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Herb Neufeld

RESPONSE PAPER

LEADERSHIP STYLES FOR THE MENNONITE BRETHREN CHURCH
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In our discussion of leadership styles it becomes evident that the greatest area of difficulty does not lie in our lack of agreement on Biblical principles, but in the application of those principles. As one writer in the Pastoral Renewal publication states, "spiritual truths which are ultimately the most beneficial can also do the most damage if not properly understood and applied." Hopefully the paper by John E. Toews will help us to focus on Biblical principles pertaining to leadership, as well as on the application of those principles.

In responding to the paper, "Leadership Styles for the Mennonite Brethren Church," I shall attempt to cover three specific areas: 1) the perceived problems, 2) a Biblical perspective regarding some solutions, and 3) some suggestions regarding the process by which some correctives may be initiated.

I. THE PROBLEM SUMMARIZED

Toews has traced the historical development of leadership styles in the Mennonite Brethren Churches rather well. It appears evident that we are currently in the last stages of completing a rather lengthy cycle as we have moved through various extremes to a model which I happily understand to be closer to the New Testament model.

While the problem of extremes in leadership styles have varied from authoritarian and hierarchial models to the laissez faire, it is my impression that the problem is best stated in the following two paragraphs:

"The leadership crises in the church today is both a crisis of authority and submission. We often lack authoritative leaders because we have not given enough attention to discerning and forming leaders out of the life of the church. We have not empowered and legitimated leaders. We have been reluctant to do so in part because we fear leaders who do not know how to be servants and shepherds in the exercise of power. Too many power models in the church are secular rather than biblical. But the other side of our reluctance has been an unwillingness to be led. We have become too democratic in our church polity. All want to be leaders and none want to be followers.

The New Testament reminds us that God appoints some as leaders. The church must legitimize this call and learn submission to its leaders, all the while testing and correcting them. But testing and correcting is a function of followership and mutual submission in the body, not rebellion or 'going one's own way'." (Toews, p. 17)

In his excellent book, When All Else Fails...Read the Directions, Bob Smith states this problem in the following:

> "Twentieth-century church life and government are often characterized by one of two patterns: (1) the church is 'run' by a dominant personality, usually the pastor, but sometimes even by a dominant female figure in the congregation, or (2) it is governed by democratic procedures. Neither of these even approximates the biblical plan of church government."

II. THE SOLUTION - A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

In our search for appropriate leadership styles there has frequently been an accompanying haze regarding the expectations from leadership. This has been further complicated by considerable fuzziness regarding the primary function of the church. It seems to me that clarity of purpose is essential to our understanding of leadership. While Toews does not specifically discuss the function of the church, he does give some very helpful insights regarding the role of leadership, which hopefully facilitate the church's ministry.

A. A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE - RE GOD'S PURPOSE FOR THE CHURCH

As I understand the New Testament the specific function of the 'church gathered' is two-fold: First, we must gather to celebrate in worship (Acts 2:46-47; Ephesians 5:18-21; Hebrews 10:19-25). There is a great need in our churches to recapture meaningful worship. Second, the church must gather together for instruction or edification "for the equipping of the saints for the work of service" (Ephesians 4:12). In the great commission Jesus spoke of this by commanding us to "make disciples . . . teaching them to observe all that I commanded you"(Matthew 28:19-20).

Some of the following quotations from other church leaders emphasize the importance of "equipping the saints."

> "The dynamic of the early church came from a proper understanding of roles in the Body: gifted men building up the saints, who in turn exercise spiritual ministries in the Body." - John MacArthur, Jr.

"Unfortunately, as a church, we've tended to focus on the 'go into all nations' aspect of the command, and failed to see that the central part of our purpose is 'to make disciples' . . . Jesus was saying that His church would be made up of 'professional learners' - disciples who would never get through increasing in their knowledge of Jesus Christ as long as they lived!"

- Donald L. Bubna

When we clearly understand the purpose of the church gathering together then we will also be better able to focus on God's plan for the church when it scatters. Without an outflow through our visible and verbal witness edification and discipleship lose meaning.

B. A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE - RE GOD'S PURPOSE FOR LEADERS

In his research regarding how Mennonite Brethren understand the role of the pastor, Gary Wiens concluded that there is a "great discrepancy between the ideal role that many pastors define for themselves and the actual role they must play in the local church." (Direction, October 1976)

Thomas Mullen points out that confusion in leadership role is due to the fact that a pastor's role is often shaped "by the expectations of the people" rather than biblical, theological and even historical truths." (The Renewal of the Ministry)

What then is the Biblical function of leaders? I understand Toews to answer this question in the following summary:

- Since God has gifted every member of the Body, leaders must facilitate the ministry of each member. The diversity of gifts provides the very essence of strength and unity. To pretend that leaders only have gifts for ministry is not only to violate God's plan for His church, but is also sure to frustrate both pastor and people.

- Since the ministry of building up the saints for the work of ministry is dependent on proper teaching, it is imperative that leaders give high priority to the instruction of God's Word (1 Timothy 3:2; Ephesians 4:11-12). Such instruction must keep in mind the principle of discipling others "who will be able to teach others also" (2 Timothy 2:2).

- Since the ministry of discipling is only as effective as the person doing the discipling, it is imperative that leaders be a good example. Indeed there is a great need for living models. It is very evident from the New Testament that "a good reputation" was a key factor in choosing leaders, whether they were deacons or elders. It is clear this applied to their reputation as a father, their reputation in the larger community, as well as to their example in such areas as in financial stewardship, etc. (Acts 6:3; 1 Timothy 3:1-14). It is evident that such qualifications address the whole question of "style" which Toews discusses at length.

C. A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE - RE: CHRISTIAN AUTHORITY

As already stated in the introductory section of my response, the question of authority is the basic area where the tensions of leadership frequently surface. It is "a crisis of both authority and submission." I believe Toews is correct in his analysis when he states:

"The authority to lead is a function of power. A leader is a person who has been granted legitimate authority by a power source. Three words are critical: authority, power and legitimacy. Authority is interpreted and applied power. Legitimacy is the sense of rightness or appropriateness within a community of the application of authority."

In his attempt to put the above into practical terms, the writer suggests four principles:

(1) The authority to lead in the church is corporate rather than individual.

(2) The call to leadership is the call of Jesus that is legitimized by the church.

(3) The test of genuine authority to lead in the church is service to others and not in an office.

(4) The style of authoritative leaders is mutual subordination.

While the above provides helpful guidelines I suggest that it still does not resolve the question of 'who is in charge?' Permit me therefore to suggest several additional principles:

(1) The church is not a democracy, but a christocracy. We therefore cannot discover the will of Christ by a vote.

(2) Leadership must be discerned from within the congregation in accordance with the Biblical qualifications (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9). This may therefore be better accomplished by appointment than by election.

(3) It is evident from scripture that leadership was never vested in one man, but rather in a team of leaders.

(4) It therefore becomes the task of leadership (elders) to determine how the Lord in their midst wishes to run his church. As Ray Stedman states, "In the day-to-day decisions which every church faces, elders are to seek and find the mind of the Lord through an uncoerced unanimity, reached after thorough and biblically-related discussion" (A Pastor's Authority).

(5) Leaders are subject to correction by the congregation when they err in doctrine or fail to live in accordance with Biblical principles. Unsubstantiated rumours, however, must not be listened to (1 Timothy 5:19-20).

(6) Some leaders who devote themselves to the ministry of the church on a full-time basis will be suitably remunerated. This should, however, not set them on a higher level than the other leaders, nor should he be considered an "employee" of the church (1 Timothy 5:17-18).

III. THE SUGGESTED PROCESS TO CORRECT THE PROBLEM

In summary I am pleased to be able to endorse the four positive steps outlined by John Toews. I believe they could greatly assist our churches in a return to a more Biblical model of leadership. In addition, I would offer the following suggestions:

(1) Each congregation must be willing to give authority to lead to one team of spiritual leaders (a Board of Elders or the equivalent). It is my observation that when a church has several boards (e.g. a deacons board to look after the "spiritual affairs" and a church council to deal with "administrative affairs") there is a tendency for these boards to become competitive.

(2) In our churches we must pay more careful attention to the spiritual qualifications of those chosen for direction of various ministries such as christian education, youth, stewardship, etc. I suggest that the biblical qualifications for deacons in the Scripture is applicable to all of these ministries (Acts 6:3).

(3) We also need to give more careful attention to the spiritual qualifications of those chosen for conference boards. Practically this should include a strong endorsation from the leadership of the local church.

(4) As church leaders we must submit to each other in the larger brotherhood, as well as to each other within the local church. (Romans 12:3; 1 Peter 5:5-6).

"Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen." Hebrews 13:20-21

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