews 13.17 puts it. Paul sums up this hortatory and disciplinary aspect of leadership in 1 Thessalonians 5.14: ‘Admonish the unruly, comfort the discouraged, help the weak, be patient with all.’ Admonition must always be combined with encouragement — and with self-awareness (Galatians 6.1, Acts 20.28).
90. **Worship:** Leadership is concerned with ‘**order**’ (1 Corinthians 14.40); whether in the ordering of charismatic worship so that all may participate and all may be edified, or in the arrangements for sharing the Lord’s Supper so that none goes hungry (1 Corinthians 11.27–34). It is precisely this commitment to **fellowship** or ‘sharing’ (*koinonia*), this concern to put your brother or sister’s interests before your own, that lies at the heart of the Lord’s Supper: which is why the eucharistic pattern of self-giving love is central to the life of the church (1 Corinthians 11.23–26; 10.14–22). Given that many of these local leaders were the hosts of house churches, it is not surprising that **hospitality** is an essential aspect of their role (Romans 16; cf Philemon 1; Acts 16; Romans 12.13; Hebrews 13.2; 1 Timothy 3.2; Titus 1.8; 1 Peter 4.9; 3 John). It seems likely, if only for practical reasons, that such hosts would ‘preside’ at the common meal: eucharistic presidency (and baptism) was at this early stage an aspect of local (not apostolic) leadership.<sup>27</sup>
91. **Work:** Leadership involves labouring for the welfare of the people. Each member of the body is called to work for the good of the others (1 Corinthians 10.24) — but leaders are called to the distinctive task of keeping this good work circulating. The

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<sup>27</sup> For house-church hosts as prototypical local leaders, see Harry O. Maier, *The Social Setting of the Ministry as Reflected in the Writings of Hermas, Clement and Ignatius* (Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier, 1991).

term *prostates /prostatis* (Romans 16.2) has the sense ‘patron, benefactor, champion’. Those in positions of honour and distinction were expected to act on behalf of others, to offer advocacy and leadership to the vibrant and active programmes of almsgiving and pastoral care that characterised the life of the early churches. Such active and practical leadership is hard work (*kopos*).<sup>28</sup> It demands all the commitment that a mature adult would give to the daily task of earning a living.

92. **The wider world:** The task of ‘presidency’ (*prostasia*) also has a representative aspect: those who preside also represent their community to the outside world. Local leaders *de facto* act as connection points with the trans-local leadership of the apostles. It is the local leaders who receive Paul’s letters, and are solemnly charged with making them known to the congregation (1 Thessalonians 5.27). They take letters and gifts to Paul (1 Corinthians 16.17–18; Philippians 2.25–30), and carry letters from Paul to other churches (Romans 16.1–2).

### 3.4.3 The tasks of apostolic leadership

93. The fundamental apostolic task is summed up in Jesus’ farewell mandate to his disciples, ‘You shall be my witnesses’ (Acts 1.8). To be an apostle is to be a delegate; apostles are ‘sent’ not by the church but by Christ himself to be his witnesses ‘to the ends of the earth’. The apostolic task thus has a global (or trans-local) dimension built into it from the outset. The components of this global task are spelt out in more detail in Matthew 28.19–20: mobility, making disciples, baptizing, and teaching.
94. **Word:** The task of making the Gospel known in the wider world is essential to the apostolic task. The apostles are called to make disciples, that is to take on Jesus’ task of **preaching** the Kingdom and calling people to follow him (Mark 1.17; Acts 20.24–25; Romans 1.5). Paul conceives his task primarily in terms of mission and outreach, planting the seed (1 Corinthians 3.6), opening up new areas to the Gospel (Romans 15.20). Equally important is the task of **teaching**, instructing new disciples in the

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<sup>28</sup> 1 Thessalonians 5.12: cf. 1 Corinthians 16.16; Romans 16.6, 12.

essentials of the faith (Acts 2.42), strengthening and encouraging their growth through exhortation and admonition. Paul combines church planting and outreach with a ministry of ‘building up’ through letters and repeated visits (Acts 14.22; 20.1, 31). The Jerusalem apostles have a particular responsibility for preserving and passing on the stories of Jesus and the Scripture passages that unlock their meaning (Luke 24.44–49) — a tradition that Paul passes on to his congregations (1 Corinthians 11.23–26; 15.3–8). The apostolic witness is about keeping the scattered congregations in touch with their common roots in Christ, not only in words but by providing a **model** of the Christ-shaped life for imitation (1 Corinthians 4.15–16, 11.1; Philippians 3.17).

95. **Worship:** Equally fundamental to the whole apostolic task is **prayer:** cf. Acts 6.4. This is expressed graphically in Paul’s letters, where the opening prayer places all their mutual relationships within a ‘triangular’ framework: this is not just about me and you, but about you, me and God. The apostolic task also involves challenging their hearers to enter the sacramental life of the church (Matthew. 28.20). In Acts, the apostolic preaching is integrally connected with repentance, faith, and baptism (Acts 2, 16), with receiving the gift of the Spirit (Acts 8, 19), and with entering a eucharistic community (Acts 2.42). As the church grows and spreads, apostolic leadership is exercised not in a monopoly of sacramental ministry but in oversight (*episkope*) for the proper ordering of the sacraments and in the passing on of dominical tradition (1 Corinthians 10—11, 15).
96. **Work:** In a very direct way, the apostles in Acts are depicted as carrying on the work of Christ in healing and pastoral care (Acts 3.6; 9.34, 40; 20.10; 28.8). But the work of caring for the poor is the task of the whole church (Acts 4.34–35), and the book of Acts depicts a progressive division of labour as the apostles effectively entrust the tasks of administrative and pastoral *diakonia* to the local church.<sup>29</sup> This frees up the apostles for a wider *episkope*, initially in Samaria and Judaea (Acts 9–10), later as far afield as Corinth (1 Corinthians 1.12; 9.5). For Paul, the ‘work’ (*kopos*) of leadership is

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<sup>29</sup> Acts 6.1–6; 11.30.



shared with his co-workers (*sunergoi*) in local leadership (Romans. 16). However, he speaks more than once of the physical and mental hardships peculiar to the apostolic task (1 Corinthians 4.9–13; 2 Corinthians 11.16–33), not least what he calls ‘the care of all the churches’ (2 Corinthians 11.28). This trans-local *episkope* entails a significant commitment of time and administrative skill, not only in travel but in the deployment of his own staff team, in correspondence with individual churches, and in the organisation of the collection for the poor in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8–9).<sup>30</sup> Work, in the sense of earning a living, is also a part of the apostolic lifestyle: Paul’s commitment to self-supporting ministry, freeing up surplus funds for charitable work, serves as a pattern for local leaders (Acts 20.33–35; 2 Thessalonians 3.7–9).

97. **The wider world:** The apostolic task is global: its boundaries are ‘the ends of the earth’ (an astonishingly bold vision for this tiny group at the edge of the Roman empire). This global horizon has two components. (1) **Networking** between scattered churches. Paul’s commitment to catholicity entails a significant expenditure of energy, keeping the networks alive by a variety of means, including letters, visits, and greetings (cf. Romans 16; 1 Corinthians 1.2, 4.17). (2) The apostles also represent the public face of the church not only in evangelism but in **apologetic**. Essential to the apostolic task (both for Paul and the Twelve) is the interface with the wider world — encountering in their persons both its incomprehension and its hostility (Luke 21.12–19; Acts 9.15–16). The apostolic call to witness (*marturia*) may also be a call to martyrdom (John 21.19). Apologetic speech — speech to those outside the church — occupies a significant amount of dramatic space in Acts, and Paul alludes to this role (and to its impact on the confidence of the church) in the epistles (Philippians 1.12–18).

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<sup>30</sup> On the collection, cf. 1 Corinthians 16.1–4; 2 Corinthians 8–9; Romans 15.25–33. For a full recent discussion, see Bruce Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 2010).

### 3.5 *Becoming a leader in the New Testament*

98. How are leaders selected and authorized in the New Testament? Who appoints them? On what basis are they chosen? What is the role of vocation, selection and discernment in this process? Is it okay to put yourself forward for a leadership role? Here again the subtle interplay of divine and human agency represented by our ‘triangular’ pattern comes to the fore on the (rare) occasions when the New Testament lifts the lid on the processes of selection and discernment that lie behind the process of becoming a leader.
99. Leadership is not *sought* but *given*. It is a commission, a trust, a command. The initiative in calling and equipping leaders comes from God. Moses and the prophets hear the call of God. David is picked out, the youngest and most improbable of a line of brothers, by the prophet Samuel in response to the active prompting of the divine voice. Time and again, biblical leaders greet this sense of divine calling with surprise, reluctance, suspicion, unbelief.
100. The paradigm of divine calling is clearly set out in the Gospels. Jesus calls his disciples from their daily occupations (fishing, tax-collecting) to ‘leave everything and follow me’. Jesus chooses the Twelve for the more specific task of becoming apostles, gives them authority and sends them out to act as his agents in the mission of the Kingdom. He promises that they will be empowered by the Holy Spirit — a promise that is fulfilled after the resurrection (John 20, Acts 1—2).
101. In Acts 1.15–26, the believers cast lots to discover the one whom God has chosen to take Judas’ place in the college of apostles. After Pentecost, however, the gift of the Spirit becomes the determining factor in the selection and commissioning of leaders. But this is not a magical process: the Spirit’s work graciously includes human agency by freeing and eliciting a faithful response. Thus in Acts 6, faced with a manifest practical need for assistance with the distribution of charity, the apostles ask the assembled body of believers to choose suitable candidates ‘filled with the Spirit’. The

apostles' laying on of hands, *with prayer*, is both a commissioning and a way of invoking the divine agency over this new ministry. Similarly, Paul hears the voice of God in vision and dream, but it needs the obedience of Ananias and the discernment of Barnabas to help him fully realize his apostolic calling (Acts 9, 11), culminating in the laying on of hands, *with prayer and fasting*, by the prophets and teachers of Antioch (Acts 13.1–3) — both an act of commissioning and an act of entrusting the work (and the workers) to God (cf. Acts 14.23; 14.26).

102. This intermeshing of divine and human agency is replicated in the appointment of local leaders in the Pauline churches. Paul himself says of Stephanas and his colleagues in Corinth that they 'appointed themselves to the ministry' (1 Corinthians 16.15). Nevertheless, Paul makes every effort to endorse and support their leadership, both by personal commendation and visits, and more generally by including them in his army of 'co-workers' (Romans. 16). These local ministries are also seen as outworkings of the divine energy, gifts of the Spirit exercised within the body of Christ. This divine origin precludes boasting (Romans 12.3, 1 Corinthians 1.31; 3.21; 2 Corinthians 4.6ff) and competitiveness (1 Corinthians 12—14). But it also confers real authority — an authority that demands respect (1 Thessalonians 5.12–13; 1 Corinthians 16.15).
103. In Acts 14, in a speech that is paradigmatic for New Testament leadership, Paul instructs a group of elders: 'Take heed to yourselves and to the whole flock in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (*episkopoi*), to shepherd the church of God, which he purchased through his own blood' (Acts 20.28). However it is mediated, leadership (*episkope*) is a gift of the Holy Spirit to the whole church, held in trust under the Chief Shepherd to whom the flock ultimately belongs (cf. 1 Peter 5.1–5, John 21).
104. This pervasive sense of divine calling results in a very real sense of compulsion — or obedience. The prophet cannot resist the call of God. Isaiah's 'Woe is me!' is echoed in Paul's 'Woe is me if I preach not the Gospel!' (Isaiah 6, 1 Corinthians 9). Whatever their natural feelings of unworthiness or hesitation, those called to leadership

cannot refuse. As Paul says in a different context, the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable (Romans 11) and much will be required of those to whom much is given (Matthew 25.14–30). The charism of leadership, like other gifts of the Spirit, is not a personal gift to the individual, a matter for personal career development, but a gift to the church (Ephesians 4.7–12; Hebrews 2.4), a gift held on trust, to be used in the service of the Giver.

105. Those who have gifts (and that may include quite practical gifts honed in the secular world — cf. Romans 12.6–8; 1 Corinthians 12.28) have an obligation to use them in God’s service (whether within the church or without). ‘By the grace of God, I am what I am,’ says Paul, ‘and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them — though it was not I, but the grace of God which is with me’ (1 Corinthians 15.10). All Paul’s work would have been nothing without God’s grace, but if Paul had neglected his calling, that grace would have been empty, ‘in vain’ (cf. 1 Corinthians 9.24–26).
106. By the same token, those who have the task of leadership discernment have an obligation to seek out and encourage God’s gifting in others (cf. the instruction to Timothy to identify faithful teachers: 2 Timothy 2.2). Gifts can be neglected, buried in the ground, kept under wraps — or risked and put to work to bear fruit for the Kingdom. Timothy is instructed (twice) not to neglect but to ‘rekindle (fan into flames) the gift that is in you by the laying on of hands’ (1 Timothy 1.14; 2 Timothy 1.6). Within the biblical understanding of leadership as gift, there is no room for undue self-importance (‘What have you that you did not receive?’ 1 Corinthians 4.6f). But there is plenty of space for obedience, grounded in love, as a proper response to the generosity of the Giver.
107. This is probably the best way to approach the thorny question of ‘godly ambition’. The church has long worked with a model of modest reluctance in the pursuit of senior office, with the implication that the people most suited to office are almost by definition the least likely to seek it out. Is there a proper role for ‘godly ambition’ in the process of becoming a leader? We might perhaps more properly frame the

question in terms of *aspiration*.<sup>31</sup> To aspire to *episkope* in the Church of God is to desire 'a good work' according to 1 Timothy 3.1. Think of Paul's 'ambition to proclaim the good news' (Romans 15.20) — and of his passionate longing ('divine jealousy') to present the Corinthian church to Christ 'as a pure bride to her husband' (2 Corinthians 11.2). In so far as such 'godly ambition' is for others (the Church, the Kingdom, Christ) not for oneself, it is never a matter for personal pride ('boasting'), but (equally) not to be denied (2 Corinthians 10.7–8; 1 Corinthians 4.1–6).

108. It is (no doubt) a canny awareness of the almost infinite capacity of the human heart for self-deception that leads Paul to approach the subject of 'boasting' with a heavy amount of rhetorical irony (2 Corinthians 10–13). The developing church was clearly aware of the inherent potential for corruption in the discourse of leadership, and hedges it about with warnings (cf. James 3.1–2). Thus 1 Timothy 3.1–7 (the closest the New Testament gets to a list of episcopal competencies) shows a clear awareness that the office carries with it the danger of being 'puffed up with conceit' (v.6). To counter this, the emphasis is on moral probity (vv.2–3), financial incorruptibility ('no lover of money'), proven management competence (vv. 4–5), and 360-degree review ('well thought of by outsiders', v.7). Such passages imply a presumption that those who love the Lord will love the Church and therefore offer themselves for service within it.
109. The difficulty, then, becomes how to deal with an excess of motivation in wanting to take on church leadership. The tradition of expecting modest reluctance from those called to senior leadership (often described using the phrase *nolo episcopari*, 'I do not wish to be a bishop!') originated from that excess. The danger is that we internalise the tradition at a superficial level while losing the good desires it was meant to channel and contain.

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<sup>31</sup> A term we owe to Fr Simon Holden CR.

### 3.6 *The ethos of leadership in the New Testament*

110. We are now in a better position to attempt to sum up the distinctive ethos of leadership in the New Testament. The New Testament discourse of leadership shows a constant awareness of leadership as derived from God, refracted through the prism of divine leadership (the vertical axis) — and held in trust among and for others who are also called (the horizontal axis). New Testament writers show a constant readiness to adopt and adapt models from the secular world into the discourse of leadership — like the steward or household manager, reflecting the more domestic social context of the early church. But they are also constantly aware of the dangers of leadership: the dangers of pride, the dangers of power, the dangerous ideologies embedded in the discourse of leadership itself.
111. **Discipleship:** Leaders share the fundamental vocation of all Christians to discipleship. The first qualification for being a leader in the church is to be a follower. All leaders (lay and ordained) are those who have heard the call of Christ, who take seriously (however imperfectly) the transformative lifestyle of the Sermon on the Mount. They are open to a lifetime of learning, and committed to following Christ on the way of the Cross. As with all disciples, their spiritual life is undergirded by the daily disciplines of prayer, attentiveness, and obedience. As figures in the public eye, their personal commitment to probity (holiness) and the imitation of Christ has to be rooted in humility and integrity. Discipleship — the longing ‘to be conformed to the image of God’s Son’ — is the undergirding aspiration that reaches out past the demands of a particular office through a lifetime and beyond (Philippians 3.9–14).
112. **Charism.** Leaders share the anointing of all the baptised with the Holy Spirit. They recognize that leadership is a gift of the Holy Spirit, and as members of the Body of Christ, they exercise the particular gifts that equip them for leadership among and alongside other members whose diverse spiritual gifts need to be affirmed and encouraged. Those tasked with the selection and equipping of future leaders would look for people already exercising spiritual gifts (both within the Body of Christ and in the secular world).

113. **Diakonia:** Leadership is a *diakonia*, a commission, held in trust from God to be carried out in the service of others. Leaders share with other ministers an awareness of the given-ness of ministry; a commitment to service; and a sense of accountability. As a *diakonos Christi*, the leader is committed to a life of service, serving Christ by participating in his mission of service to the church and the world, and imitating the model of self-giving love displayed by Jesus himself. As faithful stewards of the mysteries of God (1 Corinthians 4.1), leaders are fellow-servants with the saints, serving the same master, tasked by the same Spirit with provisioning and resourcing the household of God (Matthew 24.45; Ephesians 4.12). Leaders are commissioned to provision and support other ministers and disciples in their service in God's household, and are accountable to the Lord of the household (1 Corinthians 4.1–5). Their leadership is derived from and held in allegiance to God as the ultimate source of all authority. Hence leaders are repeatedly warned against 'acting the boss', usurping the authority that belongs to God alone.<sup>32</sup>
114. **Oversight** (*episkope*): Nevertheless, leaders are called to exercise real authority — they have a calling that instils confidence both in the leader and in other members of the church. From earliest times, the church has sensed a need for order and focus, for a clarity of vision that looks to the needs of the whole body. This leadership is **consensual**. The social world of the New Testament was intensely hierarchical. Authority was instantly recognised and respected (Luke 7.8). It is all the more striking that leadership in the church is accorded by mutual recognition rather than imposed by external authority: it has to be 'recognised' (1 Corinthians 16.15, 1 Thessalonians 5.12). Effective leadership depends on co-operation between leaders and led (Hebrews 13.17; 1 Peter 5.2). It builds upon and extends the self-control and mutual oversight of the people. It is an **enabling** leadership, designed to support and build

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<sup>32</sup> 2 Corinthians 1.24; 1 Peter 5.3; Luke 2.25. The same model of *diakonia* undergirds Paul's understanding of political authority in Romans 13, and is reflected in the prayers for the monarch in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*.

up; it is about ‘power-to’ rather than ‘power-over’.<sup>33</sup> And it is a **representative** leadership: it is prepared to speak out, to offer advocacy on behalf of weaker members, to represent the community before the wider world.

115. **Collegiality:** Leadership is one manifestation of God’s energy (literally ‘in-working’) in the life of the church (1 Corinthians 4.6). But leaders do not have a monopoly on that life-giving energy: they are aware that God is at work in many other individuals and other places in the life of the church (Philippians 2.12) – and that theirs is but one of the gifts that God has given to the church. As such it is never a solitary privilege: leadership is exercised in *collaboration* (Greek ‘*synergy*’) with others whose work is part of the same divine energy. Hence church leadership in the New Testament is inherently *collegial*: both apostles and local leaders function as groups (or teams), rather than individuals. Jesus chose twelve apostles, not a single successor: collegiality is built into the model from the start. This collegiality is built into every level of the church’s leadership, from the (sometimes tense) relationship between Paul and the Jerusalem apostles (Galatians 1–2) to the relationships within Paul’s staff team and within local leadership teams.<sup>34</sup> Apostolic unity arises not from monolithic structures of authority but from the containment of diversity and the negotiation of difference.
116. **Apostolicity:** The function of apostolicity is classically seen in the maintenance of continuity in the teaching ministry of the church. Crucial to the biblical concept of apostolicity is fidelity to the Jesus tradition: the apostles were (before the Gospels were written down) the living chain of tradition that kept the church in touch with its Master, the ones who told the stories and maintained the memory that kept alive the scattered churches’ umbilical link with Jesus. But this is not just about words or

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<sup>33</sup> Kathy Ehrensperger, *Paul and the Dynamics of Power: Communication and Interaction in the Early Christ-Movement* (London: T & T Clark, 2009).

<sup>34</sup> This comes out particularly strongly in Paul’s vocabulary describing his co-workers with a string of compounds beginning with the Greek word *sun-* (‘with’): co-workers, fellow-prisoners, fellow-soldiers, and so on.



books: integral to the apostolic lifestyle is *imitatio, mimesis*: the apostle is called first and foremost to model the Christ-like life, to be a living paradigm for a Spirit-filled life centred on the cross of Christ. To be an ‘apostle’ is to be an agent, someone ‘sent’ to act on another’s behalf. It gives you authority, but also responsibility (answerability) to your principal. But the apostles never act as agents of some global organisation called ‘the church plc’; they are ‘special agents’ sent by Jesus Christ to act and speak and suffer in his behalf as his witnesses in the world. And this means being constantly thrown back to the ethos of leadership set by Jesus himself.

117. These themes converge in the dispute between the disciples over ‘who should be called the greatest in the kingdom of heaven’, recounted in Luke’s Gospel (Luke 22.25–27). All the Gospels record, in one way or another, how Jesus responded to the tensions and ambitions latent in the disciple-group by giving them some teaching on the nature of leadership. In John 13 this takes the form of the silent, acted parable of foot-washing, with the accompanying explanation: ‘The servant (*doulos*) is not greater than the master (*kurios*), and the messenger (*apostolos*, i.e. one who is sent) is not greater than the sender’ (John 13.16). John Collins is right to point out that the *diakonos* in Luke 22 functions exactly like the *apostolos* in John 13.16, drawing attention to the divine derivation of the messenger’s authority, but it would be a gross misreading of the passage to miss the implied critique of hierarchy. The servant’s authority is real: but it is also subordinate (Luke 22.27).<sup>35</sup> Those who exercise such authority have to be constantly vigilant not to fall into secular patterns of hegemony or to ‘act the master’ over those entrusted to their care.<sup>36</sup>

118. This scene (with its parallels) offers a dramatic representation of the New Testament ethos of leadership. On the horizontal axis, the apostles have to exercise their calling with and among others who owe allegiance to the same Lord (cf. John 21.20–23:

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<sup>35</sup> Contra Collins, *ho diakonon* here clearly carries the connotations of ‘waiting at table’ as well as the connotations of ‘carrying out a commission’ — the rhetoric of the sentence demands it. Cf. further Alexander, ‘*Diakonia*, the Ephesian Comma, and the Ministry of All Believers.’

<sup>36</sup> Compare Luke’s *kurieuein* (Luke 22.25) with 1 Peter 5.3 (*katakurieuontes*).

‘What is that to you? Follow me!’). On the vertical axis, their leadership, like all human leadership, is derived from and subordinate to the leadership of the one Lord of the church; and their leadership style has to be modelled on that of the one who comes among us ‘as one who serves’. Paul makes the same point in Philippians 2.1–11. To be a *diakonos Christou* is both an enormous privilege and enormously humbling: it is (to quote C.S. Lewis), ‘both honour enough to erect the head of the poorest beggar, and shame enough to bow the shoulders of the greatest emperor on earth.’<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Prince Caspian* (London: Collins, 1974), p. 191.

## 4 Faithful improvisation

119. The New Testament church does not provide us with a single model of leadership. Instead, it provides us with a fluid picture of ongoing adaptation, in which the divisions of ministry tasks between people and leaders, and between local and trans-local leaders, were re-negotiated in the light of changing circumstances and developing understanding, as was the nature of the task itself.
120. That negotiation took place between what Christians in any particular local context were *given*, and what they *found*. They were *given* the same commission to preach the gospel, to teach one another, to worship, to care for one another; they were given the same Lord, the same Spirit, and the same Father, and a shared history of God's saving work. They *found* themselves, however, faced with very different circumstances: differing social settings, differing relationships to Jerusalem or to Rome, differing local cultures, in differing generations. They sought to do justice to these different situations (*locality*) while remaining recognisable to those in other locales (*catholicity*) and faithful to what they had inherited (*apostolicity*) – and that required of them creative and flexible improvisation.
121. In the process, they borrowed (as we have seen) language, ideas, practices and even forms of organisation from a wide variety of sources: from the household, the estate, the empire, and many other spheres of life. Some of these borrowings seem to have been quite deliberate, others were perhaps more unconscious, but they were pervasive and kaleidoscopic. As they sought to discover how to be faithful in their changing contexts, the Christians of the New Testament churches experimented with those borrowings in all sorts of imaginative ways, remaking them in the process. The story of their faithfulness is a story of creative borrowing and critical adaptation.
122. The subsequent history of Christian leadership, from the New Testament to today, continues this history of improvisation. At its best, it was *faithful* improvisation: it

took the themes and norms of the New Testament and Apostolic age, and sought to remain true to them whilst at the same time adapting the methods, scope and organization of church leadership to ensure it served the Christian community effectively in changed conditions. This was never a one-way or one-dimensional matter, however. At different times, and in different places, different aspects of the New Testament picture would come to the fore, and then recede again.

123. The church, therefore, works creatively with the materials that it finds to hand, as it seeks to be faithful to what it has inherited. Precisely through this process, however, the Spirit can guide the church into deeper discovery of the nature of what it has received. That is, the process of faithful improvisation can itself, by God's gracious providence, become a means by which the church is shown the deeper structures of its faith. To describe the church's history of thought and practice in relation to leadership as a history of faithful improvisation does not, therefore, mean that this history is simply a succession of ephemeral experiments, each of no more value than the last. There is also a sense of cumulative, hard-won discovery – and we in our own improvisations are called not simply to be faithful to the original deposit of faith, but to what the church has been shown about that faith by the Spirit in and through its history. This is why we turn from the biblical explorations of the previous chapter to the present chapter's explorations of Christian history.
124. We are not going to try to attempt even a birds-eye overview of the whole history of this ongoing improvisation. A few unevenly scattered snapshots are all that we have space for, but we hope they will be enough to show some of the kinds of adaptation and re-negotiation that have taken place, specifically (though not exclusively) in relation to episcopal leadership.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> As part of the project, members of the Commission were asked to reflect on aspects of leadership in particular periods of church history. The following material is based on these more extended reflections.

#### 4.1 *The emergence of the three-fold order*

125. It is within the leadership of the local church that we see the gradual emergence of the three-fold order of later centuries. Its roots (and its language) are already there in the New Testament. The deacon (*diakonos*: Romans 16.2, Philippians 1.1) and the *episkopos* or ‘overseer’ appear in Paul’s undisputed letters, with *episkopoi* by implication the senior role (Philippians 1.1). The ‘elder’ (*presbyteros*) by definition implies seniority, both in the sense of physical age and of attributed honour (an assumption that creates problems for Timothy’s ‘youth’: 1 Timothy 4.12). The term is already current in contemporary social life, both Jewish and Greek, and appears as a Christian office in Acts and the later epistles.<sup>39</sup> What is unclear (and remains so throughout the first two centuries) is the structural relationship between these two ‘senior’ offices: most scholars now accept that the two terms were used concurrently in different parts of the Christian world, and only slowly amalgamated into a single system.<sup>40</sup> But both terms attest to the existence and importance of ‘senior leadership’ within the local church, alongside a still flexible and burgeoning array of local ministries.

126. At this stage, then, *episkope* is exercised *both* in the local church (by the local presbyter-bishops) *and* at trans-local level, by the apostles. The *episkopoi* belong firmly within the leadership of the local church: it is the apostles who represent the third ‘order of ministry.’ Within the local church, we can begin to see a gradual shift from a two-fold order of *presbuteroi* and *diakonoi* (Titus) to a three-fold order where one of the *presbuteroi* is singled out as *episkopos* with some kind of supervisory role

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<sup>39</sup> Titus 1.5; 1 Timothy 5.17; 1 Peter 5.1–5; James 5.14; 3 John; Acts 11.30; 14.23; 15.2–16.4; 20.17; 21.18.

<sup>40</sup> As Gregory Dix observes, as late as A.D. 200 ‘it is exceedingly difficult to relate the presbyterate to the episcopate and diaconate as elements in a single organization’ (in ‘The Ministry in the Early Church’ in Kirk (ed.), *Apostolic Ministry*, pp. 183–304, at p. 222). On the office of elder see R. Alistair Campbell, *The Elders: Seniority within Earliest Christianity* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1994); Roger Beckwith, *Elders in Every City: The Origin and Role of the Ordained Ministry* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2003); Stewart, *The Original Bishops*, ch. 4, and the literature cited there.

or ‘oversight’ over the rest (1 Timothy 3.1ff). But there is no sign that the *episkopos* has taken over the role of the itinerant apostle: that still belongs to Paul and his travelling team. What is missing (to our eyes) is a management structure to link the two forms of *episkope*. Both exercise authority, and sometimes they come into conflict (as for example in Paul’s relationship with the church in Corinth). But for the most part the two forms of authority work together, in a partnership (*koinonia*: Paul’s preferred word for his relationship with the Philippians) of mutual checks and balances.

127. The real crunch comes in the last decades of the first century, with the death of the apostolic generation. The later books of the New Testament (Acts, Hebrews and 1 Peter) stand at this point, and show a concern for the future training and validation of the local leadership. One way to secure this is to demonstrate an ‘apostolic succession’ by making explicit the endorsement and training of local leaders that is implicit in the core epistles.<sup>41</sup> The Pastoral Epistles show a similar set of concerns: Paul in prison, facing death, is concerned about false teaching, managing and organising his team and preparing them to carry on without him. In 1 Timothy and Titus we see this delegation in action, creating an apostolic link to the elders of the local churches via Timothy and Titus and offering a very specific set of instructions for leadership training.
128. Thus even within the New Testament we can see fluidity and development — ‘faithful improvisation’ — in the structures of leadership within the church, structures that vary and evolve, under the guidance of the Spirit, to meet the challenges of new situations. It is no coincidence that the period after the death of the apostles saw the *episkopoi* of the local church gradually assuming a more ‘apostolic’ role. To the historian, this was essentially a contingent and human historical process, responding to changing circumstances. But that does not mean that such contingent and human processes are outside the providence of God. They

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<sup>41</sup> See Gregory Dix’s section ‘On the development of the idea of apostolic succession’ in ‘The Ministry in the Early Church’, pp. 201–213.

can be seen as a recognition of and response to an essentially *theological* perception: that the well-being of the church, its right ordering under God, demands *both* local leadership *and* the kind of trans-local leadership provided by the apostles. Indeed, the Anglican church (among others) teaches that the emergence of the three-fold order is one of those discoveries about the deep structure of the faith into which the Spirit has led the church. The church, Anglicans have said, needs episcopal, priestly and diaconal ministry in order to be fully itself, and this is an abiding insight into the nature of the church to which we, in our own on-going improvisations, are called to respond.

## 4.2 *The historic episcopate*

129. The historic episcopate in its classic form stands at the confluence of the two strands of leadership we saw in the New Testament, the local and the apostolic. In the post-apostolic period there was a gradual shift in the balance between ‘local’ and ‘trans-local’ leadership, and a bid to capture the trans-local teaching authority of the apostles for the local *episkopoi*. This came about quite slowly and piecemeal over the second and third centuries – a multifaceted renegotiation of the triangular pattern we have seen in the New Testament period, involving complex gains and losses.<sup>42</sup>

130. One result is a re-definition of *locality*. The *episkopoi* in effect remain local church leaders, but the definition of ‘locality’ enlarges and solidifies from the house-church to the city and eventually its surrounding region (*dioikesis*). With this growth in scale comes an ever-greater structural complexity, requiring growing numbers of subordinate clergy to assist the bishop in his role. The deacons of this period are

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<sup>42</sup> The *Didache* (ch. 11) is revealing here: there are still itinerant ‘prophets and apostles’, who are treated with residual respect but also with a marked degree of suspicion; priestly tithes are to be given to local teachers. (See ‘Didache’ in Michael W. Holmes (ed.), *The Apostolic Fathers: Greek Texts and English Translations*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2007), pp. 344–369.

essentially the bishop's personal staff (with the role of Archdeacon emerging within this structure). The role of presbyter evolves from a collegial structure (individual house-church leaders meeting as a collegial body on a city-wide basis) to a more hierarchical one (presbyters as delegates and surrogates for a monarchical bishop). Nevertheless, aspects of the older patterns (such as the collegial role of the presbyters) survive in the rites of ordination. And the symbolic importance of locality in the authority of the bishop survives in the continuing practice of election by the people throughout the pre-Nicene period.<sup>43</sup>

131. At the same time we find a process of *centralization of ministries* within the local church. The episcopate gradually draws into itself the striking variety of ministry tasks found in the Pauline churches. Ministry tasks that had once (in the Pauline churches) been undertaken by a variety of church members came to be regarded as the preserve of a growing clerical elite. Eventually a concept of local *monarchia* begins to emerge, which in time will marginalize all other forms of spiritual authority within the bishop's *provincia* – prophetic, ascetic and patronal authority (including the authority of women). This is all part of a process of clericalization which draws an increasingly strong distinction between 'laity' and 'clergy' (terms that are hardly applicable in the New Testament period). Here we see the beginnings of 'a clear trajectory that renders the laity ever more passive and gives ever higher standing to the clergy'.<sup>44</sup>
132. Thus the episcopate combines within itself two forms of leadership: the mobile, missionary, trans-local leadership of the apostles; and the stable, locally rooted (and locally accountable) leadership of the local *episkopoi*. As *local* leaders, the bishops inherit the tasks of the local *episkopoi*, taking responsibility for the community's worship (presiding at the Eucharist); for moral discipline and spiritual growth within the community; and for the community's extensive charitable work among the poor.

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. Dix, 'The Ministry in the Early Church', pp. 198–99.

<sup>44</sup> Karen Jo Torjesen, 'Clergy and Laity', in Susan A. Harvey and David G. Hunter (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), pp. 389–405, at p. 401.



Episcopal leadership grows organically out of the hospitality and patronage of local house-church hosts, which includes taking responsibility for providing premises and resources for the community meal, as well as the patronal role of offering advocacy and support within the wider community. As the church grows, the task gets bigger, but it is essentially the same task. There is a direct line of continuity from Justin's 'president' handing out food parcels at the Eucharist to Basil's full-sized hospital complex.<sup>45</sup>

133. But the office of the bishop also inherits the mantle of *apostolic* leadership. This gives it the essential dimension of *catholicity*, setting the episcopate (and the local church) firmly within the setting of the wider Church. Apostolic leadership takes responsibility for the *mission* of the church in preaching and apologetic to the wider world — and, crucially, for the *memory* of the church, for keeping the church in touch with the words and work of Jesus. Thus the apostolic task of *teaching* comes to assume an increasingly central role in the role of the bishop, especially in defining the boundaries between orthodoxy and heresy (Ignatius, Irenaeus). The early Church is primarily defined by its ideology rather than nationality or geography (though it reverts to more traditional factors like race and place later as the Church becomes normalized in society). This necessitates teachers to communicate that ideology because there is no other way for Christianity to pass from one generation to the next. Continuity with the original 'apostolic' teaching and model of leadership remains an essential part of how the Church identifies itself — and thus an essential aspect of senior leadership — into the present day.
134. This fact in itself precipitates a change in the identity and authority of the *episkopoi*: 'as soon as *teaching* becomes essential to the role, wealth and patronage are no longer sufficient qualifications.'<sup>46</sup> Already in the New Testament a double measure of

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<sup>45</sup> Justin, *First Apology* 67.6–7. On Basil, see P.J. Fedwick, *The Church and the Charisma of Leadership in Basil of Caesarea* (Toronto, ON: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1979).

<sup>46</sup> Stewart, *Original Bishops*, p. 164.

‘honour’ is accorded to elders who teach as well as ‘rule’.<sup>47</sup> Increasingly, as the church grew in social status and influence, it had to find senior leaders who benefited from a classical education in rhetoric (the theory and practice of persuasive public speaking). They had to be educated in order to engage with the world of non-Christians all around them. They were well-used to countering (in speech or writing) the attacks of non-Christians on the intelligibility of Christianity. It is evident that such leaders were expected to be men of intellectual, moral and spiritual stature. What is less often understood is that they needed to be communicators who were also persuaders.

135. Thus as the church grows in size and social standing, its leadership grows to match. The essential ministry tasks remain the same, but the church needs leaders who can cope with social change and operate in the new, wider world that is opening up: bishops who were also politicians like Ambrose, John Chrysostom and Athanasius; bishops who were theologians before all else, like Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa.
136. Our documents tend to focus on those who fit the ancient ‘type’ of a leader in terms of birth and background, education, and character, privileging adult males without physical defect and of a certain moral and spiritual character (which the ancient world conceived as ‘fixed’ rather than developing). They will privilege the kinds of leader which their — and our — cultural mythology and history prefer: heroes, people of stature, of moral courage or sharp intellect. They will also shape the messy reality of individual leaders’ actions into familiar moral types, to ease this process of interpretation and prioritization.

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<sup>47</sup> 1 Timothy 5.17. Stewart is almost certainly correct here to read *time* as the ‘honour’ accorded to a generous patron, not the ‘pay’ offered to a subordinate officer: Stewart, *Original Bishops*, pp. 147–64.

### 4.3 *Monks and martyrs*

137. Meanwhile, however, new ways of accruing public authority for the exercise of different kinds of leadership are beginning to emerge in society in the fourth century. Peter Brown's work on the figure of the 'Holy Man' in late Antiquity shows how the lone ascetic, dedicated to the pursuit of holiness and the service of God, can come to exercise (without seeking it) a localized form of spiritual leadership 'on the ground'.<sup>48</sup> The increasing prestige associated with asceticism privileges those who have proven their worth by undergoing physical privations either willingly as monastics or forcibly as confessors (i.e. those who have demonstrated their willingness to suffer as martyrs). The consecrated virgin carries considerable moral and spiritual authority by reason of her 'purity', and can therefore intervene in public affairs.<sup>49</sup> The authority of wives and sisters is not to be despised either: Christian women like Helena, Eudoxia, Faustina, Justina, all exercise leadership in church and *imperium* — as does Macrina in a different sphere.<sup>50</sup> But their authority derives from their *selves*, the combining of a personality and character with a role and situation, without any support from the traditional, male sources of leadership legitimation (army, priesthood, legislature).
138. The history of early monasticism very clearly takes the form of a series of experiments in faithfulness, with each rule a distinct improvisation, giving rise to its own evolving tradition of ongoing improvisations, on through the medieval period and beyond. One particularly influential text (both now and then) was the *Rule of St Benedict*. The *Rule* recalls the 'triangular' pattern of leadership we identified in the New Testament. The Abbot's authority is significantly (and systematically) qualified

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<sup>48</sup> Peter Brown, 'The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity', *The Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971), pp. 80–101.

<sup>49</sup> Marina Warner, *Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London: Pan Books, 1985), esp. pp. 50–67.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Kate Cooper, *Band of Angels: The Forgotten World of Early Christian Women* (London: Atlantic, 2013), ch. 7.

or constrained. In principle, he commands obedience only as one himself under obedience, and insofar as he points away from himself to Christ. 'The authority of the abbot has nothing in it which is of itself; it is oriented to the realisation of the purpose of the rule which is to lead a community in the school of discipleship to be conformed to the passion of Christ; its purpose is to foster and nurture the making holy of Christian sinners. He is not to give way to his own preferences (RB 64) and he is under the same commitment to renounce his own will as his fellow monks. The object is the good and flourishing of the monks, whether strong or weak. Indeed he is to give attention to the individual needs and peculiarities as much as to the general requirements of the community's life, adapting himself to the ways of the monks (2.31). The authority of the abbot may be called a supple authority.'<sup>51</sup>

139. Above all the abbot is not a substitute for Christ, even if there is an evocation of the relationship of disciples to Christ in the relationship of the community to the abbot, and in their response to the abbot's commands and teaching, a response which is treated under the term 'obedience'. The abbot is a servant (*servus*) or rather fellow-servant (64.13) with the members of the community, who are also *servi*, all serving the same Lord and all directed to the same end. The abbot is bound to consult, and moreover to consult the youngest, the most recently admitted of the member (RB 3). All members of the community are called to participate in weighty decisions affecting the community because God often reveals what is better to the younger members. After listening to all the members, Benedict gives the final decision to the abbot but it is unusual for an abbot to decide against the community's choice. Indeed modern church law requires some decisions to be made by the chapter, rather than the abbot alone. Capacity to direct is shaped by the life of the community: 'The abbot's power is limited by the reality of the life.'<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Xavier McMonagle, O.S.B., 'The Service of Authority: The Abbot in the Rule of Benedict', *Cistercian Studies* 17 (1982), pp. 316–337.

<sup>52</sup> Rembert Weakland O.S.B., 'Obedience to Abbot and Community', *Cistercian Studies* 5 (1970), pp. 309–316, at p. 315.

140. These monastic ideas and practices of Christ-focused rule and obedience filtered back into the wider church, and helped shape evolving ideas of episcopal authority – providing one powerful set of lenses through which to understand the triangle of relationships between God, leader, and people. Particularly influential was the *Pastoral Rule* of Gregory the Great (itself heavily dependent on the *Rule of St Benedict*), which became something of a guidebook in the Western Middle Ages for bishops, abbots and Christian monarchs alike. The overlap it presumes between being a pastor and being a ruler in the context of Christendom indicates that ‘transferability’ of leadership skills is not an idea wholly without precedent in Christian tradition.
141. Gregory’s *Pastoral Rule* begins by defining the particular character of Christian pastoral responsibility (as we might put it) in terms of its goal: that it seeks to prepare people for the vision of God by fostering their growth in the virtues. From that starting point, Gregory focuses on two particular areas that follow naturally enough. The first is the need for the person who exercises such responsibility to be wholly committed to this goal in their own life, and to remain committed enough to cope with the inevitable distractions and temptations that such office will bring in its train. Importance is also given to a collegial approach to life and decision-making, including the election of a new abbot by the community and the abbot living among the community. In this context, we might say, leadership in the church requires a decision to seek continuing transformation in company with those it seeks to lead towards the common goal of the face of God.
142. The second is the need for continual wisdom and discernment as the pastor-ruler communicates day by day with all manner of people in all manner of situations, so as to speak the word that these particular men and women need to hear at this particular time in order to move forward in their discipleship. Leadership in the church, on Gregory’s account, requires a kind of constant ‘faithful improvisation’ from the rich resources of Scripture and traditions of prayerful reflection on it.

#### 4.4 *Monasteries and mission*

143. We often talk as if there is an unbroken line of development from the structures of the post-Constantinian (or more properly post-Theodosian) imperial church to the self-confident affluence of the medieval episcopacy. But in fact the centuries after Constantine saw the break-up of the old Roman civic order across Europe and the rise of new and powerful, often tribal, societies. New forms of leadership were required to deal with a new situation. The monastic tradition (particularly in its Celtic form) played a significant role in the survival and spread of Christianity across Western Europe. Monasteries offered security in a disintegrating world; they preserved classical teaching and used it to shape a new Christian culture. And they formed the nodes of a new Christian network, increasingly centred on Rome. The story of how Christianity spread across the British Isles is vividly told in Bede's *History of the English Church and People*. Bede's work also reflects another tradition, often known as Celtic, which encouraged a view that the primary responsibility of Bishops was to oversee, lead, and enable effective mission.<sup>53</sup> This was a responsibility both for the direction and coordination of the Christian community and for strategic Christian relations and communications with the wider culture, and it was based in a disciplined and collegial life of prayer.
144. The Celtic church was structured around bishops who were also abbots. The abbot-bishop is the chief strategist and enabler who sends apostles, often themselves bishops, 'on mission'. In the seventh century the Roman mission to Wessex was led by a Benedictine bishop, Birinus, who became the abbot-bishop at Dorchester. Later the abbot-bishop model was amalgamated with the Latin model in Anglo-Saxon Wessex with the transfer of Birinus' seat to the See of Winchester tradition.<sup>54</sup> The monastic rule of life was a vital resource for mission. There were ongoing cross-

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<sup>53</sup> See John Finney, *Recovering the Past: Celtic and Roman Mission* (London: DLT, 1996).

<sup>54</sup> The conversion of Britain was not a simple matter, but was nevertheless a profound one that reached the depths of culture and helped forge a new cultural identity. See Barbara Yorke, *The Conversion of Britain: Religion, Politics and Society in Britain 600–800* (Harlow: Longman, 2006).

cultural missions within and beyond the British Isles, including Patrick to Ireland, Aidan to Northern Britain, Boniface to Germany, and many more. Another stream flowed from monasteries of England to the Scandinavian countries, where English monks, either as simple missionaries or as bishops and royal protégés, helped Christianize the north.<sup>55</sup>

145. Bede's account of St Chad clarifies the missionary focus of these early bishops. 'As a bishop,' Bede says (3.28), 'Chad immediately devoted himself to maintain the truths of the church, and set himself to practice humility and continence, and to study. After the example of the Apostles, he travelled on foot and not on horseback when he went to preach the Gospel, whether in towns, the countryside, cottages, villages, or castles, for he was one of Aidan's disciples and always sought to instruct his people by the same methods as Aidan and his own brother Cedd.'<sup>56</sup> When Chad became Bishop of Lichfield (then a huge area stretching from the Trent to the Scottish borders), he continued to pursue the same simple but effective pattern he had learned from Aidan, an approach that almost got him into trouble with his new Archbishop: 'The most reverend Bishop Chad always preferred to undertake his preaching missions on foot rather than on horseback, but Theodore ordered him to ride whenever he undertook a long journey. He was most reluctant to forgo this pious exercise, which he loved, but the archbishop, who recognized his outstanding holiness and considered it more proper for him to ride, himself insisted on helping him to mount his horse' (Bede, *History* 4.2). The image of the missionary bishop, covering the huge areas of his diocese on horseback, irresistibly recalls the missionary travels of John Wesley.

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<sup>55</sup> David Knowles, *The Monastic Order in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), pp. 46, 67–69.

<sup>56</sup> Bede, *A History of the English Church and People*, tr. Leo Sherley-Price (London: Penguin, 1968), 3.28.

#### **4.5 Leadership in the Reformation**

146. There is a sense in which the Reformation could be interpreted as the ultimate crisis in church leadership. Many of the questions that drove the Reformation centred around issues which in the twenty-first century we would categorise as leadership. Who had responsibility for the pastoral care and the teaching of the people in any given place? Who determined appointments in a parish or to a diocese? Who was responsible for providing structures and instruction that would support the spiritual health of the people of God? In different places, or in the same place at different times, answers to these questions might include, variously, the bishop of the diocese, the city council, a local prince or ruler, the pope, the king or the emperor. The Reformation saw a very wide variety of experiments in reformulating the role of bishops or other senior leaders. Bishops became (amongst many other things) reformers and inspectors of preaching, and leaders of the education of their clergy. The division between local and trans-local leaders, the relationship between leaders and people, and the responsibilities of all these to God, were all rethought with a new centrality given to the ministry of the word.
147. Fundamental to the cluster of reform movements we call ‘the Reformation’ was the rediscovery of the laity. Luther was convinced that spiritual authority lay not only with clergy, but with the whole people of God: therefore, he concluded, ‘it is the duty of every Christian to espouse the cause of the faith, to understand and defend it, and to denounce every error.’ Luther’s conviction that every believer stood equal before God, and that all believers were called to propagate gospel truth, has come to be known as the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. However, although Luther was convinced that every Christian had a role to play in the propagation of gospel truth, he was nonetheless adamant that a specific (and indeed male) person must be appointed to preach the gospel and celebrate the sacraments in the context of parish worship. As he explained in his lectures on Titus, ‘Christians all have a priesthood, but they do not all have the priestly function. Although all can teach and exhort, nevertheless one ought to do so, and the other ought to listen.’ The common



priesthood shared by all believers did not mandate all Christians to a public ministry. The appropriate leadership of the church included the discernment of the proper tasks of bishops and priests, and the establishment of structures that would enable them to carry out those tasks without distraction.

148. The reformers also had a strong sense of the importance of *locality*. Luther argued that local clergy should be appointed with some attention to the local community: ‘When a bishop consecrates [someone as a parish priest] it is nothing else than that in the place and stead of the whole community, all of whom have like power, he takes a person and charges him to exercise this power on behalf of the others.’ Though bishops might, at least in theory, be appointed to the oversight of a larger area, the nature of pastoral oversight required that these bishops or elders (who in his view might better be termed ‘inspectors’ or ‘visitors’) should know their people well enough to exhort them to a better life: ‘Every city ought to have many bishops, that is, inspectors or visitors. Such an inspector should be the parish clergyman along with the chaplain, so that they may share the duties and see how people live and what is taught. He would see who is a usurer, and then he would speak the Word of healing and correction.’ This concern for the *locality* of oversight re-surfaces a century later in Richard Baxter’s *Reformed Pastor*: ‘When we are commanded to take heed to all the flock, it is plainly implied, that flocks must ordinarily be no greater than we are capable of overseeing, or “taking heed” to.’<sup>57</sup>
149. One solution to this problem (favoured by the more radical groups) was to reform the *structures* of senior leadership. In seventeenth-century England the issue, as Judith Maltby argues, is a fundamental difference over the *shape* of church order.<sup>58</sup> Presbyterians and episcopalians agreed that every local church or congregation should have its own pastor, and both cited in their favour the New Testament

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<sup>57</sup> Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (first published in 1656; cited from the abridged edition, Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1997), ch.II sect.1: ‘The nature of this oversight’.

<sup>58</sup> Judith Maltby, *Prayer Book and People in Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 160.

pattern of 'elders in every town'. What the presbyterians contested was the distortion of this essentially 'flat' picture of church order by the elevation of the bishop to a higher order.

150. However, most of the reformers sought not so much to abolish the episcopate as to restore it to its biblical roots. Bishops, in Erasmus's view, had lost sight of the true function of the office – the preaching and teaching of Scripture, and the administration of the sacraments – had forgotten their responsibility to pursue a holy life, and had become caught up in the intricacies of worldly politics and concerns. They were not, in any proper sense, spiritual leaders. Erasmus's critique would be echoed by Martin Luther. The two men were part of a mood of anti-clericalism which was united (if not always fair) in its denouncement of the immorality and spiritual incompetence of the church's leaders. For them the issue was not so much the structures of *episkope* as a return to its proper tasks and ethos: the ministry of word and sacrament, the care of the poor, and the diligent pastoral oversight of every soul under their care.
151. The Church of England's decision to retain the historic three-fold order of bishop, priest and deacon also reflects the political realities of the Reformation in England. Luther would have been very glad to enlist the bishops on the side of Reform — if only he could have found any bishops willing to support him.<sup>59</sup> In England, the situation was rather different. Where Luther struggled to find political support from the imperial princes and bishops, the reformation in England could claim a distinguished series of bishops among its martyrs. And the reformation found an unlikely political ally in Henry VIII. Having displaced the Pope as head of the Church in England, Henry (and his successors) *needed* bishops as part of the fabric of

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<sup>59</sup> Dorothea Wendebourg, 'The Reformation in Germany and the Episcopal Office'. For Sir Thomas Aston, this is an example of the ambivalence of the reformers' position: Maltby, *Prayer Book and People*, pp. 158–59. ('It was with palpable pleasure that Aston provided evidence that Calvin's views on the Episcopal office were not abstract absolutes but changed to reflect actual circumstances.')

government.<sup>60</sup> Episcopacy and monarchy were always closely intertwined in England ('no bishop, no king') and became even more so in the pre-Civil War period as Charles I, aided and abetted by Archbishop Laud, sought to govern without Parliament. Thus it was more or less inevitable that after the Civil War, the restoration of episcopacy went hand in hand with the restoration of the monarchy.

152. Thus in the early modern period, as 'Lords Spiritual', bishops remained powerful figures in the Court and in Parliament, whose authority depended not only on a coherent theological understanding of the relationship of ministry and gospel, but also on their position near the summit of the social hierarchy. Even when modestly born (and many were, until the mid-eighteenth century), their general literary and social abilities, allied to their ecclesiastical status, made them central to the particular configuration of church and state that held sway until the constitutional revolution of the mid-nineteenth-century Reform era.

#### **4.6 Leadership in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries**

153. The seamless alliance between secular and ecclesiastical leadership remains a striking feature of senior leadership in the Church of England right through to the mid-twentieth century. David Edwards, in his study of *Leaders of the Church of England, 1828–1978*, remarks on their striking assurance 'in what they commonly took for granted. . . . A whole complex of privileges combined to give them this pride in belonging to their Church and civilisation. . . . They were all the sons of Christian homes, with their basic values clear from the beginning. Almost all of them were educated in strong Anglican schools [and] at Oxford and Cambridge. Their domestic circumstances were usually easy; they had servants [and supportive wives] even while they were parish priests or schoolmasters. When they talked or preached, they expected others to listen and learn. In their teaching they appealed to the authority of the Bible, reinforced by the authority of a Christian consensus which had shaped

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<sup>60</sup> John Findon, 'Developments in the Understanding and Practice of Episcopacy in the Church of England', in Dalferth and Hoare (eds), *Visible Unity and the Ministry of Oversight*, pp. 79–92.

England for more than a thousand years. In discharging their administrative responsibilities in school or college, parish or diocese, nation or empire, they felt themselves to be members of a governing class, close to the Crown; and their fellow-rulers accepted them, inviting them to dinner, enquiring after their opinions, complimenting their ladies, mourning their deaths. They were solid figures in the English Establishment, and the English Establishment was then dominant over national, and much of international, life.<sup>61</sup> Even at the end of the Second World War, he adds, 'it was possible to retain the illusion that nothing had really changed.'

154. Yet the intimations of change were already visible in the nineteenth century, for those who had eyes to see. Their social influence increasingly challenged, the bishops and other church leaders sought to reinvigorate ecclesiastical administration. Many bishops became busy municipal administrators, exercising a paternalistic rule over a whole diocese – another in a long line of reformulations of their public role. At the same time, thanks to the Oxford Movement, there was another rethinking of the whole triangle of relationships, now with a new centrality given to sacramental ministry.
155. The term 'leadership' is almost never used of a bishop in this period, yet the rise of a conception of bishop's 'rule' reflects a new-found confidence in their intrinsic spiritual authority. But concepts of 'rule' could never last long in a time of unprecedented social and economic change. The democratic, reforming tide that swept aside the old Anglican constitutional hegemony also eroded traditional assumptions about social hierarchy. When state subsidies for church-building ceased, church rate was abolished, Parliament was opened to Dissenters, Roman Catholics, Jews and atheists, and the ecclesiastical courts were largely bypassed, bishops could in fact no longer 'rule': they had to argue, persuade, and above all lead by example. They became, to all intents and purposes, much like the leaders of other

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<sup>61</sup> David L. Edwards, *Leaders of the Church of England, 1828–1978* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1978), pp. 350f.

voluntary organizations, albeit with much more than a residuum of traditional paraphernalia.

156. One of the most significant developments in the Church of England in the twentieth century has been the re-awakening of the laity. As the laity started to gain a significant voice (both in Parochial Church Councils, and subsequently through the adoption of a synodical system of government), clergy have had to learn new ways of exercising leadership. That, in turn, has opened up the Church of England to new challenges, at a time when resources began to be threatened. The improvisations of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are all around us – the huge increase and diversification of lay involvement, lay ministry, and lay leadership in the church; various forms of team ministry involving new ways of handling collegiality; the emergence of secular management roles within diocesan and cathedral structures, involving a new division of labour in senior leadership; and many others.
157. Behind all these, and shaping contemporary notions of what church leaders actually do, were accompanying developments in church bureaucracy and management. Some have described these as part of a process of professionalization, though to what extent this is an adequate description is open to dispute. Since the mid-twentieth century, bishops and others were indeed beginning to use the language of ‘leadership’, not as a simple theft from the secular world of management theory, but as a useful term for naming the many skills of negotiation, consultation and organization they are having to deploy to help chart the church’s course in a time of shrinking membership, growing religious pluralism, and (most recently) new legal responsibilities in terms of safeguarding children and vulnerable adults.
158. Alongside these rapid changes in the role of senior clergy, new forms of Christian leadership began to spring up alongside traditional church structures. David Edwards’ study includes influential lay leaders like Gladstone, Wilberforce and Shaftesbury alongside bishops and archbishops. These great nineteenth-century social reformers, driven by the imperative of ‘doing the gospel,’ provided a form of Christian leadership in society that conspicuously superseded formal clergy–lay

distinctions. This is also the period of the great pan-Evangelical mission societies, intentional communities, networks and agencies, which operated with an 'essentially pragmatic' approach to leadership, and offered new ways of handling the trans-local dimension of Christian leadership. They 'sought and acquired influential patronage, mobilised mass support by constructing a network of local auxiliary societies, and co-operated with any who shared their aims regardless of belief',<sup>62</sup> making a positive virtue of combining ecclesiastical, civic and business leadership in interdenominational projects, societies and councils.

159. This pan-evangelical activism, and the generic leadership paradigms which accompanied it, saw a resurgence in the second half of the twentieth century, from the Billy Graham crusades of the 1950s and '60s, to the socially-active campaigning organisations such as TEAR Fund, CARE for the Family, Christians in Parliament, the AIDS charity ACET, and many more.<sup>63</sup> Many of the most influential evangelical leaders of the late twentieth century have come out of such trans-local networks operating above and behind the formal structures of parish and diocese — ranging from the elitist V.P.S. 'Bash camps', through the Church Growth strategists of the 1980s, to the 'Executive Archpastor' (David Hilborn's term) who operates as CEO of a large and successful church, becoming 'less and less of a pastor to individuals and more and more simply the supervisor and eventually the manager of a network of pastoral carers and other systems.'<sup>64</sup>
160. These movements are often led by Christian businesspeople who are more at home with the language and operating methods of business 'leadership' than with the traditional categories of the church. They have been highly successful in training generations of Christian leaders. Yet, for all the biblical teaching and discipleship

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<sup>62</sup> Doreen Rosman, *Evangelicals and Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London: James Clarke, 2012), p. 17.

<sup>63</sup> Tim Chester, *Awakening to a World of Need: Recovery of Evangelical Social Concern* (Leicester: IVP, 1993); Ian Randall and David Hilborn, *One Body in Christ: The History and Significance of the Evangelical Alliance* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2001), pp. 208–82.

<sup>64</sup> Croft, *Ministry in Three Dimensions*, p. 24.

training they offer, it is still noticeable that they sometimes operate with a relatively uncritical acceptance of secular hierarchy and power. In this sense, they are prone to similar hermeneutical criticism as might be levelled at unfiltered application of secular management, business or civic paradigms of leadership — or at the ‘worldliness’ of the medieval bishops.

#### **4.7 *The nature of improvisation***

161. These are only very brief snapshots of a complex history, but they are perhaps sufficient to demonstrate a number of important points.
162. The most obvious point is that change is not a new experience for the church. It simply is not the case that earlier generations enjoyed an unvarying stability in the idea and practice of senior leadership, or that it is only we in the early twenty-first century who are facing upheavals and transformations. In the context of church history as a whole, our time is not a time of greater change, nor a time of greater complexity – it is simply a time of *different* change and *different* complexity. We should not therefore think in terms of a conflict between a single, stable, ‘inherited’ model of leadership, and our dramatic new developments (whether we use that contrast to praise the old or the new). Rather, we stand within an ongoing history of improvisation, and are called to continue it and (where we believe that the Spirit has revealed more of God’s abiding will for the church through this history), to build on it. We are called to improvise faithfully in our own time too.
163. Something else follows from this. If, looking back, we can see how complex the interaction has always been between models of leadership and the social conditions in which they have been exercised, we must be especially careful not to oversimplify our understanding of the world in which we find ourselves now. It is very unlikely that there exists a model of church leadership today that can address decisively *all* of the challenges the Church of England faces. But at the same time it must study those

challenges closely, and look carefully at the many different contexts and circumstances in which leadership is wanted.

164. It is also clearly impossible to sustain a simple opposition between Christian and secular ideas of leadership. Our tradition has always been in the business of assimilating and transforming material from the world around it. Ultimately, *all* the language we use about leadership — whether we say ‘bishop’ or ‘leader’, ‘shepherd’ or ‘counsellor’, ‘servant leader’ or ‘deacon’, ‘prince’ or ‘priest’ or ‘elder’ — is language that has been borrowed, assimilated, and transformed. The only interesting questions are about the kind and depth of the transformation and assimilation involved, not about the fact of borrowing itself.
165. Of course, some of our language about leadership has a very long history of churchly appropriation and re-appropriation, and so has come to seem like it is firmly ‘our language’ — but none of it even so has achieved absolute finality and stability. What we mean by ‘pastor’ now is not identical to what we might have meant by ‘pastor’ fifty or a hundred or four hundred years ago. That word, like all the words we use, has picked up new connotations and had old connotations rubbed off as it has been used in our changing contexts, and so it stands in need of thoughtful testing, of critical appropriation, just as much as words freshly picked up from contexts outside the church. On the other hand, it is of course true that much of the language we have picked up more recently has not yet been well assimilated (like the idea of a church leader as a CEO), and some may prove to be all but inassimilable.
166. We should not, therefore, assume any neat opposition between theological and secular, nor between traditional and innovative ideas of leadership. Rather, we need to focus on the *process* of critical appropriation or negotiation: the process by which we bring all our languages and practices of leadership, wherever they come from and however long we have inhabited them, before the God who calls us and commissions us, to be transformed and remade. After all, ‘traditional’ language and ideas can become a way of protecting ourselves against such necessary transformation, just as much as new language borrowed from the wider world can



distract us from it. Yet newly borrowed language can serve to drive us more deeply into our faith, in unexpected and refreshing ways, just as much as traditional language can call us to remember our deepest responsibilities, and help us keep hold of the hard-won wisdom discovered and tested in earlier negotiations of the church.

## 5 Facing the future

167. We began with three questions.
- Is it right to make ‘leadership’ a central idea in the life of the church?
  - If so, what are the underlying *theological* principles that inform the exercise of leadership within the church?
  - How can these principles best inform the exercise of senior leadership in the Church of England today?
168. We can now give a more precise answer to the first of these questions. It can only be right to make ‘leadership’ a central idea in the life of the church if our ideas and practices of leadership (whether inherited from earlier generations of the church or borrowed from elsewhere) are subjected to ongoing critical questioning in the light of the church’s relation to its Lord. A simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer to this question threatens to bypass that critical questioning, and should be avoided.
169. As for the second and third questions, we can now give them a new formulation. We are asking: *What faithful improvisations upon the traditions of leadership we have inherited are required of us in our present situation?* And that is a more difficult question. As we indicated at the start, there is no way that a single report from a central Commission can answer this question. What is needed instead are multiple wise experiments *in situ*, and prayerful scrutiny of the fruit of those experiments over time.
170. What we can provide in this report, instead of attempting a direct answer to these questions, is twofold.
171. The first is simply *encouragement* to diverse and creative improvisation upon our tradition, in the light of its sources. It is a tradition of experimentation in multiple contexts, and to continue it faithfully requires that we continue that

experimentation in our own contexts. We should not be looking for a single template, process, strategy or formula that will tell us what to look for in prospective senior leaders, or what the roles of senior leaders should be.

172. The second is a set of *guidelines for thoughtful scrutiny* – a description of the kind of reflection we will need if our creative improvisations are to be faithful. These guidelines flow from what we have already said about leadership in the New Testament church, but there are some key points worth emphasising again.

### **5.1 Keeping God at the centre**

173. As our triangle diagrams indicate, the triune God must remain at the centre of all our ideas and practices of leadership. We cannot hold a meaningful conversation about leadership except in the context of our understanding of the *missio Dei*, the mission of God in the world.
174. Any true leadership in the church will emerge as an aspect of the Spirit's work conforming the whole body together to Christ, in relation to the Father. Its proper discernment and development therefore requires constant, prayerful, humble and attentive listening by the whole church, and especially those who exercise leadership within it, to what the Spirit may be saying to God's people. Wise improvisation in leadership will therefore only emerge from communities and individuals gathered by the Spirit in sustained prayer and worship, with the Son, before the Father.
175. We also need to keep our leadership language and practice under critical review – all of it, wherever it has come from, and whether it is traditional or recently borrowed or invented – as there is no quick way of confirming whether we are being faithful, either in our innovations or in our repetitions, except by careful, prayerful testing together, in openness to God's judgment.

## 5.2 *Leading in the midst of the people*

176. The first triangle that we described above – joining God, people, and leaders – underlines the fact that leadership is always one ministry amongst others. It is one of the gifts that the Spirit gives for the building up of the whole body of Christ, and it is given for the sake of the whole ministry and mission of God’s people. It is one of the ways in which God is, by the Spirit, drawing the church into Christ-like life. That is why (as we said at the beginning) we cannot hold a meaningful conversation about leadership in isolation from the urgent and necessary conversations taking place about the mission and ministry of the whole people of God. Within the church, leadership is always exercised in and for the Body of Christ. To quote T.W. Manson, ‘Things are very far wrong when any member of the Body of Christ has become a cog in a machine. But while cog-in-a-machine is too low a status for any Christian, member of the Body of Christ, partaker of His Spirit, and sharer of His Ministry is not too high for any. In any case there is no other.’<sup>65</sup>
177. Even the ministry of oversight, of *episkope*, is first of all a ministry of all God’s people, who are called to exercise self-control and hold one another to account. Some, however, are called to a special exercise of this ministry of oversight for the sake of ‘building up’ the wider body – some at a very local scale, others on a wider stage, and some at the ‘trans-local’ level that we have been exploring. In that sense, today’s rediscovery of the ministry of the laity (whether experienced as charismatic renewal or simply as a pragmatic result of pastoral re-organization) represents the re-emergence of a pattern of ministry closer to that of the New Testament. At whatever scale it operates, however, this call to *episkope* includes a call to attend to, to encourage, to guide, and to work with the ministries of every member of God’s people.
178. These new patterns of ministry place new demands on both clergy and laity. Clergy are much more likely now to find themselves working in a ‘leadership team’ or

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<sup>65</sup> Manson, *The Church’s Ministry*, p. 30.

managing a confusing variety of lay ministries. Clergy increasingly report finding their time taken up in ‘management’ rather than in front-line pastoral work.<sup>66</sup> Again, it is refreshing to return to the Pauline churches and discover that ‘leadership’ (whatever you call it) is just one among many of the gifts of the Spirit — but that it is a real gift, demanding specific skills, and real respect (leadership as a two-way process). Paul’s letters are a rich resource for practical models for team-work and collaborative ministry, operating in a much more fluid and complex ministry structure than what we once used to regard as the ‘norm’ of the traditional parish structure.<sup>67</sup>

179. This also suggests that the way senior church leaders model share ministry among themselves is of great importance. Here we touch again on some of the issues raised in Section 1, including the relationship within dioceses between diocesan and suffragan bishops, between bishops and archdeacons, and between ordained and lay leaders, and parallel sets of relationships between senior leaders within cathedrals and at national church level. In each case, there is a need to make space for careful reflection on the patterns of relationship between all those entrusted with senior leadership, and between them and those they work with and serve. Leaders in these contexts need to exercise authority, responsibility, accountability, collegiality, and prayerful discernment together in a way that seeks God’s kingdom above all else and reflects the underlying pattern of the self-emptying servant leadership of Christ (Phil. 2.1–11)
180. The exercise of collegial leadership needs particular reflection in the current climate of public accountability around issues such as safeguarding. Collegiality should not be confused with collusion, nor with a refusal to accept individual responsibility for

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<sup>66</sup> This is one of the clearest findings from recent Ministry Division research exercises, and of studies such as Croft, *Ministry in Three Dimensions*, ch. 1.

<sup>67</sup> For a refreshing and engaging dialogue between Paul’s leadership style and contemporary management theory, cf. Richard S. Ascough and Sandy Cotton, *Passionate Visionary: Leadership Lessons from the Apostle Paul* (Ottawa: Novalis [St Paul University], 2008).

standing out (where necessary) against a culture of corruption.<sup>68</sup> A collegial model of leadership does not mean that everyone has exactly the same responsibilities, the same tasks. Some will be individual responsibilities, and some will be common, but the individual ones will also be fulfilled in consultation with the rest of the college and in the light of common goals and concerns, not 'held' and used to hoard knowledge-as-power. This is an important aspect of leadership at diocesan level in particular regarding issues of abuse and clergy discipline. It is important not to encourage a false dichotomy here between individual and shared leadership: what matters is doing collegial leadership properly, which means having individual tasks and responsibilities clearly framed within a context of shared working and mutual accountability.

### **5.3 Leadership and discipleship**

181. Leaders respond to their particular call alongside the calls of each of God's people, and in the context of the whole people's common call to love and serve the Lord. They are not 'above' others, even if their calling often requires them (literally and metaphorically) to stand up in front of others. Any of our language and practices that embed attitudes of superiority need to be resisted, as do ways of living that tend to separate those with leadership responsibilities from the shared experience of the 'ordinary' church.
182. Those whom God is calling in this way to lead can nevertheless have a proper ambition: an emerging personal discernment of their call, a recognition of the gifts that God has given them for it, and a growing desire to serve God's work in obedience to it. The discernment of a leader's calling is not, however, simply a personal matter. The individual leader's discernment interacts with and is tested by

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<sup>68</sup> A point made in the *Interim Report of the Commissaries Appointed by the Archbishop of Canterbury in Relation to a Visitation upon the Diocese of Chichester* (2012); available online at <http://safeguarding.chichester.anglican.org/documents/archbishops-visitation/archbishops-commissaries-interim-report/>.

the discernment of the wider body – so that we could say that any proper ambition to lead will not simply be the individual leader’s ambition, but will be an aspiration shared with the community.

183. If our understanding of leadership has its place within our understanding of the Spirit’s work, conforming the people of God to Christ, then it has its place within our understanding of sanctification – God’s work in us drawing us deeper into holiness. Yet to exercise senior leadership in the life of the church makes very great demands on a person’s spiritual life and can create very great obstacles to growth in love and holiness (hence the repeated advice to monks in the early centuries to avoid episcopal office at all costs). This is one reason why senior leadership in the church was traditionally linked with the ordained ministry, with its built-in commitment to a life formed by the eucharist. The welcome opening up of senior roles to lay people raises the question: what patterns of training and support do we need to ensure that all leaders – whether lay or ordained – are equally committed to the fundamental practices of discipleship and have the constant prayer and support of those around them?
184. Recognition of a call to lead also, therefore, means recognition of a call to share in an accompanying spiritual discipline. Leaders must, with the help of the wider community, be on their guard against the temptations associated with leadership: the temptation to isolate their own discernment from the discernment of the body, the temptation to focus on building a name or a legacy for themselves at the expense of building up the body, and the temptation to desire leadership for its own sake.

#### **5.4 *Acknowledging failure***

185. As we pursue diverse improvisations in leadership, we must not mistake failure for disaster. Some improvisations will fail – or, at least, they will not produce the renewal or the growth or the depth that we hoped for. Sometimes, there may be

lessons that our prayerful reflection can learn from such failures; often, even with the benefit of hindsight, it will be hard to see what else could have been done. The growth of God's kingdom is in God's hands. We must pray all we can, learn all we can, and work all we can, but these are not handles that need only to be turned hard to guarantee success.

186. We therefore have to cultivate a culture that allows failure, that attends to it carefully and learns from it seriously, but that does not condemn it. In part, this is because we will certainly not encourage real improvisation and experimentation if we have generated an atmosphere of performance anxiety; improvisation is only made possible by trust. More seriously, however, it is because any understanding of Christian leadership that believes success to be firmly in the grasp of good leaders, rather than in the hands of God, has become a form of idolatry. The one *true* leader of the church is God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and true success is in God's hands alone.

### **5.5 *Attending to the local and the trans-local***

187. Our second triangle – joining God, local leaders, and trans-local leaders – underlines the interdependence of the local and the trans-local. We are inheritors of a complex on-going negotiation between local and trans-local – a shifting division of labour between the local church and wider structures of coordination and communication. That division of labour has shifted continually throughout Christian history, and our own experiments will go on drawing the boundary in different places and in different ways – but in all of them will need to find ways of doing justice both to the local and the trans-local: to the unity of the body of Christ, and to the embeddedness which the Spirit gives it in each and every location.
188. One thing is, however, clear: local and trans-local leadership are interdependent. What originally defines the office of the bishop is that it holds together both of these: rooted in responsibility (for life, according to the canons of Nicaea) for a



specific group of Christian communities defined by place, yet also accountability to the church of God in every place through patterns of episcopal collegiality. This mediation of the local and trans-local is an important element of what ‘senior leadership’ means in the Church of England.

189. It is also clear that our definitions of locality may need to change with a changing world. *Mission-Shaped Church* and the Fresh Expressions movement have challenged us to think more searchingly about what we mean by ‘locality:’ is our ‘locality’ where we eat and sleep and send our children to school (and not much else), or where most adults spend their waking hours — i.e. in the workplace? Is it where we shop? Or is it the virtual world we inhabit when we’re on-line? What are we doing to resource a Christian presence in those (equally real) localities, and how do they relate to the actual physical church buildings that imprint God’s presence so powerfully on our landscape?<sup>69</sup>

## **5.6 Identifying the tasks of leadership**

190. Any attempts we make to identify the specific tasks of senior leaders must flow primarily from our understanding of the ministry and mission for which God has called the church into being by Word and Spirit, rather than from some generic account of organisational leadership.
191. In the specific case of bishops, although the precise arrangements and forms have changed constantly, there have been strong strands of continuity woven through those changes. We began by looking to Canon C18 and the Ordinal for an expression of this: the bishop is chief pastor; called to teach and to admonish; called to be an example of righteous and godly living; called to oversight of sacramental ministry; and called to recognise and commission others in the church for their own forms of public ministry (see above, §44). In a rather different idiom, we might refer instead to the main headings from our exploration of the New Testament: the ministry and

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<sup>69</sup> *Fresh Expressions in the Mission of the Church*, ch. 5.

mission that the bishop serves are matters of word, worship, work and world – that is, of preaching, teaching and admonition; of prayer and sacramental ministry; of caring labour for the welfare of the people; and of networking around the wider church and representation of the church in public. These tasks have remained constant through the long history of the church, though their distribution between different parts of the structure (local and trans-local, lay and ordained) changes over time. The important thing is that the church as a whole remains faithful to her calling.

192. A healthy account of senior leadership in the church will keep these matters at its heart: they are the forms of leadership specific to the church and its collective task of ministry and mission. Other, more generic tasks of leadership and management may well be necessary to allow the whole collective practice to function well, and they may at times be of very great importance, but those further tasks should always be oriented toward the practice of ministry and mission, and we should take care not to let them become ends in themselves. Management in the church exists only for the sake of ministry and mission, and it must not get in their way. This is precisely why it is crucial to understand leadership as a form of ‘stewardship,’ equipping and resourcing the saints for their work of ministry in the world. As stewards, leaders are called to faithfulness (1 Corinthians 4.1): they are custodians, not owners and have no authority to change the ultimate goal of the whole enterprise — though it may be their task to reflect on proximate objectives as means to attain the desired end. Leadership is always subservient to the goals and ethos of the whole Body.

### **5.7 *Attending to the context***

193. Successful improvisation will also require sustained attention to the contexts in which the church finds itself. Overviews and generalisations, and reports on what experiments have worked in other contexts, are important ingredients in our improvisations – important sources of inspiration, guidance, and caution – but they are not the whole recipe.

194. We need sustained prayerful attention to the social locations, the cultures, and the histories of the places in which the church finds itself; sustained prayerful attention to the composition and character of the local churches; sustained prayerful attention to the different strengths and experiences that individual leaders bring with them, often including their experience of service in a variety of ‘secular’ worlds.
195. We should be very wary indeed of approaches to the development of leadership that push towards uniformity, not least because they tend to mistake models grown in very particular soil (a compost of hidden assumptions about gender, class, race, and culture) for universal schemes. The hallmark of the Spirit’s work is variety – a diversified Christlikeness, never twice the same.

### **5.8 *Improvising within a tradition***

196. Successful musical improvisation depends on a deep training in the musical tradition – an intimate knowledge of the possibilities of scales and harmonies, of rhythms and melodies. In the same way, faithful improvisation in leadership requires communities and individuals deeply grounded in the Christian faith, knowing it well enough and richly enough to be able to see new ways of living it out appropriate to the new contexts in which they find themselves.
197. Tradition and innovation are not opposed, because deep immersion in tradition is not an awkward constraint upon improvisation, but is its enabling condition. The more improvisation we want, the deeper the forms of education we will need – and the deeper those forms of education will need to take us into knowledge of the tradition and knowledge of the scriptures. The need for ongoing education that takes them ever deeper into the scriptures’ witness to Christ, and the changing patterns of the church’s response to that witness, is as urgent for senior leaders as it is for any other member of the body – and the need for such ongoing education

needs to be a prominent part of our thinking about the selection and support of senior leaders, lay and ordained.

198. Above all, faithful improvisation will only emerge from communities and individuals who are brought by the Spirit, in the company of all the Saints, to deeper and deeper knowledge of Christ, and him crucified.

## Some questions for further study

As a 'resource for reflection', this report is not intended to produce a set of straightforward practical recommendations for the practice of senior leadership in the Church of England.

Our exploration of the nature of leadership does, however, yield a set of questions that it is appropriate to pose to our practices of senior leadership, at national and diocesan level, as well as in other contexts.

- How do we identify those being called to senior leadership, and what are the processes of prayerful corporate discernment by which those identifications are tested? How are those processes rooted in our wider practices of discerning the gifts and callings of every member of God's people?
- In what ways are we providing for and supporting ongoing discernment, capable of identifying necessary changes to roles, relationships and tasks?
- Are our processes of identification and discernment producing the leaders we need to serve the ministry and mission of the church in the world? Are they fostering faithful improvisation? Are we fostering a culture of leadership that allows failure?
- How do we ensure that, with all the demands of management, senior leaders can focus on their vocation to lead people deeper into ministry and mission as disciples of Christ?
- Does the collegiality between different kinds of senior leader in a given context (e.g., a diocese) help to make this focus on the gospel possible, by allowing a division of labour? Is it structured in such a way that the various leaders involved can hold one another to account in the light of this primary vocation? How can we deepen the ecology of relationships amongst senior leaders in this context?
- How are we ensuring that senior leaders are closely engaged with the people they serve – closely enough to be challenged by them and learn from them?
- In what ways are senior leaders enabled to learn the particularities of their contexts together, and how is that knowledge passed on, tested, and enriched?

- In what ways are we providing for and supporting senior leaders' ongoing learning, including their ongoing engagement together with scripture and tradition? Are we creating a learning culture, within which the learning of the whole people of God, and within that the learning required of leaders, can flourish together?
- In what ways are we making space for and supporting the spiritual disciplines vital to senior leadership? Do any of our structures or processes unnecessarily work against those disciplines? Do we give senior leaders the space, the tools and the support they need for self-reflection, including honest and searching self-criticism?

Senior leadership in the church is one of the many gifts that God gives to animate and shape its ministry and mission. It is a gift to the body, locally and trans-locally; it is discerned by the body, and exercised in, with and for the body; it helps to build up and guide the body in its task of witness. But it is given to the body only so that Christ may be more luminously visible in its life and audible in its speech, so that the world might believe. The deepest question that we can ask, and must go on asking, of all our arrangements for senior leadership is, Do they serve this task?