

## **Visions and Values of Church Leadership in Biblical Perspective**

### **I. Church reality in biblical perspective – introductory observations and perceptions**

#### **I.1. Terms, metaphors, images of church and church life in biblical literature**

- Church
  - o our common word today is the English translation of a Greek word (Greek: *ekklesia*) meaning „assembly“ or „gathering“; in the background there is a Hebrew term denoting „(the assembly) of the people of God“, and it also relates to the Greek notion of the „assembly of all citizens“ in a city. The term always denotes a group of people, either all Christians in a city or those gathered for worship in a particular house or all Christians in all the local churches (congregations) or the whole (universal) church; it never signifies a building or a „denomination“.
- Disciples
- Terms relating to „church people“ in a personal manner:
  - o believers, the elect, the saints, sisters and brothers (family of God), Christians (first use in Antioch, Acts 11:26)
- Body of Christ
- Communion / community
- House / Temple of God
- Royal priesthood
- Pilgrim church / the wandering people of God
- New Creation / New Humanity
- ...

*(For further consideration and discussion: Tension between the claim to be the people of God and the reality of conflicts and controversies within the church, as for example can be seen in the Pauline letters)*

#### **I.2. The people of God – a community of many different people**

What people do we encounter as Church people in the NT? Here only three short remarks:

1) There are people, we indeed know by name, and occasionally we also become aware of their profession in society and their role in the church. Here just some examples in relation to concrete persons:

- The 12 apostles (fishermen, tax collector)
- Paul (trained theologian, but also tent maker)
- Priscilla and Aquila, business people / tent makers of Jewish origin from Rome who were expelled from that city by the Emperor Claudius
- Luke, „the beloved physician“ (Col. 4:15)
- Onesimus, the run away slave
- Lydia, a rich dealer in purple cloth (Acts 16:14)
- Timotheus and Titus, the young (!) co-workers of the apostle Paul
- Nympha, a Christian woman from Laodicea (Col. 4:15)

- Gaius, a city treasurer (Rom. 16:23)
- Andronicus and Junia, relatives of Paul and at times imprisoned with him (Junia is a female name, and she was called an apostle, Rom. 16:7).
- Phoebe, deaconess (?) of the church of Cenchreae
- Many more...

2) Church, that meant a community of Jews and gentiles/Greeks, barbarians (this word really appears in the Bible in Col. 3:11), people of very different origin, men and women, slaves and free men, scholars and uneducated people, rich and poor, from different social strata, of different age and background...

3) Church – that meant a vision of an inclusive community, a realization of the age-old dreams of a renewed humanity... Keywords: Gal. 3:28, Col. 3:11; Eph. 2:11ff. and others.

*(For further consideration and discussion: How inclusive is the church today?)*

### **I.3. Different titles / descriptions / designations for specific functions, offices, ministries in the church**

What kind of leadership functions and titles for leadership do we encounter in the NT?

The words „leader“ / „leadership“ is of course an English term. It occurs in the NRSV indeed a few times (see Rom. 12:8; 1. Cor. 12:27; Hebr. 13:7. 17. 24), but it would be difficult to take these references (alone) as the basis for our considerations. The English word is used as translation for at least three different Greek words; those words stand – at least in the Pauline letters – in midst of some more specific designations so that we on the one hand have difficulties to determine what exactly is meant by the task of leadership and it on the other hand quite evident is that it rather relates to a more limited organizational responsibility. In Hebrews, on the other hand, it relates rather to a full-fledged (theological and pastoral) leader of the church.

We therefore should not simply depend on this particular term, but widen the horizon and look at all relevant titles, functions, aspects in which **the phenomenon of leadership in the NT** occurs. And we also have to keep in mind, moreover, that the distinction between lay leaders and pastors/theologically trained and ordained persons was not yet known or an aspect in the Biblical literature.

One also has to be aware that leadership structures and institutional settings had in early Christianity only grown in the course of time. There were very fluid beginnings that gave way only later to the development of clearly defined leadership positions and structures.

Since we are rather concerned with values for Christian leadership, we don't need to look into all the difficult issues of the development of leadership structures. Here, therefore only by way of an **Excuse** some short notes **on titles for leadership positions in the early church and their development**. We have to distinguish between different phases of the development of leadership functions within the early church/es:

#### First Christian generation:

We have to distinguish between Christian communities of Jewish and of Hellenistic/Greek-speaking background. In the former we find, as we learn from the Acts of the Apostles, besides *the Twelve*

(*apostles*) a group of „*elders*“ (Greek: *presbyteroi*) who collectively exhibited (probably mostly) organizational leadership functions (see, for example, Acts 15 where the term occurs often).

Regarding Greek-speaking congregations, established by mission initiatives from Antioch (Acts 13:1ff.) and later by the apostle Paul and his co-workers, we have a somewhat different picture. In Acts 14:23 it is mentioned that Barnabas and Paul „*appointed elders... in each church*“ that they had founded. However, we don't find „*elders*“ in Pauline letters except the late so-called Pastoral Letters (1./2. Tim.; Tit.). Since the author of Acts was interested in stable leadership structures one may understand his interest to place a later development already at the initial phase of the foundation of churches.

It seems that in Antioch one knew the leadership functions of „*prophets and teachers*“, as Acts 13:1 shows; and we have probably to add „*apostles*“, for Barnabas and Paul – missionaries from Antioch – were called „*apostles*“ in Acts 14:4. 6, whereas this title was otherwise not conferred to Paul at all in Acts. And these three titles for leadership functions we do also find in the Pauline letters, heading a list of different leadership functions in 1. Cor. 12:28 and (in a slightly different manner) Rom. 12:6-8. To quote 1 Cor. 12:28:

*„And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues...“*

We note that titles in the strict sense of the word are only the first three; the following ones refer rather to areas of activities than to clearly defined institutional functions.

In addition it should be noted that Paul in Phil. 1:2 mentions „*bishops*“ (Plural!) and „*deacons*“; and the term „*deacon*“ occurs also in Rom. 16:1 in connection with Phoebe. These references may give a hint that there might have been some concrete leadership forms already in some congregations, but it is – especially in regard to „*bishops*“ – very difficult to determine what is meant or implied by them.

#### Second Christian generation:

Just in short: We find a slightly different picture as to leadership titles and functions in the letters to the Ephesians and Colossians. We also have, as in the earlier Pauline letters, the image of the body of Christ – we still have to talk about it – but there is now a distinction between the body and Christ who explicitly is called the head of the body. The list of leadership functions is slightly different from earlier ones:

*„... some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers“ ...*  
(Eph. 4:11)

The functions of „*apostles and prophets*“ already seem to belong to a past period; for now – that is different from Paul, where Christ and only Christ is the „*foundational stone*“ of the church (1. Cor. 3:11) – the church as „*household of God*“ is „*built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone*“ (Eph. 2:20).

#### Third Christian generation:

In biblical writings that originated only in the time of the third Christian generation (we talk about 100 A.D. and beyond) we encounter titles for leadership function that indeed relate to institutional structures. The term „*elder/s*“ (*presbyteroi*) is found in the book of Acts (most interesting perhaps in the section Acts 20:17ff.: Paul's farewell speech to the elders of Ephesus in Antioch), in 1. Peter 5:1.; James 5:14; 2. and 3. John, and in the Pastoral Letters (1. Tim. 5:1.2.17.19; Tit. 1:5). „*Elders*“ here is usually seen as a group of people that collectively acts. However, besides this group – and apparently

entrusted with more authority – stands in the Pastoral Letters the „*bishop*“ (singular!) who seems to emerge here as holding the top leadership position in the church (cf. 1. Tim. 3:1f.; Tit. 1:7; also Acts 20:28).

In addition to the bishop and the elders occurs in the Pastoral Letters the office of *deacons* (1. Tim. 3:8ff.), a term that already occurred earlier and other writings (Rom. 16:1), well known perhaps from Acts 6:1ff. where „social service“ for the Greek-speaking widows in the church in Jerusalem is being organized, where the title „*diakonos*“ as such however does not occur; the NRSV translates the Greek verbal form quite correct with „*to wait on tables*“. From this and other verses we get the impression that „*diakonos*“ and „*diakonia*“ refer always to social services; this, however, is in the NT occasionally but not always the case. More about it later.

#### Fourth Christian generation:

Here only a quick mentioning of the fact that the top position of the bishop that was envisioned in the Pastoral Letters not long after that time in writings of the so-called Apostolic Fathers – for instance Ignatius of Antioch – gave way to the introduction of the office of a *bishop* as a monarchic leader of the church. Here we have, if not already earlier with the Pastoral Letters, the origins of Catholic teaching about the role and function and dignity of the bishopric in the church.

Besides these terms we may mention the metaphoric use of terminology such as the talk of „*shepherd*“ and „*sheep*“ (cf. for example Acts 20:28; 1. Peter 5:1ff.; John 21:15ff.) as well as the reference to widows who also seem to represent a certain type of ministry in the church (cf. 1. Tim. 5:3ff.).

That the English translated uses a few times the word “leader” was already mentioned. As an example I refer here only to the Greek word „*kybernesis*“ („the ability to lead“, as a Greek-English dictionary says) in 1. Cor. 12:28 which is translated with „*administrators*“ by the RSV and with “*forms of leadership*” in the NRSV. Those translations already show that it is very difficult to grasp the exact meaning of the activities that are implied here.

An important note in closing should be added: It is interesting that none of the title that the Roman leadership or Greek-speaking world used for their civil / political / military leadership functions is being employed by the NT for the description of leadership functions in the church.

*(For further consideration and discussion: How about a differentiation between lay people and clergy in the New Testament? How about women in leadership positions? Tensions in Biblical literature)*

## **II. Basic principles and key values regarding leadership in the church – the initial inspiration**

After sketching the phenomenon of church life and leadership titles on an historical level in biblical literature we move on now and dig a little deeper in order to decipher the guiding principles and the values of a leadership that is in accordance with the vision of the church that is established by Jesus Christ and inspired by the Holy Spirit.

I am going to unfold this in the following three main sections that deal, first, with essential key values – so to say the initial inspiration deriving from the Jesus story, the Gospel of Jesus Christ (II.); I will then look at the development towards an institutionalization of leadership in the churches of the second and particularly the third generation and outline the questions that arise from insights into

that development (III.). And finally I try to sum up all these considerations in concrete recommendations as to leadership issues, leadership development and leadership performance in the church (IV.).

Now, first of all, we turn to what I would call the key values.

The guiding principles for leadership in the church are, compared with the realities of the ancient world of Roman Empire and the rulers / leaders of the day in a way nothing less but revolutionary. Church, the little communities of baptized and Christ-believing people who ventured to evangelize the world, where inspired by a vision of a new way of living together as a community and thus setting a new model for the society in the contemporary world. These small groups saw themselves as a new humanity, of people who believe in Jesus Christ, the firstborn among many brothers and sisters (Rom. 8:29), and thus build up a community of sisterly and brotherly love.

I will substantiate this statement by reference to only a few key passages from the Bible.

### **II.1. „Service“ versus „rulership“ and „domination“**

First a passage from the (Synoptic) Gospels. In Mk. 10:35ff. (with parallels in Mt and Lk) we read about the request of Jesus' disciples James and John to be seated at the side of the glorified Jesus in his heavenly kingdom. Jesus reacts to this request with a general statement regarding the values of leadership in the community which Jesus is about to establish:

*„So Jesus called them (the disciples) and said to them, `You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers (we could also say: leaders) lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant (Greek: diakonos), and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave (Greek: doulos) of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as ransom for many.“ (Mk. 10:42-45)*

Leadership – and with it also honor – in the church is different from the way, authority, rulership and leadership is often carried out in the world. The term „to serve“ and the noun „service“ becomes, starting from this saying of Jesus one – if not the – key word for the description of a Christian attitude towards Christian leadership and general behavior within the church. The term translated with „to serve“ refers originally to the service on the table; it relates to a servile work, usually even done by a slave, in any case by a person regarded of a lesser value than the one for whom the service is being done. Jesus himself is the model for such a service: He was the person for others, looking at their needs; and he even gave, out of love, his life for the world, to save all people. And Jesus' action in washing the feet of his disciples, reported in St. John 13, gives another example of this attitude that should become normative for the Christian community and that is – in John's Gospel quite evident – connected with the commandment to love one another.

„Service“ is thus the key attitude for those who want to be Christian leaders. Leadership means to put myself to the service of others, to assist the community, to help others and the community at large to grow. What we find here – and that is very characteristic for the community of Christ – is a reversal of values and attitudes that were prevalent in contemporary society: The attitudes of the great authorities of the time – here: to rule and exhibit domination and suppression - were rejected; and on the other hand: Attitudes of those who were regarded as inferior and shameful – here: „service“ at the table, service of a slave; but also attitudes such as „humility“, „friendliness“, „meekness“ for instance – were appreciated and regarded as genuine expressions of Christian life styles.

Christian community appears thus, even and particularly in leadership issues, as a counter-cultural movement, with a certain commitment to the principles of democratization, constructive engagement of all members, participation and solidarity. And this was, at least to a great extent, also what made the Christian community so attractive for outsiders.

However, we also have to note that the terminology of *diakonos/diakonia* (literally: *servant/service at the table*) is not seldom also translated as “*ministry/minister*” (cf. for example 2. Cor. 5:18; 11:23) – and that this is the term we usually use in church language of today for all kinds of services in the church, particularly for the pastoral ministry. This translation is not quite wrong, and indeed used to express the term “*servant/minister of the Lord*” also a sense of honor in the church (the Pope calls himself as “*Servant of Servants*”; but cf. already the controversy between St. Paul and other missionaries who called themselves proudly “*ministers of the Lord*”, 2. Cor. 11:16ff.); but we should not forget that the key element indeed relates to service – service in humility and concern and love for others, not at all to domination, rulership, authoritarian attitude (cf. once again 2. Cor. 11:16ff.; also 1. Cor. 3:1ff.).

*(For further consideration and discussion: Does the notion of church as a counter-cultural movement make sense? And if so, how?)*

## **II.2. Leadership by engagement**

What in the Gospel section of Mark still seemed to lie in the future became indeed the practice of the early Christian communities. Leadership developed – and was appreciated – first of all out of engagement in and for the community.

It is interesting that Paul in his letters confers greetings to many a fellow-Christian, may it be in Corinth or Rome or in other places. In such contexts he usually employs a terminology that in one way or another expresses the engagement of that particular person within and for the community. The term „*service*“ and the verbal form „*to serve*“ occur here again (for example related to Stephanas, the first convert in Achaia and his house who „*devoted themselves to the service of the saints*“ (1. Cor. 16:15); the next verse mentions no names, but speaks of persons and everyone „*who works and toils*“ (1. Cor. 16:16). In Rom 16, too, we find words such as „*to work in the Lord*“. The list could be extended, and one could also refer – for just one more example – to Paul’s description of his and Apollos’ ministry in 1. Cor. 3: Both of them did „*labor*“, both were therefore „*Gods servants, working together*“ (3:5ff.).

I think that this usage of terminology related to (hard) work, engagement and service underlines very strongly that leadership in a Christian community – at least in the early stage – emerges out of an attitude of engagement. Those who put themselves into the service for others in the community are regarded as leaders – and they are also appreciated as leaders. That is actually an expression of the fulfilment of Jesus’ saying that those who want to be great – that is: honored – in the church should become servants of all. And Paul is certainly ready to appreciate this service; and moreover, he admonishes people to give recognition to such leaders: „*So give recognition to those persons.*“ (1. Cor. 16:18)

*(For further consideration and discussion: Service mentality and self-esteem? How to deal with that tension?)*

### II.3. One body – many members

One of the most relevant biblical passages in relation to church and leadership is the image of the Church as Body of Christ, used by Paul in 1. Cor. 12 and Rom. 12 (and in Eph. 1:22f:1ff.; 2:16; 4:1ff.; Col. 1:18, here with the distinction between head and body).

Paul uses here a parable that was widely known in the contemporary Greek-Roman world. However, he does not introduce it as a simple illustration – as if the church would be something like a body –, but he identifies the Christian community with the body of Christ, that is with Christ himself:

*“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.” (1. Cor. 12:12f.)*

And then, at the end of his comparison, he states:

*“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it...” (1. Cor. 12:27)*

Paul’s application of the imagery of body and members is based on the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. I already quoted the reference to baptism that we find in 1. Cor. 12:13. Baptism means the incorporation of a person into the body of Christ, that is into the church. One is now connected with Christ, belonging to Christ, *“in Christ Jesus”*, as St. Paul quite often simply says (cf. only Gal. 3:26-28 which is very similar to 1. Cor. 12:13)

However, it is the Eucharist that provides the terminological connection with the imagery of the body. Paul himself refers to the Lord Supper in 1. Cor. 11:17ff. where he even quotes the words that Jesus used in the evening of the Supper meal with his disciples:

*“For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me’....” (1. Cor. 11:23f.)*

Sharing in baptism and the Lord’s Supper means the incorporation into the body of Christ. It is obvious here that “body” is not simply an illustration for Christian community; it is the reality of a communion, an incorporation into the reality of a new humanity that Jesus Christ has brought about and in which he is present.

As to the members of the body: they stand first of all for the members of the church as such, that is for the individual Christians. However, the special interest of Paul in this context is not simply on the foundation and life of the church as such, but on issues related to leadership in the church. He introduces the image of body and members in the context of a leadership struggle in Corinth where some leaders thought that they would have greater and more important gifts from God than others, and they therefore held themselves in high esteem and had some contempt for others who – that was the basic issue – were not able to speak in tongues and show extraordinary performances during the assembly of the congregation.

In responding to and commenting within this leadership controversy Paul identifies the members of the body with tasks or functions which the members of the Christian community (might) have and exercise in the congregation. In V. 28 their functions are listed:

*“And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership (Greek: kyberneseis, the ability to lead), various kinds of tongues...”*

The list shows that we can not really speak of clearly defined offices within an institutional setting. The first three titles may refer to well defined and generally acknowledged areas of engagement and responsibility whereas all the other functions seem to refer to a rather fluid situation of engagement and responsibility. The two functions after the first three refer to some kind of ecstatic performances and healing ministries; the next one perhaps to forms of diaconical service or assistance in the organization of the worship or/and the distribution of the Lord Supper or to taking care of the bursary and collections of and for the congregation, whereas the *“forms of leadership”* might relate to all kinds of organizational matters, chairing assemblies and counsel meetings etc. The ability to speak in tongues surely stands here at the last position, because that was just the gift that led to pride and arrogance and controversy in the Corinthian congregation.

The basic principle that Paul emphasizes here, however, is quite clear: Each member of the congregation – the body of Christ – has something to contribute for the well-being of the body! And the basis for this statement lays in two spiritual notions that Paul applies: He speaks of *“spiritual gifts”* (cf. 12:1) and of *“charismata”*, manifestations and gifts of the Holy Spirit as expressions of Gods grace (*charis* means “grace”, *charismata* are the gifts or individual manifestations of Gods of grace upon a person. It is quite obvious that the term “spiritual gifts” was appreciated by the Corinthians themselves, while charisma – or charismata in the plural – in the sense of “gifts of grace as gifts of the Holy Spirit” was the terminology preferred by St. Paul. Already in 1. Cor. 1:7 he speaks of “charismata” (the NRSV translates however translates here “spiritual gifts”), and in 1. Cor. 12 this terminology and the relation to the Holy Spirit is emphasized very strongly by St. Paul:

*“Now there are varieties of gifts (in Greek: charismata), but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.”* (1. Cor. 12:4-7)

Indeed, the teaching of Paul regarding one body and many members and in connection with that his reflection on spiritual or charismatic gifts given to each one for the common good, talks about leadership values in the church. Each one, we could conclude, is a leader or at least is a potential leader or is, in other words, encouraged to bring in his or her special abilities and gifts for the well-being of the whole; for each one has been given talents and skills in order to contribute to the community. And since all the functions and responsibilities which people take up in the body of Christ come from God, the bearer of those particular gifts will also be perceived as responsible to God.

After having laid out the theological foundations of St. Paul’s teaching at this point, it may still be of great interest to see what actually is conveyed by the metaphorical language of the body that has its theological grounding in Christian perceptions of the Gospel, but that was otherwise used already before Paul in the New Testament environment. There are still some more lessons to be learned.

There are various notions – we could say: values – connected with or implicit in the image as such. I will mention the most important one, and perhaps we can find even more:

- The way in which St. Paul makes use of this image signifies a process of democratization as a comparison with the satirical usage of the parable of body and members in the Roman worlds shows. Kind of famous was the application of this metaphor to the rulership in Rome. In some applications of the parable there was great attention placed to the stomach which was identified with the Emperor himself or the ruling class in Rome. The metaphor / parable reading was that all the different members should contribute with their gifts and talents, with their taxes etc. to the government that was seen as the big stomach that swallowed everything and was never ever satisfied. The metaphor of the state as body, and the stomach



as the hierarchy or rulership was a satirical criticism of politics within the Roman empire. (Cf. Judges 9:7ff., where we find a parable with a quite similar meaning)

In Paul's application there is no center that dominates everything and is being served by all the other members. We find again – this time rather implicit – a criticism of authoritarian rulership. What Paul enfolds here is a model that we well could call a democratic foundation for any notion of leadership.

- Along with it goes the emphasis on participation: All members have a part to play, all are important, all are needed, nobody is excluded. Each one also has something to contribute to the well-being of the body.
- Such participation, however, does not lead to competition and struggle for greater influence and power, for dominance and control. What is required for the well-being of the body is the cooperation of all the members. All are depending on one another, they therefore need to work together. What is required is a sense of solidarity, working together for a common purpose: that the body is sound and well, that it may grow!
- It is also interesting – that again is important in regard to the perception of Christian leadership – that St. Paul even transcends the metaphorical level when he speaks in relation to the members of the body in terms of „*caring for one another*“, „*suffering together*“ and „*rejoicing together*“. This language refers to emotions, and emotions refer to personalities. Members – and leaders – are persons with affection, with the ability to express empathy and exhibit emotional skills; they show emotional intelligence – and are not simply functionaries and managers who are interested only in processes and procedures but not in human beings and their well-being.
- What is further important for and within the body then is an attitude of respect of and appreciation for each and every one of the members. But we find within the general concept of appreciation for every member again a surprising special emphasis: There should be a particular recognition and awareness for the supposedly small, minor, inferior part/s of the body. And this should not be understood as a contradiction to the principle of democracy what lays at the basis of the whole imagery. We find here again – as a typical identity marker of the Gospel tradition - the paradoxical reversal of the roles of rulership and domination so prevalent in the world. Not the ones in power receive special attention, honor and respect, but the weak and needy ones are taken note of with a particular concern and in a special, appreciative way:

*„... the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this...“ (1. Cor. 12:22ff.).*

Leadership in the church, we learn here again, means first of all service within and for the community. Leadership is certainly needed, otherwise the body would not function well. But leadership is a shared responsibility. Each one of the members, of the believers of Christ has been gifted by God, she and he have talents and skills that they may bring in for the good of all in the community. There is not place for domination or even arrogance, even controversies should be settled – hopefully – with an attitude that the model of the body-members-image conveys.

And it may be added that Paul underlines the model that he sets here with the body-members-metaphor with reference to two other key words connected with the Gospel. At the end of chapter 12 he urges the congregation to *“strive for the greater gifts”*, and in chapter 13 he talks about this gift that is supposed to be the basis of all the gifts and functions in the church: the gift of *love*! I know, we all are aware of the content of that wonderful chapter 13 of 1. Corinthians with Paul’s meditation on what love is all about.

And one needs to add that next to love Paul draws in chapter 14, where he talks about controversies regarding the way a worship is being conducted, attention to the term *“upbuilding”* (14:3, Greek: *oikodome*), what actually – now in the image of the church as a building, the temple of God, so to say – means quite the same as the world *“well-being”* in connection with the body language. All leadership, all engagement in the church should relate towards the wish to upbuild the community, so that it serves in this world as the city on a hill, the salt of the earth, and the light of the world.

*(For further consideration and discussion: What are my talents? Where and what for am I needed?)*

#### **II.4. The “priesthood of all believers” in a „house of living stones“**

A further example for the process of democratization of the leadership idea can be found in 1. Peter. In chapter 2 of that letter the church is being portrayed as a *„house of living stones“*. Foundation or cornerstone of that house is Jesus Christ, the *„living stone“* – an image from the Old Testament. The image of the house relates originally to the temple, and with the temple connected were of course the temple personnel – the priests – and the activities in the temple – that is prayers and, as particular task of priests, the offering of sacrifices.

In the background of this section in 1. Peter we find – so to say - a history of restricted areas. The temple was certainly the cherished center of the people of Jahwe, the God of Israel, but it was only accessible for the people of Israel and prohibited for gentiles (remember the commotion caused by the apostle Paul as he brought Greeks with him into the temple, Acts 21:27ff.). Only the High Priest was permitted to enter the innermost area of the temple – the Holiest of the Holy -, and that even only at certain times; and the priests – and the priests only – were in charge of the offerings and sacrifices and of performing the liturgy. (Note: These observations should not give way to anti-Judaic sentiments!)

The message of 1. Peter now, so joyfully and triumphantly voiced, is that there is no such restriction and limitation anymore. The temple is open for everybody, also for gentiles; all are priests, whether they may be Jews or gentiles. The temple is perceived not anymore as a house made of stones, but a house made of people; Christians are living stones in this house of God, and everyone who believes in Christ is honored to be a priest:

*„Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God’s sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ...”* (1. Peter 2:4f.)

And again:

*„But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous*

*light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.” (1. Peter 2:9f.)*

What we find here is, on the one hand, a universalization of the notion of “*people of God*” – not only Jews, but also gentiles, everybody, is called to be part of the people of God; and on the other hand a democratization of the notion of priesthood. All people are now regarded as priest, all have direct and immediate access to God, and – that also is implied – all have priestly functions. The notion of “priesthood of all believers”, so much cherished in the Lutheran tradition, has its foundation here in the teaching of 1. Peter.

This idea, that is important to stress, does not only mean that all people have now direct access to God, so that a human mediator in form of a priest who would represent me before God, is not needed anymore. It also implies a shared responsibility in the house of God, a participation in leadership. It rejects not only a distinction in principle between – as in the Catholic tradition – a consecrated priesthood and the lay people as the people of God, but it also denies a distinction in principle between clergy and lay people in matters of leadership in the church. All are eligible to be leaders, even though leadership functions may be organized in such a way that it serves the upbuilding of the house of God, that is the community of Christ. Martin Luther's famous manifest: “That a Christian Assembly or Congregation Has the Right and Power to Judge Teaching and to Call, Appoint, and Dismiss Teachers” underlines that the whole community of believers has a leadership responsibility. Leadership in the sense of functional position or administrative office then may be entrusted to individual persons, but this should always be done with the consent of the congregation/church as a whole.

*(For further consideration and discussion: Priesthood of all believers? Does it work in my church?)*

### **III. Towards an institutionalization of leadership structures – challenges and tensions in the third generation of Christians**

I already mentioned that leadership functions in a more institutionalized manner – that is that generally recognized, permanent, authoritative positions of leadership in positions of elders, bishops and others – had emerged only in the second and third generation of Christians and is therefore reflected only in later stages of NT writings. The titles for leadership positions that emerged in those times were already mentioned in section I.

#### **III.1. The necessity for more institutionalized forms of leadership**

It is important to note, first of all, that such a development towards a more stable, institutionalized leadership was necessary for several reasons:

- The growth and increasing outreach and spreading of the congregations
- After the realization that the coming of Christ was delayed there was a growing sense for the need to interact constructively with the non-Christian environment
- The need for a representation of the church towards an (often hostile) environment
- Competition and controversies between different leaders or leadership styles
- The emergence of pluralistic interpretation of Christian faith, or – in the words of the Pastoral Letters – the emergence of false teachings, erroneous attitudes etc.

*(For further consideration and discussion: Do I see a need for shifts in institutional leadership forms of the church today? If so, why and how?)*

### **III.2. The growing interest in leadership matters**

It may not be necessary here again to look at the different titles. We rather draw attention to such aspects that illustrate and show the growing interest in leadership matters. What were the concerns? What do we observe? I will state some of the items that now came into focus:

1) There was a growing interest in encouraging and establishing leadership structures. Evident is this particularly in the so-called Pastoral Letters which are not letters to congregations, but to church leaders. And their main purpose was that the recipient of such a letter – Timothy or Titus – were encouraged, admonished, sometimes even charged to act for themselves as leaders or to see that leadership structures and persons as leaders are identified and put into place in the congregations. *“The saying is sure”,* said the author of 1. Tim. (3:1), *“whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task.”* *“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor...”* (1. Tim. 5:17). Titus is charged to *„appoint elders in every town, as I (Paul) directed you...”* (Tit. 1:5).

2) Connected with that interest of fostering leadership structures we find a growing interest in spelling out the (moral) qualifications and (administrative, managerial or educational and theological) skills a leader must have. The catalogues for the requirements on the lifestyle and leadership skills that a bishop (1. Tim. 3:2-7) or a deacon (1. Tim. 3:8-13) or the elders (Tit. 1:5-9) need to bring to their offices may – from our perspective of today - sound a little surprising, but these lists clearly show that there was a very considerate interest in spelling out what kind of personality a leader needs to be. To quote as an example here the catalogue of the required qualifications and skills for the office of a bishop (whereas, I need to say it again, a bishop at that time was not a bishop as we know this office today):

*“Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, temperate, sensible, respectable, hospitable, an apt teacher, not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money. He must manage his own household well, keeping his children submissive and respectful in every way – for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how can he take care of God’s church? He must not be a recent convert, or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace and the snare of the devil.”* (1. Tim. 3:2-7)

I suppose, this list includes items about we should talk in a little more detail; at this point we can’t do it.

3) There is also a great interest in a proper and formal appointment and commissioning of leaders. This usually takes place by a ritual that is called *“the laying on of hands”*, a formulation that occurs a few times in the Pastoral Letters and indeed gives us evidence of an act that later is called “ordination” or even *“consecration”*. However, it is not quite clear who was responsible for this act of ordination or who was acting in it: In 2. Tim. 1:6 it was set that Paul himself has ordained Timothy, whereas in 1. Tim. 4:14 it is said that *“the council of elders”* had ordained him. Was ordination the privilege of the apostle or bishop alone or did the congregation, represented through the council of elders, take responsibility for it? Interesting also is that the assumption now was – and that is different from 1. Cor. 12 and Rom. 12 – that the *“gift of God”* (2. Tim. 1:6; 1. Tim. 4:14) was bestowed on Timothy through the act of ordination whereas Paul earlier stressed that each one of the

members of the church has been gifted by God. Nevertheless, there was a clear way of commissioning leaders – and we can assume rightly that such an act equipped those leaders with confidence and courage to carry out their duties. To quote 2. Tim. 1:6:

*“For this reason, I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands; for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.”*

Perhaps it is important to note here that “ordination” or commissioning does not necessarily relate to the office of a pastor or bishop in today’s perception. Leaders of those days were not (necessarily) trained theologians, and a bishop was often rather perceived as the administrative leader of the congregation or the council of congregations in a city. Some NT scholars also think that a bishop was (primarily) in charge of the money of a congregation – what sense should the repeated warning that a bishop or leader should not be “a lover of money” (1. Tim. 3:3) otherwise make?

4) Moreover, we find now a growing interest in defining the relationship of the different leadership roles and positions to one another. What exactly is the role of a bishop in comparison to the elders? And what exactly is the obligation of a deacon? Who is superior to whom? The picture is not always clear, so that we are not really in a position to make definite statements. In Acts 20:17ff., for example, we find a tendency to identify the position of elders and bishops; they seem to be the same, what however is an indication that the office of bishop – that is certainly the younger term – was now on the way to be generally acknowledged in the church at large. In the Pastoral Letters we have both the offices of elders and bishops as distinctive entities. Some say that the bishop has now a head position – that is definitely true in relation of bishop and deacon -, as kind of a chairperson of a larger congregational or city church council. But it may also be that the author of the Pastoral Letters is interested in strengthening the newly introduced office of the bishop over against earlier leadership structures.

5) It can finally only be stated that the Pastoral letters – and some other writings of that generation – deal quite a bit, throughout so to say, with leadership matters. We find encouragement, hints as to the right behavior, to skills and procedures for dealing with conflicts and adversaries etc. These letters are really letters to leaders – even though leaders who are children of their time and therefore not always and in every manner a source of inspiration for us today. This leads to the next set of considerations.

*(For further consideration and discussion: Does my church pay enough attention to leadership issues and leadership development?)*

### **III.3. Growing tensions between Gospel values and leadership structures**

There is no doubt that the third generation of Christians knew and upheld the values inherent in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And yet, we observe in the Pastoral Letters – and also some other writings – an adaptation of values that were prevalent in the Greek and Roman culture in which the young congregations now had to find their place. One did not take up – as one could have thought – the terminology for leadership positions that were common in the civil administration of the Hellenistic world – such as the Greek words as *arché* (in such a context it would read “ruling power”, “authority”, “ruler”; an “*archegós*” is a ruler), *timé* (“honor”, “respect”, “recognition”, “of high esteem”) or other terms. Those and similar terms, that was a Christian instinct, were not applicable to express the ethos of Christian leadership.

And yet, one tended to see a familiarity with ethical values prevalent and of common sense in contemporary society. Of particular interest were values connected with family life as well as the popular philosophical teaching regarding virtues and vices in society – usually formulated in catalogues – and not least attention to social stratification as well.

Of special relevance in our context is the attention that those Christian congregations paid to the structures of family life and the attitudes that are connected with the living together in the larger family of a house where men and women, parents and children, slave holders and slaves relate to another in a manner of superiority and subordination, authority and obedience.

Adopting those values of the environment paved the way towards a growth of a hierarchical tendency also in leadership matters. The bishop in the Pastoral Letter is now perceived as the “*pater familias*”, the patriarchal head of the family and the principal in the “*house of God*”, exhibiting an executive authority. This attitude gave way to a paternalistic mindset that grew dominant in the early church.

Even though the patriarchal mood was intertwined with a still vivid awareness of the key values for how Christian leadership has to be understood at all – Gerd Theißen, a New Testament scholar therefore speaks of a “patriarchalism of love” (“*Liebepatriarchalismus*”) -, the impact on the formerly so vivid involvement of women in Christian leadership was dramatic. Women were now totally excluded from leadership roles – and, moreover, women were seen as inferior beings. Here just one quotation to illustrate the attitude with which women were now regarded:

*„I desire, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument; also that the women should dress themselves modestly and decently in suitable clothing, not with their hair braided, or with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes, but with good works, as is proper for women who profess reverence for God. Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness with modesty.” (1. Tim. 2:8-15)*

What to say in regard to such a biblical statement? – One should not say that 1. Cor. 14:33b-36 has already a harsh statement on the role of women in the church; for it is general agreement today that these verses were a later insertion into St. Paul’s letter to the Corinthians.

*(For further consideration and discussion: How about the involvement of women in leadership in my church?)*

#### **III.4. Appreciation and criticism – attempt towards an evaluation**

In the last section I did not only describe the content of Bible, but I already provided some critical remarks on some of the later developments in view of Christian leadership. I will now explicitly move towards an evaluation of those developments. There are four aspects I want to stress – and it will be quite obvious that I apply here basically Lutheran principles for interpreting the Bible and theological developments.

1) I think that it is quite justified that leadership structures, organizational, institutional and administrative requirements may change if historical developments or circumstances demand new developments and adjustments to contextual challenges. This has always a Lutheran point of view.

The early church needed to develop stronger and more stable institutional structures and it was justified in doing that. We, too, today have to look at the challenges for leadership that lie in the situation of our time, and we have to organize us accordingly – so that the Gospel may be heard and the church is perceived as the “city on a hill” from which light should shine into the world.

2) It is also quite in order that we find in different churches, in different regional and cultural contexts different forms of leadership. I once learnt in an Assembly of Tanzanian and German bishops that even in Tanzania the office of a bishop is very differently perceived in the one Lutheran church, depending whether the diocese and the office of Lutheran bishop had a Scandinavian, German or American missionary background. In Lutheran teaching, church is constituted not by leadership structures – as in the Catholic or also the Anglican tradition where the episcopacy is an indispensable mark of the church -, but church is simply there where people come together and the Gospel is being proclaimed and the sacraments are distributed. This is, as the famous phrase of the Augsburg Confession (VII.) says, “enough” for the unity of the church (“*satis est*”). That there were already in NT times different church and leadership structures should therefore not be regarded as a problem.

3) It is nevertheless necessary that the key values that I pointed out in this lecture still do nourish and inform leadership structures in the church. I am not talking of a cheap compromise, but of a creative balancing of historical and contextual challenges and biblical values. Such a balancing is not achieved once for all, but it is a continuing process, for the church is also in regard to leadership issues as “*ecclesia semper reformanda*”, always afresh listening to the Gospel and its values and engage in a process of self-examination and ever new adjustment – in the response to the call of God in our times.

4) And yet there are features, even in the Bible, that have to be criticized and even rejected. Criterion for a critical judgement is not so much our modern consciousness but the interpretation of the Bible from its center: the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The exclusion of women from ministry can not be justified if one takes into account the spirit of the Bible. Women were appreciated as co-workers and leaders by the apostle Paul, and it is a sad development that women were put in an inferior position in later times. Gal. 3:26-28 is one of the key words of the NT and, from the perception that we are united and equal in Christ, called to be fellow members and co-workers in the body of Christ, we cannot exclude women from leadership positions.

*(For further consideration and discussion: Is it permitted to criticize the Bible? If so, what are they criteria? If not, why not?)*

#### **IV. In summing up: Leadership values for me today**

In summing up I will just mention some key insights regarding leadership issues in the New Testament that may be applicable for us today. There are three sets of insights, and in each of the three sections I will formulate three short sentences that might serve as guidelines for us today. I simply make these statements which of course could be substantiated by Biblical quotations.

##### **IV.1. From my reading of the New Testament I find a threefold encouragement for myself:**

- 1) I am, as a member of the body of Christ, encouraged to contribute to the well-being and upbuilding of the church.
- 2) I am invited and encouraged to look at myself and ask myself what my particular talents, skills, abilities are that I could offer as a contribution to the church and its ministry.

- 3) I should see and perform my introspection in view of my talents as a spiritual exercise or a spiritual journey, guided by the question what kind of gifts and skills God has already and still will give to me as my very personal charismata.

**IV.2. I foster a threefold attitude for carrying out my leadership contribution in the church:**

- 1) I develop a dedication to the Gospel values regarding leadership in the church and I will exhibit an attitude of service for and within the community.
- 2) I uphold a certain style of leadership informed by empathy and not by authoritarian behavior.
- 3) I pay attention to my own strength and limitations and avoid to get exhausted and restless.

**IV.3. Three principles that my congregation and the church at large should keep in mind:**

- 1) The church should encourage people – young and old, women and men, poor and rich... - to offer their gifts and talents to the well-being and up-building of the church and share in the responsibility that is entrusted to all of us as church members.
- 2) The church should always give a clear mandate and commission leaders for certain responsibilities with a ritual of laying on of hands and asking God's blessing upon them.
- 3) The church should find ways to give proper and thankful recognition and appreciation to people who devote themselves to serve the congregation and the church at large as leaders.

**In closing** I would like to quote a Bible verse that is being applied as motto for the service of the theological seminary I once taught in Hyderabad, India: God gave gifts of leadership/service in the church

“to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ...” (Eph. 4:11)

Indeed, to equip others to become leaders is the most precious service that leadership in the church may render to others and to the community.

Hamburg, May 2021

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