How Leadership and Authority Evolve
A Study of the Leadership Functions and Authority in the New Testament Community

Noah Pashapa, Ph.D.

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How Leadership and Authority Evolve
A Study of the Leadership Functions and Authority in the New Testament Community
Noah Pashapa, Ph.D.   56

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Introduction

More than ever, this century, plagued by extremism and terrorism, needs a leadership that truly serves the people of all nations. As nations of this world have come to depend on each other for stabilizing democratic institutions, social order and economic prosperity, there is a dire need for developing leadership values and patterns that will help humanity to live in peace and prosperity. Going back to trace the leadership patterns in the ancient past will, perhaps, help re-learn what should be done to train those who will assume leadership roles around the world.

In this article, I propose to discuss how authority and leadership evolve based on textual examination of the books of the New Testament. Such investigation of classic texts in other religions and a variety of cultures will enable us to seek the best that human history offers to us.

In all these, language use reveals the values of the society, and the study of language used by the leaders reveals the leadership characteristics. Language provides us with a window to our inner most thoughts, even as it provides a revelation of our values and practices and an explanation for the personality traits that the leaders exhibit.

This study is a text-based investigation of characteristics of leadership and the nature of communities the leaders sought to build.

The Books of the Bible and the Abbreviations for Their Names Used in this Article are given at the end of the article.

Differentiated Leadership Functions and Ministry Patterns

The New Testament witnesses to the existence of differentiated forms of leadership functions and ministry patterns among the early Christian communities. Any serious investigation of the N.T. in an attempt to establish the patterns that office- bearing, leadership function and ministry took in the early church communities will find it difficult to disagree with observations on the diversity that characterizes it made by Raymond Brown. He has observed that,

> ... we do not find a clearly defined and continuing pattern of leadership, nor given a definition of the functions of those who lead, nor agreed and uniform titles for leaders...The structuring of the church evolved, and variation between churches was quite marked...[2]

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
How Leadership and Authority Evolve
A Study of the Leadership Functions and Authority in the New Testament Community
Noah Pashapa, Ph.D.   57

or those of Kevin Giles's when he says,

> The New Testament does not give a definitive picture or suggest that only one order is God-given. But it does show how leadership emerged, the way it functioned, the various forms that appeared and how they managed to meet new needs. It helps us escape the feeling that we are locked into one order given once for all…reminds us of forgotten forms of ministry, and encourages the diversity and flexibility essential to meet the needs of our complex society[3]

Two diametrically opposed leadership structures?

This evidence for diversity has been interpreted by scholars such as Hans von Campenhausen and J.D. Dunn to indicate the presence of two diametrically opposed leadership and authority structures in the early church. One of these church orders is said to have been entirely free of structures and directed entirely by the Holy Spirit while the other is said to have been characterized by an institutional order with office-bearing elders[4]

Such scholars suggest that early Pauline epistles reflect the latter while the Acts of the Apostles; James; 1Pet 1 and 2; Timothy and Titus witness to the former. Hans von Campenhausen puts it this way,

> Paul develops the idea of the spirit as the organizing principle of the Christian congregation. There is no need for any fixed system with rules, regulations and prohibitions... the community is not conceived or understood as a sociological entity, and the Spirit which governs it does not act within the framework of a particular church order or constitution. If you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law! In the church 'freedom' is the basic controlling principle... with the system of elders we move into the sphere of a fundamentally different way of thinking about the church, which can only with difficulty be combined with the Pauline picture of the congregation and certainly cannot be derived from it... it presents not merely a new phase, but a new line of development, the first and decisive pre-requisite for the elaboration of a narrowly official and ecclesiastical way of thinking...[5]'

This 'conflict theory ' as a framework for understanding what is happening on the ground with leadership functions and ministry development in the New Testament is attractive in that it provides a simple theoretical formula, that gives two clear alternatives between two opposing pictures of the church which cannot be harmonized. It appears though that such a simplistic linear developmental account might not do justice to the historical realities associated with these early church communities.

Different church communities with different ministry patterns

It appears more in keeping with the picture portrayed in the N.T. to posit the existence of different church communities, located in particular cultural contexts, which reacted differently to the needs associated with leadership functions and ministry patterns. In the Luke-Acts reports for example there are no precise instructions from Jesus on this matter. It is implied here that leaders arose to meet specific needs (Acts 6:1-6).With time a group of elders emerge about whom no explanation is given (Acts 11:30; 15:2ff; 21:18) and they appear to assume the leadership

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
How Leadership and Authority Evolve
A Study of the Leadership Functions and Authority in the New Testament Community
Noah Pashapa, Ph.D.   58

functions first given to the apostles. It is likely that this does reflect a development at a later post-apostolic stage. A group of 'leading men among the brethren ' whom Luke describes as prophets also emerge and play an active leadership role alongside the apostles and the elders already mentioned (Acts 15:22). In one place these prophets are reported to have presided over the church community (Acts 13:1-3)[6].

When one moves to the letters of Paul, the diversity is even more pronounced. In his letters to the Corinthians and Thessalonians for example, leaders are introduced who had no titles (1Thess 5:12-13; 1Cor 16:15-18) as well as those who had them (1Cor 12:28-30). Letters to the Romans and the Corinthians on the other hand portray a scenario where no individual or sub-group had preeminence when the church community assembled (Rom 12:3-8; 1Cor 12:4-7). The letters to the Philippians and to Timothy introduce leaders with titles 'Bishop (episcopos) and Deacon (diakonos)' (Phil 1:1; 1Tim 3:1-13) while 'Elders (presbuteroi)' are mentioned in Timothy and Titus (1Tim 3; Tit 3). Apostles, prophets and teachers (1Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11) are also reported to have been active leaders. Now with all this diversity reflected in the N.T., it would appear that the conflict model applied to leadership functions and ministry patterns in the New Testament by H. von Campenhausen, mentioned above, and others with similar views,does not correspond to historical realities on the ground witnessed to in the N.T. Rather, it reflects more the popular idealistic, dialectic conception of social structures typical of the Weberian dichotomy, with its 'charismatic' versus 'institutional' ideal types of authority, which has been superficially imposed on the N.T. evidence.

General consensus prevails among scholars that the development of leadership functions and ministry patterns in the early churches that we read about in the New Testament followed some kind of structural developmental process. B. Holmeberg , D. Tidball and Kevin Giles are among such scholars.[7]

This phenomenon of group development from less to more structured patterns of social organization which is referred to as institutionalism by social scientists, is typical of human interaction within groups, various types of associations as well as whole societies. Kevin Giles highlights this process in human organization when he says,

> Human beings cannot exist without some structure on which to pattern their relationships. There is a latent and powerful force, once people associate, to establish norms of behavior, routine ways of acting and decision -making processes. In a small newly formed group, social interaction is personal and informal. In the first stage leadership is usually given by the person who has brought the group into existence and by those who have been called to assist. With the passing of time and the growth of the group, more structured forms of interaction develop. The group's needs demand differentiation in leadership (someone to chair meetings and someone to write letters), in due course these people usually become office bearers with specific titles (chairman and secretary). When a group has been formed by a 'charismatic leader' -which Paul was-, that person can in fact be the driving force in the process of institutionalization...those things that will give permanence and structure to the new associations are encouraged: in this the leader gives impetus to forces already at work. Such processes must be presupposed in studying the way leadership emerged in the Christian churches[8]

The guiding and facilitating role of the Holy Spirit

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
How Leadership and Authority Evolve
A Study of the Leadership Functions and Authority in the New Testament Community
Noah Pashapa, Ph.D.   59

To be fair to the development that takes place with the early church community though, one must take into account the guiding and facilitating role claimed to have been played by the Holy Spirit in some such sociological process. Any account that leaves out this divine dimension, around which the reports on the early church community in the New Testament revolve, would not have done justice to them. And it is here that most sociological accounts of what is taking place with these early communities fall short as they are not designed to adequately deal with religious phenomena or truth claims so dominant in these religious texts. Another common pitfall that sociological studies on these communities fall into is the tendency to read onto the New Testament texts, perceptions and practices borrowed from the researcher's own world. This observation does not in any way imply that it is possible to eliminate the philosophical, cultural and conceptual distance between a modern day researcher and the historical conditions on the ground of these early church communities. This is simply to underscore the necessity to apply 'familiar' conceptual frameworks for analyzing and understanding the 'unfamiliar,' with due regard for the interpretive 'distance'. In my view Kevin Giles, in his work which has already been quoted above, avoids both these pitfalls successfully.

The household setting as background for leadership development and its functions

A lot of research on the cultural inheritance, the particular context and patterns characterizing the way in which these early Christians assembled for worship has already been carried out and one finds the results extremely informative. The scholarly works in this area that have been consulted in the writing of this paper are recorded in the endnotes. Notable among them are:

1.*'Jews and Christians in Antioch in the First Four Centuries of the Common Era'* by W.A. Meeks and R.L. Wilken and published by Scholars Press, Montana in 1978.

2.*'The Social Patterns of Christian Groups in the first Century'* by E.A Judge and published by Tyndale, London in 1960.

3.*'The social setting of Pauline Christianity'* by G. Theissen and published by T&T Cark, Edinburg , 1982.

4.*'The Church with the Human face'* by E. Schillebeck and published by S.C.M., London 1985. and

5.*'Social Aspects of Early Christianity'* by A. Marlherbe and published by Fortress Press, Philadelphia in 1983.[i]

Aspects in the social world of these early Christians that have been generally highlighted to have had a bearing on their self awareness and organization include (i) the voluntary religious clubs or associations which were popular in the Roman world, (ii) its philosophical schools (iii) the Sanhedrin and (iv)the newly formed synagogues sprouting throughout the Greco-Roman world. In addition to this general socio-cultural environment, scholars highlight,[9] first century Judaism, especially its household setting, to have been the dominant social setting for these early Jewish

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
How Leadership and Authority Evolve
A Study of the Leadership Functions and Authority in the New Testament Community
Noah Pashapa, Ph.D. 60

communities. It is consistent with the evidence in the New Testament to regard this background as the particular context within which to study the process of institutionalization in the early church communities.

Influence of the Jewish household setting

Scholars, some of whom have been highlighted above, have also generally noted that Jesus himself, the founder and archetypal model for leadership function and ministry, was a Jew. His disciples were Jews and the first Christians were Jews. Even apostle Paul, the great apostle to the Gentiles, was himself a convert from the most fundamentalist movement within Judaism, the Pharisees. Reports found in the Acts of the Apostles and the Pauline letters on the developments in these early church communities suggest that the household setting, more than any other cultural or social influence determined the patterns of social interaction and association that evolved among them. Christians are reported both in Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2:46; 5:24; 10:2; 11:14; 12:12-17) and in the Pauline letters (Rom 16:5, 10, 11, 23; 1Cor 1:16; 16: 15-16; Col 4:15; Phil 2) to have assembled in homes. It is most likely these homes were owned by new converts who would have had some significant social standing in their communities. Such people would have owned houses that could provide rooms large enough for the believers to assemble.

The reports listed above suggest that the head of the household most likely continued to exercise some kind of authority over the church assembly. The scenario appears to be that of these early Christian groups assembling as part of extended families in households whose heads played some leadership role with authority.

No need for rigid conflict theory

This evidence of some leadership role with authority exercised by the head of the household flies in the face of J.D. Dunn's view on this matter. He insists that the church communities in the Pauline era and epistles were completely unstructured, radically egalitarian communities which were based solely on free association and where office bearers of any sort were unknown. Egalitarian here refers to the equality of all members based on faith in Christ and possession of the Holy Spirit by all (1Cor 12:13), resulting in inclusion into the body of Christ. This he insists was so because the Holy Spirit was the only guiding principle. He says,

> *If leadership is required, Paul assumed that the charismatic spirit would provide it...*[10]

This view is sponsored by using a conflict framework for analysis that insists on clearly distinguishing the charismatic from the institutional elements and understanding charisma exclusively in terms of ecstatic momentary manifestations such as speaking in tongues or uttering ecstatic prophecies. Contrary to this view, Paul in his letters highlights both the ecstatic momentary manifestations of the spirit (1Cor 12: 14-16) and the more organized ministries characterized by high levels of permanence (1Cor 12:28; Rom 12:7). These permanent and predictable ministries are said to have been supplied by the Holy Spirit too. Paul describes both categories as 'grace-gifts' (*charismata*). More significant on this matter though, is the fact that

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
How Leadership and Authority Evolve
A Study of the Leadership Functions and Authority in the New Testament Community
Noah Pashapa, Ph.D. 61

Paul's letters to the Ephesians and to Timothy, which present a significantly highly structured ministry pattern, do also highlight the Spirit's gifting for ministry (Eph 4:4-12; 2Tim1:6-7) and thus casting doubt on the credence of any rigid conflict theory that posits movement from unstructured 'charismatic' forms to structured institutionalized ones. As a matter of interest it is evident that when the Corinthians inquire from Paul about how spiritual gifts for ministry function, they use an elitist term ' spirituals' (*ta pneumatikos*) which implies the existence of a few spiritually enlightened people and those not so enlightened within the church[11].

When Paul responds to their request in 1Cor 12 he appears to highlight the egalitarian nature of the church communities (1Cor 12:13) and the charismatic nature of ministry functions as momentary manifestations or permanent roles (1Cor 12:4-9; 14:1-12). In the words of N.H. Ridderbos,

> *charisma is everything that the Spirit wishes to use and presses into service for equipping and up building the church... what can serve for instruction and admonishing and for ministering to one another...*[12]

Authority contours and impulses dominant in the New Testament

Having highlighted these issues of diversity and development as well as that of the house church (as the earliest expression of church) it will be necessary that we now move on to investigate in more detail the relevant New Testament evidence in the Acts of the Apostles, in the Pauline and Pastoral Letters. It is the majority view of New Testament scholars that these sources are 'primary' and key to any attempt at understanding the early church communities of the New testament. This is the most appropriate place to begin in preparation to highlight authority contours and impulses that are dominant in the New Testament.

Diversity and Development in Acts, Pauline Letters and Pastoral Letters

The distinction made here between the Paulines and the Pastorals is consistent with scholarly convention that distinguishes between Pauline correspondence to churches and Pauline correspondence to individual church leaders in the persons of Timothy and Titus. The general picture that emerges early on portrays different patterns of leadership functions at play in the different places and cultural contexts where the church was being planted.

The twelve at Jerusalem

At the Jerusalem church (Acts 2:4; 3:2; 4:20; 5:20) it appears that it was the 12 apostles who provided leadership as a team with Apostle Peter as the spokes- person. When problems of doctrinal, ethical, ethnical, political or ecclesiastical types came up, it was the apostles who intervened and directed their resolution (Acts 1:5; 6:1-6: 11:4ff: 15:6ff). Even though there is no record of them having been formally appointed by Jesus, the founder and central figure of their movement, they have the responsibility to project, propagate and protect this new religious vision and its teachings (Acts 2:42).

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
How Leadership and Authority Evolve
A Study of the Leadership Functions and Authority in the New Testament Community
Noah Pashapa, Ph.D.   62

A council of elders at Jerusalem

At the time that the issue about Gentiles eating 'bloody meat' (which really was about the threat experienced by the ethnocentric exclusivist Jewish community at Gentiles now being included into the Messiah's community on universal religiously non-Jewish terms) arises, there appears to have developed a council of elders over whom James presided (Acts 15; 15:13-21; 21:17). It is quite likely that Jesus' apostles handed leadership functions and ministry responsibilities over to this team of elders.

House church leaders

Concurrent with this development, there existed house-church leaders in the house-churches of earliest Christianity (Acts 2:46; 5:42; 10:12; 11:14; 12:12-17). The Jewish community, which provides antecedent religious and cultural ideas, forms and practices for the early Christians, often met in 'houses of prayer' or 'houses of meeting' which were household rooms enlarged for purposes similar to those of the synagogue.' House of prayer' and ' house of meeting ' were terms used among first century Jews as synonyms of the word for their place of regular worship, synagogue. In these 'house-synagogues', the host assumed the role and function of oversight in a way reminiscent of the 'ruler' of the synagogue albeit in a manner less official and hierarchical.

Non-Christian religious guilds

Another first century contextual feature that makes it consistent that the early 'Jewish' Christians would have adopted the house-church small group model is the existence of non-Christian religious guilds which were headed by patrons whose official leadership function was technically defined by the Roman government. The patrons of these guilds were respected and exercised oversight over them. These religious and secular antecedents would have impacted developments within the early churches on leadership functions and patterns of ministry. In a similar manner the host and head of the household in the house-church would have been accorded the respect and expected to exercise oversight over the group. B.Holmberg has made useful observations on this matter. He says of the household head and host,

> His social standing would give him preeminence in the group, His close connection with the
> apostle who founded the church and sought his assistance would add to this… and as time passed,
> the fact that he was the first (or one of the first) converts would further enhance his position in the
> group[13]

Priscilla and Aquilla: house church hosts

Priscilla and Aquilla appear to have hosted a house-church at Ephesus and at another time in Rome (1Cor 16:19; Rom 16:5; Acts 18:1ff). It is highly likely that they traveled regularly and always ensured their home had a room large enough to accommodate regular house-church meetings.Crispus, who before his conversion had been a ruler in a synagogue (Acts 18:8) and Gaius (1Cor 1:14-16) are likely to have been house-church leaders as well. Stephanas' household

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
How Leadership and Authority Evolve
A Study of the Leadership Functions and Authority in the New Testament Community
Noah Pashapa, Ph.D.   63

is reported to have dedicated themselves to the ministry (1Cor 1:6) and that he himself provided his home for regular worship and ministry gatherings. A list of house-church leaders at Corinth appears in 1Cor 16:15-18. Both in this passage just mentioned as well as in 1Thess 5:11-12 this 'ruler' and 'patron' type person who gave oversight and labored (*kopian*) within the house church structure, was to be respected.

House-synagogue ruler and house-church leader

In the light of the limited evidence available, we can conclude that the house-synagogue was the model most influential on the form leadership function and ministry patterns took in the early church communities. In the same way we can conclude that the function of the house-synagogue ruler of presiding and encouraging participation influenced that of the house-church leader most. A comment by Kevin Giles on the relationship between leadership function in the house-synagogue and that in the house-church confirms this view.

> Thus... assuming the house-synagogue was the proto-type for the house-church we can better interpret the limited evidence available... the main function of the synagogue ruler was preside over services and encourage participation of those present... the early Christians avoided the title used by the Jews and chose a neutral but appropriate title-episcopos-and saw it primarily as a presiding and coordinating function to facilitate widespread participation...the episcopoi were not expected to monopolize ministry ...[14]

This assumption on the origins of the early churches and their patterns of ministry has become convention among scholars even though, as would be expected, variations exist in their preferred renditions of the process.

Official overseers/bishops and deacons

It is not until about 10 years into the post-Pentecost era that we read of the existence of official overseers/bishops and deacons in the church (Phil 1:1, 7, 14) in a letter written while Paul was in prison. It appears here that the function of the household host giving oversight and coordination to the house-church has become more defined. Remembering what has already been highlighted in this work, on the diversity characteristic of leadership functions and ministry patterns reflective of responses to localized needs and challenges, we now see the hosts titled 'overseers' (*episcopos*) and those assisting them titled 'deacons' (*diakonoi*).

This new feature apparently does not seem to have affected the essential nature of the church as a non-hierarchical and egalitarian community (Phil 4:1,5,7,12,25; 2:1,25; 3:1,10,13,17; 4:14,15). All christians including the leaders are addressed as 'brethren' and to be in partnership (*koinonia*) with Paul in the gospel. The term egalitarian is used in this context to highlight the equality of status for all Christians expressed in the priesthood of all believers achieved through union with Christ and possession of the Holy spirit (1Cor 12:13). Elders, who are also overseers,(*presbuteroi /episcopoi*) whom Paul appoints and instructs to sheperd (*poimen*)the church of God, are mentioned in Acts 20:28.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
How Leadership and Authority Evolve
A Study of the Leadership Functions and Authority in the New Testament Community
Noah Pashapa, Ph.D.   64

The existence of these elders (*presbuteroi*), and or overseers (*episcopoi*) and deacons (*diakonoi*) at Ephesus and Crete is highlighted in the Pastorals (1Tim 1and 2 and in Titus). We are here following the majority view which assumes that these letters were written by Paul from prison or by someone on his behalf soon after that imprisonment (2Tim 4:6-8). In this case it is likely that some time has lapsed before these variegated and distinctly identifiable ministry roles have developed at Ephesus and Crete.

Overseers/elders in the New Testament

Following the majority scholarly view, it will be assumed here that terms overseer(*episcopoi*) and elder (*presbuteroi*) were used with reference to closely linked functions as it is likely that the elders were made overseers by the Holy Spirit(Acts 20:17-28; 1Tim 3:1ff; Tit 1:5). In the Acts passage, the apostle Paul addresses 'elders' and tells them that God made them 'overseers' of the flock. In the Timothy and Titus passages character requirements of elders and overseers are very similar. This may be indicative of the close link between these functions if not their outright identity in some instances.

This close link or identity is also reflected in Titus 1:1-5 where the elders (*presbuteroi*) to be appointed are referred to as overseers (*episcopoi*). It is better to suggest that the two leadership functions were perceived variously as merely closely linked or out rightly identical in the different house church contexts in the light of their local challenges, needs as well as influences from secular and or religious practices that were prevalent.

Overseer and elder in secular Greek usage

The influence of the religious and secular context on the development of leadership functions and ministry patterns among the church communities is seen most in the choice of terms drawn from secular service to designate church ministry roles. Elder (*presbuteros*) is a term that was used of those advanced in age within Greek secular society as it was believed that age conferred wisdom.

Within Jewish society on the other hand the same concept was used to refer to members of the Sanhedrin who had teaching and judicial authority for the whole community (Acts 11:30; 15). It is a concept that carried with it some idea of authority which was taken by the New Testament churches and used in a new context with a new meaning. Overseer (*episcopos)* which in Greek means guardian, protector, patron or state official with technical or financial responsibilities, is adopted and used in a church ministry context (Acts 20:28; Phil 1:1; 1Tim 3:2; Tit 1:7; 1Pet 2:25).

Deacon

Deacon (*diakonos*) means waiter or servant, again a term drawn from its secular context for use in a different one. This incorporation of secular forms and terms for a reinterpreted use within the church context has also been highlighted by M.A.H. Melinsky who says,

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
How Leadership and Authority Evolve
A Study of the Leadership Functions and Authority in the New Testament Community
Noah Pashapa, Ph.D.   65

> *... the New Testament lacks a clear and comprehensive structure of church organization and ministry...terms are chosen from the world of secular service in its many forms. New Testament writers use these terms in their secular meanings which gradually get Christianized...*[15]

All this sheds more light on our efforts to understand developments with leadership functions and ministry roles in the churches of the New Testament.

Functions and roles of overseers and elders

Moving on now to the distinctive functions and interaction of roles between overseers (*episcopoi*) and elders (*presbuteroi*), it must be noted that this topic is not dealt with at all in the New Testament. It appears consistent with available evidence that both terms and functions be interpreted in the framework of the house-church which was understood to be that 'household of God' in which each member had a contribution to make to build and strengthen (1Tim 3:15).

Their functions, as with the host in the house church, would have been to act benevolently in the interest of members by encouraging inclusive participation and order. Evidence indicating that officers in secular Hellenistic municipalities were expected to accept office as an opportunity to render service to less fortunate members of the community seems to concur with the emphasis in Timothy that the elder (*episcopos*) should aim to care for members and facilitate order in the church as he is expected to do for his household.

This explains why the qualifications required for this function are those of a respected head of a large household (1Tim 3:1ff; Tit 1:7). The emphasis therefore is on care for and service to the members. Another interesting observation is that in the letter to Titus the elder (*episcopos*) is also referred to as steward (*oikonomos)* which can be rendered 'house manager '(God's Steward). There may have been situations where such overseers or elders each cared for a single house-church. D.C. Verner has made comments on this matter which coincide with the view espoused here when he says,

> *... the basic image... is of a large household... each member has an appropriate part to play... the task of the bishop is a noble task i.e.- a charitable deed performed for someone less fortunate than oneself... therefore acting benevolently for the welfare of others...*[16]

All this still leaves us only partially educated as to what their actual responsibilities were, given that references to them in the New Testament are few and unclear on the matter.

Judaism-background for elder

Any attempt at suggesting what their responsibilities might have been must begin with the 'Judaism-background' to *presbuteroi* (elders). In Judaism the Hebrew word for elder [ ](*zaken)*, translated '*presbuteros*' in Greek and 'elder' in English, has an etymological root meaning 'beard'. In the Old Testament it highlights seniority in age and the experience that comes with it which becomes a source of wise counsel. Such people would be honored and

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
How Leadership and Authority Evolve
A Study of the Leadership Functions and Authority in the New Testament Community
Noah Pashapa, Ph.D.   66

respected as the community looked up to them for leadership and counsel (Is 65:20; Zech 8:4; Dt 28:56; Prov 20:29).

Often these elders(*zeqqenim*) would be the officially recognized representatives (Num 11:16; Ex 24:1) of a city (Dt 19:12; Josh 10:4), tribe (Dt 31:28; 1Sam 20:26; Ez 8:1) or nation (Ex 3:16; 4:29) who acted on behalf of their communities in political, religious and legal matters (1Sam 8:4; 1Sam 30:26; Dt 19:12; 22:15; Josh 20:4; Ezra 10:14). To be recognized as an elder and to contribute to the deliberations and actions of the group of elders was not by any formal process but rather by recognition over time.

Hellenistic background for elder

The Hellenistic background is also important to our attempts at understanding the functions of '*presbuteroi*' and '*episcopoi*'. It has been emphasized in this work earlier on that these two terms appear to refer to closely linked functionaries. During the Hellenistic period, Jews in Jerusalem looked to the group of elders called the Sanhedrin for leadership and direction in all areas of life. Within local Jewish communities local governing councils were established which had older men at their helm to lead and to direct them. In local communities these groups of older men in leadership were called elders, and were likely to have achieved leadership status on the basis of age, social standing and knowledge of the law.

Jews in the Diaspora like those in Alexandria for example, had governing councils of elders with ruling elders heading them. Even though differences existed from place to place, it appears that each synagogue was ruled by an *'arche-sunagogos'*.

This ruler of the synagogue whose function was to facilitate and supervise worship and to encourage participation by all was assisted by a servant (*hazzan*) whose role was to serve, especially by looking after the scroll (Lk 4:20). Thus what we have of religious leadership function within the Jewish communities and secular leadership function within Hellenistic communities in the first century could be described as being characterized by the following:

(a) Elders of a community who form a representative group of senior men and recognized as overseeing councils

(b) The men are not officials with official status or elite roles, rather they are communal leaders rendering services to the synagogue or grouping
And

(c) They are men respected and honored highly in their communities

Diversified development of the function and ministry of elders

It can be argued from the New Testament and historical evidence explored so far, in light of what is happening with the synagogue ruler (*arche-sunagogo*s) and the councils of elders in the

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
How Leadership and Authority Evolve
A Study of the Leadership Functions and Authority in the New Testament Community
Noah Pashapa, Ph.D. 67

Diaspora, that elders in the early church were senior respected believers who had been recognized by the community as leaders.

This is clearly the case in places where Jewish and Christian elders are correlated in the New Testament (Luke 21:23; Acts 4:5; Acts 14:23; 15:2ff and 20:17). In light of their counterparts in the Jewish synagogue, whose model is radically modified in the Christian communities, it is likely that the primary functions of elders had to do with the spiritual and instructional nurturing of believers, the facilitation of worship and the directing of processes guiding decisions on matters affecting the groups they represented (Acts 15:1-29; Acts 21:18; 20:28).

It is also very likely, as already observed, that elders (*presbutoroi*) developed into overseers (*episcopoi*) or that they were increasingly identified in the course of time. It is important also to insist on the diversity that such developments would have taken and 'worked out' in the different church community contexts with their challenges and needs. In our view, Kevin Giles has captured correctly something of this diversified development of the function and ministry of elders in his comments on the period reflected in Acts. He says,

> ... all God's people will be charismatic leaders (2:17) ... as churches grew there emerged certain leading men (15:22)... who were prophetic leaders in a distinct way ... in some towns with many Christians, communal leaders functioned like their Jewish counterparts (20:28) ... men relatively mature in years, Christian understanding and equipped for service by the Holy spirit to be leaders of their community...they took no dominant role at worship gatherings...[17]

The emergence of official leadership

In the Pauline letters we begin to see the emergence of official leadership. The letter to the Thessalonians, reflecting developments from about 50 CE for example, records Paul's injunction that the believers ' honor those who labor among them'(1Thess 5:12).

There is here a clear distinction between those identified as 'leaders' and those who are not. In Corinthians, which reflects events occurring at a later period, there is recorded Paul's instruction that the Christians should be subordinate to men such as Stephanas (1Cor 16:15). By this stage there is no mention of office or specific titles. It is with the development of events associated with 1Cor 12:28; Eph 4:11 as well as Phil 1:1 that office bearers with titles of elder (*presbutoros*) overseer/bishop (*episcopos*) and deacons (*diakonoi*) are mentioned.

The practice of rewarding those ministering to the church communities regularly in the work of teaching is, at this stage in the developments, enjoined and commended (2Cor 11:7-9; Gal 6:6; 1Cor 9:3-7) . Recognized leaders ministering across church communities such as Phoebe, Timothy and Barnabas are mentioned in association with letters of commendation introducing them to congregations where they are not known (1Cor 16:10; Col 4:10; Rom 16:1). At this stage it is evident though still very much at the early stages of development that elements associated with the concept of office/institution are beginning to emerge.

Distinct offices of elder and bishop/overseer

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
How Leadership and Authority Evolve
A Study of the Leadership Functions and Authority in the New Testament Community
Noah Pashapa, Ph.D.   68

It is when we come to the Pastoral letters that the distinct offices of elder and bishop/overseer are mentioned distinctly and specifically. Clearly now there are high levels of permanency associated with the office and function. These officers are distinguishable from the rest of the members who, it is assumed, would have recognized their suitability for office and ministry. In addition to the existence of some standards by which suitability can be assessed, these ministers now receive payment for their services. Here we begin to see an advanced picture of leadership function and ministry patterns. Now there appears to be more structure with only suitable candidates appointed to the office of elder (*presbuteros*) (1Tim 3:1-13; 5:17-22) while these communal elders should now be rewarded for their services.

The situation now is that of a well established organization seeking to ensure that only suitable persons will hold leadership office. Compared to the developments at Ephesus reflected in 1Timothy, the situation in Crete reflected in Titus, though highly structured, appears relatively less so. It is important to note the mention of overseers /bishops in the plural in this context, as opposed to the Ephesians one, which could point to the existence of many of them for the numerous house churches there.

Co-existence of charisma and institutionalism

This developmental pattern should not be read in terms of rigid linear evolutionary concepts that place unstructured charismatic form at the early stages and structured institutionalized forms at the later ones. It is more in keeping with the witness of these texts especially in regard to the role played by the Holy Spirit in this developmental process to insist that here charisma and institutionalism flow into each other. This view most adequately accounts for the sociological process of institutionalization and the reality of charisma and office co-existing in these Spirit driven churches. The positions taken by Hans Kung and E. Schweizer on this question echo the view upheld here. Both scholars are quoted here. Schweizer says,

'*...charisma and office belong together...*'[18]

While Kung also says,

'*… In other words the natural outcome of regularly exercised Spirit -initiated ministries was the emergence of office bearers in the church. The first to be seen as incipient office -holders were the charismatic apostle, prophet and teacher; but the later office-holders, such as the elder ,bishop, deacon, also gained their status on the basis of spiritual development[19]*'
(Hans Kung; 'The church'; Search Press; Lon.; 1968; p388)

Leadership function and ministry of deacon

Before moving on to look at the leadership function and ministry of deacon, it is important to note that more information about the functions of elders and overseers and the place of women in all this will be explored later on, when focus turns to the dominant contours of authority in the New Testament. It is at that point that the relevance of Jesus as arch-type, which really is a critical factor in our understanding of authority in the New Testament, will come into focus.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
How Leadership and Authority Evolve
A Study of the Leadership Functions and Authority in the New Testament Community
Noah Pashapa, Ph.D.   69

It is not possible to be conclusive about the exact nature of the function of the New Testament deacon.

Here the words deacon *(diakonos)* and serving *(diakonoia)*, service *(diakonia)* and deacons *(diakonoi)* are key as they refer to the functionary, the functioning, the function and the functionaries related to the word 'deacon' respectively.

The conventional theory that the seven men selected to serve at the tables in Acts 6:1-6 were the first deacons is unconvincing. For one thing these men are never referred to as deacons *(diakonoi)* in the Acts of the Apostles. Secondly they are presented as men of significant status in the church community and two of them are in fact great preachers Acts 6:7-8).

Deacon in the Greco-Roman world

Deacon/s is associated with a group of words that were primarily used to refer to unimportant life chores. Within the Greco-Roman world, out of which the term comes, it was used to refer to service fit only for the lower-castes, women and slaves. This word could not be applied to proud Roman citizens for whom the development of one's potential in terms of personality and use of power was 'the' life-goal.

Deacon in the New Testament

The New Testament community adopts this word, transforms it, and uses it extensively to refer to various aspects of its life and service. A basic word study of this group of words is very enlightening. The Greek verb 'to deacon' *(diakonein)* refers to general service rendered by an individual. Its cognates 'deaconing' *(diakonia)* and 'deacon' *(diakonos)* refer to related action and persons involved in executing it respectively.

Those who wait on people and serve the drinks at Cana of Galilee are *diakonoi* (deacons-Jn 2:5-9) and Martha , Mary's sister was involved with serving Jesus *(diakonia-Jn 10:40)*. In Mathew 22:13 the servant of the king mentioned here is a deacon *(diakonos)* while in chapter 25:13 caring for a prisoner is also referred to as service *(diakonia)*.

Clearly this was a word that was associated with 'menial tasks' and the early church community most likely followed the Jewish and not the Greco-Roman attitude towards such service. Among Jews such service through menial tasks was noble service as long as it was for a greater master and not just as a pattern of one's life. If the service was done as service to God, then it was even more elevated. All this serves to highlight the fact that this term can be used to refer to an office as well as to various kinds of Christian service provided by those who may not be holders of office.

It also sheds more light on the fact that though the seven in Acts 6 are not referred to as deacons, their work of preaching the word (for two of them) and practical service (for 5 of them) is described as 'deaconing' *(diakonia)*. 1Pet 4:10-11 echoes this association of this word and

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
How Leadership and Authority Evolve
A Study of the Leadership Functions and Authority in the New Testament Community
Noah Pashapa, Ph.D.   70

practical service-functions but exhorts that all believers engage in the *diakonia*. Perhaps earlier on in the history of the churches this fluidity characterized '*diakonia'* pervasively as the emphasis was more on the function rather than on the office. This would make Acts 6 a report on '*diakonia*' (deaconing/service) which prefigures its later more structured and specified forms.

Tension in the use of the term deacon

In the period before this structuring and specification is pronounced, there is a sustained tension in the use of the term. It is used to refer to the service that all believers should render and at the same time also referring to the special ministry others will render as deacons. So we see in Rom 16:1 a woman who was a leading person in her church by the name of Phoebe is specifically called a *diakonos* (deacon). In this instance there is no differentiation between deacons as secondary leadership function to elders which is usually the case when the specific office of deacon is in view as you find in the Pastoral letters.

Tychichus (Eph 6:21; Col 4:7), Epaphras (Col 1:7) and Timothy (1Thess 3:2; 1Tim 4:6) are like Phoebe, specifically called *diakonos* (deacon). Clearly these are cases of Christian men and women who were making significant contributions to the life and growth of their church communities being recognized by being titled deacons.

On the other hand the deacon group of words are used to describe all forms of service rendered by members in the service of the community (2Cor 8:19,20;8:8; 9:1,12,13; Rom 5:25) The work that church elders do is also *diakonia* (1Cor 16:15) while the whole church is to be trained for *diakonia* (Eph 4:11-12). Phil 1:1 could very well be taken to reflect the first mention of official deacons and not Acts 6:1-6 as others have attempted to do. However it is not, as has been highlighted already, until we come to the Pastoral letters that the office of deacon is clearly in focus. Here the deacons are holders of an office secondary to that of the overseers/elders who are mentioned first and whose qualifications are superior to those of deacons (Titus 3; 1Tim 3).

Development of deacon from function to office

It is best to see here a developing movement from function to office. Assuming that overseers were originally house church hosts, providing oversight, care-service and facilitating the participation of community members, who now have deacons associated with them for support-ministry responsibilities appears to be consistent with what is going on here. Now this association of the deacon with the elder would be demonstrable in tandem with the servant (*hazzan*) who assisted the *'arche-sunargogos'* of Judaism.

It is quite conceivable that this server (*diakonein*) to the house-church 'host', with time and development, becomes an official 'deacon' along with the overseer. This development may have seen the differentiation of the two main functions of Christian *diakoni*a into two official functions coinciding with the two clearly distinguished offices.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
How Leadership and Authority Evolve
A Study of the Leadership Functions and Authority in the New Testament Community
Noah Pashapa, Ph.D.   71

The foregoing will now guide our investigation into the dominant contours of authority at play here. Additional relevant data as it relates to Jesus and women will now also be explored.

Dominant Contours of Authority in the New Testament -
Jesus and Authority in the New Testament

The words and example of Jesus must be regarded as most determinative in this quest to represent the distinctive characteristics of authority at play in the New Testament. This is because the faith community that produced the New Testament believed itself to owe its very existence to His birth, life, teachings, ministry and resurrection.

The New Testament is intended by this believing community to be a reliable, authoritative and divinely inspired written witness to Jesus' 'salvific' significance and as a primary-source for faith and practice.

Here Jesus is portrayed as the 'archetype' and church communities looked to what they perceived as his words and actions as setting authoritative standards for belief, behavior and practices. The authority that Jesus talked about and exemplified was perceived by the church communities to have been dominated by a self-limiting tendency towards sacrifice and service on behalf of others. He talked, walked, ate and lived with His followers as His 'brothers and friends'.

Centrality of service and sacrifice

The centrality of service and sacrifice on the other's behalf is central to authority in the New Testament and particularly to Jesus' life and mission. This is reflected in the early Christian community's recollections of him preserved in these writings. His whole mission is understood in these terms as seen in the following examples.

> *...the son of man did not come to be served but to serve and to give his life a ransom for many...*
> (Mark 10:45; Matt 20:28)
> *... but he became a servant... and humbled himself more than a servant...*[20]
> *... He became poor in order that we might become rich...*[21]

Jesus did not only embody humble sacrificial service but exemplified it and made it the goal of all of life for his disciples. The self-limiting and sacrificing tendency in his consciousness and expression of authority is seen in the way in which he understood the significance of his Messiah-ship. He understood it primarily as servant-hood (Is 42:1; Matt 3:13-17; Mrk. 1:10-11) and he does not allow people to misinterpret his messiah-ship in terms of authoritarian and dominance-loaded categories of wonder-worker and political-liberator (Matt 4:1-11; Lk. 4:1-11). Though he had all authority and power (Matt 28:18; Matt 7:29; Mrk. 1:22-27; Matt.11:20-24; 13:58;) yet love which gives 'authority-subjects' choice and liberty, was the dominant impulse in his expression of this authority (Lk 9:37).

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
How Leadership and Authority Evolve
A Study of the Leadership Functions and Authority in the New Testament Community
Noah Pashapa, Ph.D.   72

In John 13 he demonstrates this 'servant-authority' impulse by adopting the customary role of a servant and washes his disciples' feet. In fact he is reported to have repeatedly instructed them to view authority this way, and not in the authoritarian and hierarchical terms of the 'world' (Jn 12:26; 13:1-20). He insists that those who are 'authority-bearers' and leaders *(ho hegoumenos)* should pursue sacrifice and servant-hood as servers(*diakonein*)thus exercising authority in a manner totally different from that employed by kings ,army generals and priests of the time (Lk 22:26). He emphasized that there was not to be authority-bearers of the hierarchical and authoritarian worldly types, whose leadership was characterized by mysterious authority-distance, within the church communities. To this end he instructed them not to call any man on earth father or master (Matt 23:8-11; Lk 22:26).

We will observe later on in this article that in Jewish, Roman and Greek cultures the biological father was accorded absolute authority. Paul Beasley-Murray has explored the question of Jesus as the ultimate role model of authority for modern Evangelical Christian leaders who are increasingly being driven by the modern success-drive towards triumphalist ones, away from Jesus' model of leadership. He contrasts the Jesus-model of leadership and authority-bearing with that of Christian leaders who do not answer for their actions at all and 'abuse authority'. He describes their leadership as characterized by the following impulses among others:

> …oppressive, authoritarian …no room for other ideas and independent action…lack of accountability at the top…pyramid of power…the further from the top the less power and influence members have…belief that members and their families are inferior to the leader and his circle…belief that the leader is closer to God and can hear Him better than lay people…ostracism of former members and prejudice against those no longer 'choosing to belong.[22]

Jesus as servant and suffering servant

Beasley-Murray usefully highlights the continuity detectable in the mission of Jesus as servant highlighted in the New Testament (Mark 10:45) and the theme of the 'suffering servant' in the Old Testament (Is 53:11).Because his interest lays with highlighting the 'non-authoritarian', 'non-hierarchical, and 'non-oppressive' nature of the 'Jesus model' of leadership in contrast to 'success-driven-models', he draws the continuity of the suffering servant theme from the Old Testament as it expresses itself in Jesus' style of 'authority-bearing'. His thesis that the type of authority that Jesus exercised was dominated more by love which seeks the welfare of others (John 10:10) and the promotion of their growth (John 21:15-17) and not by power which leads to dictatorship and authoritarianism confirms our own.

We have described what he calls 'love' as self-limiting service and sacrifice. This is what prevents authority (in Jesus' life and ministry) from manifesting as centralized, hierarchical authoritarianism which maintains a mysterious authority-distance between itself and authority-subjects. Beasley-Murray's application of what he interprets to be the 'Jesus model' of leadership to Evangelical church leadership reveals further what he perceives to have been the nature of authority in Jesus life and ministry. This is evident when he says,

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How Leadership and Authority Evolve
A Study of the Leadership Functions and Authority in the New Testament Community
Noah Pashapa, Ph.D.   73

…so Jesus is both a testament to the power of God and also the willingness of God to give power…God does not dominate His people because domination is alien to love. The kind of power God offers and seeks is one that comes through relationality in which God gives us the space to participate in His life just as we are to give Him the space that He may participate in ours…Leaders must stay in touch with those they have been called or chosen to lead. A sense of detachment or superiority is a failure of power and a corruption of authority. Equally leaders must not become isolated from reality but immersed in it, so that the exercise of power is always relevant and rightful…Power that does not empower and produce dialogue is on the path to totalitarianism…[23]

Through the imagery of washing his disciples feet as a servant(John 13:1-15) and the good shepherd who called his sheep by name and cared and loved each one of them specifically to the point of dying for them (Matt 18:12-13;John 10:1-18), Jesus taught and demonstrated that authority was to be tempered with self-limiting service and sacrifice. When one reminds himself that the authority exercised by both the father, as the shepherd who provided and protected his family, and the master, as authority-bearer, was absolute, then the full import of Jesus' radical instruction on authority here becomes clearer.

Radical discontinuity between Jesus' view of authority and that of the Old Testament

What we find here in connection with Jesus' words and actions, indicate radical discontinuity in the nature of the authority at play here and that evident in the Old Testament. This is the case despite the continuity of the traditional authority-bearing roles and labels of priest, prophet and king which continue to be associated with Jesus. It is also important to note the discontinuity in question here in that this association of Jesus with priestly, prophetic and kingly functions is 'eschatological' and 'universal' in a theological context of God's plan of salvation for all mankind. This eschatological dimension re-interprets and transforms these functions into a 'kingdom-of-God' framework for understanding them which 'loads' them with the self limiting sacrificial service of the Jesus' model of authority.

Jesus' authority militates against authoritarianism

Jack Domitian is another scholar who has drawn attention to the non-authoritarian and relational nature of the type of authority that Jesus exercised. He highlights the concepts of compassion, love, service, vulnerability, and 'kingdom-of-God agenda' as impulses that informed and steered Jesus' authority from the path of authoritarianism. He says,

…Christ's authority was revealed in and through love(Mark 10:42-45;Matt 7:29; John 13:34-35)…He taught with authority(Mark 10:40-42)but not like the scribes…Christ's authority expressed itself through service(Mark 10:42-45)…service is the key to authority…Christ's authority expresses itself through compassion and secure-vulnerability not judgmentalism or arbitrariness…He was open to criticism and His views contradicted and rejected…beyond order, justice and peace must be sought authority as service[24]

Domitian's preoccupation, in his work quoted here, is the universal need for non-authoritarian models of authority in a world which no longer upholds previous norms of authority. He

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How Leadership and Authority Evolve
A Study of the Leadership Functions and Authority in the New Testament Community
Noah Pashapa, Ph.D.   74

highlights how power is brought into the equation to back authority in a modernistic scenario where the traditional hierarchical system of authority is under threat in family life, school education, church and society in general with its laws. Domitian identifies the rise of scientific humanism and the post-second world-war period which was characterized by independence from the authority of the colonizers by the former colonies as ushering in this 'revolt against authority'. What is important for our purposes here is his view that in Jesus, authority is tempered and informed by impulses that militate against authoritarianism. His view confirms our view of Jesus' authority.

**Authority in Paul and the Early Churches -
Principal terms for ministry**

Though it is not possible to identify a clear and comprehensive structure of church organization and leadership functions in the New Testament, we can be certain that the principal terms used to refer to ministers and ministry provide important pointers as to the nature of authority at play. We have already explored the meanings and usage of terms such as 'elder' and 'overseer' in the context of their 'household' usage in the first century A.D.

The other principal terms are 'slave' (*doulos)* in 2Cor 4:5, 'waiter/servant' (*diakonos*) in Mark 10:44-45;Phil 1:1;1Tim 3:1-13 and Rom.6:1,'subordinate' (*huperetes*) in Matt.5:25; Lk 4:20; John 18:36and 1Cor 4:1, 'shepherd'(*poimen*)in John 10:1-30 and 1Pet. 5:1-4, 'sent out'(*apostolos)*in John 13:16; 2Cor 8:23 as well as 'servant'(*leiteurgos*)in Rom 15:27;2Cor 9:12 and Phil. 2:30.

It is important to note that all these terms were drawn from the secular world and eventually associated with a peculiarly Christian angle. The secular meanings associated with these terms got Christianized with the passage of time and Christian usage. What is critical for our purposes here is to note that in the context of the Christian community or kingdom of God these terms are used to emphasize a social position that is inferior and secured for the service of another. Melinsky, who shares the same viewpoint, puts it this way,

> *…these terms emphasize inferior social status aimed at seeing that someone else's will is carried out…*[25]

Even if the early churches might have found themselves in social-cultural contexts where it may have been necessary to adapt elements from contemporary leadership patterns, it appears that they sought to remain true to their founder and archetype, Jesus, by maintaining the preference to self-limiting service and sacrifice in their conceptualization, expression and practice of authority. It is these self-limiting and sacrificial-service impulses that are central to what makes authority in the New Testament distinctive.

Giles helpfully notes the possibility that early church communities strove to remain faithful to their Master's teaching and example on authority and to respond to current challenges and needs which had a bearing on leadership patterns and ministry. He however risks giving the impression

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How Leadership and Authority Evolve
A Study of the Leadership Functions and Authority in the New Testament Community
Noah Pashapa, Ph.D. 75

that they adopted worldly patterns of leadership uncritically, which in the view upheld here, would be inconsistent with the cumulative witness of the New Testament. He says,

> the church would never forget that its Lord and Master had made diakonia the path every believer must follow. But in its practice the church would allow that some were given to the ministry of others in a special way, and that elements of the worldly pattern of leadership were needed for directing and nurturing the flock as it awaited the end of this age.[26]

Apostle Paul as an authority-bearer

Paul the apostle makes a very interesting case-study of a prominent early church community authority-bearer who himself strove to be guided by the 'Jesus model' of authority. It is clear that his authority derives from his position as founding father of most of these early churches. As a founding father, his authority was perceived in the same way a biological father's authority was perceived among Jews and Greeks. Jewish sons viewed themselves as sons and servants towards their fathers. Among the Greeks, the absolute authority that the father wielded was very similar. Epictus, a Greek secular historian is quoted to have described the father's relationship with his son in the following terms:

> *…to be a son is to regard all one's possessions as the property of the father, to obey the father in all things, never to blame him before anyone, to support him with all ones power…*[27]

It is important to note that Roman culture was no different in that fathers had the legitimate right to exercise control over their children who would themselves have grown into married adults. Thus as the founding father, Paul described himself as an Apostle whose authority and legitimacy did not derive from humans but from God. He had authority to give the churches instructions and to expect them to obey (1Cor 11:17; Phil. 2:12; 2Cor 10:6; 1Thess 3:6-15).He however put limits on his authority in comparison to that exercised by 'fathers' within the Roman, Greek and Jewish cultural contexts. The fact that he preferred to encourage the churches to examine what they heard and read from him and make their own judgments reflects this self-limitation on his part. He appealed to the churches rather than command them (1Cor 1:10; 4:16; 16:16; 2Cor 1:24; 5:20; 1Thess 2:11; 4:1; Rom. 12:1; 16:17).

Anthony Bash has highlighted this aspect of Paul when he says,

> *Paul's model was the parent/adult-child and not the parent/minor child…*[28]

He goes on to highlight the 'voluntary-self-limiting' appeal which should characterize Christian leaders (which he calls the paranetic appeal) which he suggests is an expression of the gospel and of the presence Christ. He says,

> *For God himself in His incarnational form expressed himself to human beings in voluntary self-limitation and appealed but did not compel, men and women to follow him, then Christian ministers must do the same…*[29]

Egalitarianism of '*diakonia*' in the New Testament

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
How Leadership and Authority Evolve
A Study of the Leadership Functions and Authority in the New Testament Community
Noah Pashapa, Ph.D.   76

The centrality of '*diakonia*' as self-limiting sacrificial-service in the context of leadership patterns in the New Testament highlights differentiation with authority-bearing in the Old Testament. In the New Testament the whole body of Christ is to be trained for *diakonia* so that every member is enabled to make their unique contribution to the growth of the whole. The community is a living organism in which individual believers exercise a variety of grace-gifts(*charismaton*), a variety of service(*diakonion)* and a variety of working(*energematon*).

The egalitarianism of inclusive participation noted in the preceding discussion is quiet pronounced here. Even though there are some who exercise special service, its purpose is in fact to render service to the whole community. Emphasized here over and over again is the coexistence of charismatic endowments and '*diakonia'*. Hierarchical, centralized, authoritarian structures with a rigid separation of authority-bearers and authority-subjects do not exist here.

Those who are recognized leaders who rendered specialized ministry are associated with the 'diakonia' group of words. Paul describes his apostleship, especially his preaching, as '*diakonia*' (Rom 11:13; 2Cor 4:1; 5:18; 6:3; 11:8) and himself as being a deacon (*diakonos)* (2Cor 3:6; 11:23; Col 1:23'25; Eph 3:7; 1Cor 3:5). Specific Christian leaders such as Stephanas, the house-church elder is '*diakonos*' (1Cor 16:15). It appears that it was special '*diakonia*' that made leading men and women in the life of the early church stand apart from other Christians.

Women, Leadership and Ministry in the New Testament

On the place of women in all this and its implications for the issue at hand, it is important to note the many women who are mentioned alongside their male counterparts as leaders or authority-bearers in the church communities in contrast to the Old Testament where authority is clearly a preserve of patriarchy. Where women are identified as formally recognized authority-bearers in the Old Testament, such cases have a ring of irregularity and exceptionality to them. It is important to note however that there are traditions in the Old Testament which reflect the presence of religious and social currents in those communities that challenged the 'patriarchy' status core.

Greater 'gender-inclusiveness' in the New Testament

Ruether, a feminist theological professor and author, seems to agree with our view that there is a comparatively greater 'gender-inclusiveness' in the New Testament than there is in the Old Testament. Her view is that the New Testament witnesses to gender-consciousness which is not the case with the Old Testament where,

> …the prophets of Israel continue the tradition of protest against the hierarchical, urban, landowning society that deprives and oppresses rural peasantry.[30]

She observes that because Old Testament prophets were predominantly male, they were aware of oppression by rich urbanites or dominating empires yet they were 'similarly conscious of their

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How Leadership and Authority Evolve
A Study of the Leadership Functions and Authority in the New Testament Community
Noah Pashapa, Ph.D.   77

own oppression of dependents (i.e. women and slaves) in the patriarchal family'[31]She goes on to highlight the different perspective of the New Testament which

> *contains a renewal and radicalization of prophetic consciousness, now applied to marginalized groups in a universal, non-tribal context…Class, ethnicity and gender are now specifically singled out as the divisions overcome by redemption in Christ…In the New Testament stories, gender is recognized as an additional oppression within oppressed classes and ethnic groups*[32]

This confirms our view that there is greater gender-consciousness and inclusiveness where authority-bearing is concerned in the New Testament than there is in the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament Women's primary location is 'family'

It is also important to note that it was with reference to religious piety and commitment that women in the Old Testament were recognized as achieving superiority over men. Old Testament women such as Deborah (Judg 6), Miriam (Ex.15), prophetess Hulda (2Kin 22:14), Queen Attaliah (2Kin 11), Jezebel (1Kin 19), Queen of Sheba (1Kin 10) and Queen Maacah (1Kin 15:9ff) appear to be exceptional cases of women who exercised formal authority in the public sphere. Greater numbers of women, whose influence resulted in far reaching socio-political consequences, seem to have exercised informal and unofficial influence on men, who controlled their destiny on the family front and monopolized official authority in the public sphere.

D.M. Lake draws attention to this exclusion of females from the exercise of formal and official authority in the public sphere when he highlights the woman's 'primary location' in the family, which effectively excludes her from authoritative public roles and relegates her to an 'inferior status' vis-à-vis her male counterpart. He says,

> In the Old Testament the primary position of the woman was within the structure of the family. She did in fact move from one family unit to another. Not only in patriarchal times but throughout the Old Testament history, the father exercised primary responsibility for the female members of the family, whether daughters or servants, until that responsibility was transferred to the husband or new master'(cf Abraham and Hagar[Gen 16:2], Laban and his daughters Leah and Rachel [Gen 28:31], David and Michal [1Sam 18:20; 19:11-17]and Solomon and his wives [1Kin 11:1]…Probably most important is the role of childbearing as the fulfillment of a woman's position in Old Testament society[33]

In the New Testament women exercise formal leadership functions

In the New Testament to the contrary, we encounter a strong re-orientation away from the 'patriarchy' status quo that systematically excluded women from formal authority inherited from Old Testament times. This re-orientation and discontinuity is seen most in biblical traditions that developed about and around Jesus and the Apostle Paul. Here one finds mention of a preponderance of women who are in formal leadership functions and ministry alongside their male counterparts. This communicates unparalleled gender-inclusiveness in comparison to the Old Testament.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
How Leadership and Authority Evolve
A Study of the Leadership Functions and Authority in the New Testament Community
Noah Pashapa, Ph.D. 78

To be fair to the biblical evidence though, it must be stated that the 'patriarchy' status quo continued into New Testament times. The Sanhedrin, the priesthood, the scribes and the Rabbis in Jewish religious and social institutions were exclusively male-dominated. The significant prophetic and priestly figures, which were associated with some Old Testament prophecy, mentioned in connection with Jesus' birth were all male. The primary/main group of disciples who are mentioned to have been chosen directly by Jesus were all male. Joachim Jeremias has aptly described the conventional social status of women and the prevailing attitude towards them in first century Palestine. He has said,

> They were of little importance to anyone, secluded and powerless. Social and religious restrictions barred them from the kind of life men knew. Participation in public activity was taboo, discussion with a scholar in the streets was a disgrace, teaching and bearing witness forbidden, and being alone with a man out of the question. A married woman would not be looked at or greeted. The religious community of that day clearly marked women as inferior.[34]

Jesus broke with the 'patriarchy status quo'

In the light of all this, there is a very real sense in which Jesus, by reaching out to women in public as He did, went against accepted social norms and religious customs. Haubert has highlighted some of the ways in which Jesus broke with the 'patriarchy' status quo and ushered in a religious and cultural re-orientation towards women which ushered in a greater gender-inclusiveness where authority was concerned. Here we quote her extensively:

> In John 4:1-42, He (Jesus) accepted a drink from a Samaritan woman; even though Jews believed that Samaritans were unclean…A woman with an issue of blood touched Him. He welcomed her, contrary to ancient laws dictating her touch to be unclean (Matt. 9:20-26;Mark 5:24-34; Luke 8:40-56)Jesus also touched women publicly, an uncustomary act in Jewish society (Luke13:10-17), and openly taught them when most rabbis shunned it as unacceptable (Luke 10:38-42)…Women are warmly accepted into the ranks of discipleship, often traveling with Jesus and supporting him financially (Mark 15:40-41; Luke 8:1-3)…In response to Jesus' acceptance, women became some of His most devoted followers.[35]

The gospels report that it was women who stayed with Jesus when He was crucified with the men 'gone' into hiding as they feared for their lives. Reports on His resurrection in the gospels say it was the women who arrived at the empty tomb first. (Mark 15:40-41; John 20:1-9; Luke 24:1-12)The attitude that Jesus is reported to have adopted towards women at His resurrection and their participation in the 'Pentecost' experience has been seen by some as a deliberate and intentional bias towards incorporating women into equal dignity and value in Christ's mission along with their male counterparts.

Apostle Paul accepted and ministered together with women leaders

The Apostle Paul seems to interpret Jesus' attitude towards women in terms of the radical re-orientation and discontinuity, vis-à-vis the Old Testament, suggested here. He adopted a similar bias and carried further towards the affirmation of women as authority-bearing leaders within church communities. He uses similar ministry titles to describe both female and male ministry

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
How Leadership and Authority Evolve
A Study of the Leadership Functions and Authority in the New Testament Community
Noah Pashapa, Ph.D.   79

partners. On the basis of the equality that men and women share in their salvation in Christ (Gal 3:28) Paul accepted and ministered together with women who exercised leadership in the church.

These are general indicators on an issue which will now be illustrated with specific examples. Priscilla who is usually mentioned ahead of her husband Aquilla (Acts 18:1ff; 1Cor 16:19; Rom 16:5) hosted a house church along with her husband and could have had a higher social status and more influential leadership role compared to her husband. Phoebe though specifically called a deacon, must have been an elder or overseer in the house-church in her home (Rom 16:1). In the same scripture reference she is also described as a '*prostatis'* (patroness) of many including Apostle Paul. The word '*prostatis'* (patroness) associated with a verbal form '*proistanai*' (doing the work of a patroness), which is used elsewhere of male leaders in the church (1Thess 5:12; 1Tim 5:17), can be translated to mean patron, president, protector or leader.

This goes to show the significance of Phoebe's leadership status. Other women who would have exercised leadership functions in the house churches held in their homes include Mark's mother (Acts 12:12), Nympha (Col 4:14) and Lydia (Acts 16:14-15; 40).

These are women-leaders who provided the same kind of leadership with their male counterparts as 'heads of homes'. The churches assembling in their homes would have acknowledged their social status and recognized them as hosts.

Women official-deacons are mentioned in 1Tim 3:11 and admonished to render service with Christian maturity. Because the preceding verses highlight overseers and because of patriarchal interests, it has been suggested, by some modern interpreters, that this instance is concerned rather with deacon's wives and not women-deacons per se.

This interpretation though popular with many, must satisfy a number of key exegetical queries if it is to be accepted. The writer could not have suddenly digressed to address wives of bishops in a context dealing with leadership- function and the functionaries. A passage that is dealing with bishops and does not say anything about their wives could not then suddenly characterize deacon's wives. With a definite article (the wives) or a genitive pronoun (their wives) this bit about women could have been linkable to their husbands mentioned somewhere, but certainly this is not the case here. Instead verse 11 begins with the adverb 'likewise', which implies a distinct group being referred to. All in all it makes more exegetical sense to take this as a reference to women that are deacons.

New Testament passages prohibiting women leadership

This treatment of the subject of women in leadership is not unaware of the strong insistence that the scriptures bar women from exercising positions of authority in the church made by many within Pentecostal Evangelical churches. In an unpublished article on 'The Place of Women in the Church' we have argued that 1Tim 2:14 and 1Cor 14:34 are the only places in the New Testament where the prohibition of women from assuming authority-bearing roles (as teachers) in the church is categorical.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
How Leadership and Authority Evolve
A Study of the Leadership Functions and Authority in the New Testament Community
Noah Pashapa, Ph.D. 80

The cumulative witness of the New Testament in its mention on women receiving gifts of the Spirit and functioning as members of the body of Christ alongside their male counterparts in passages such as 1Cor 11:5; Rom 16:7, 12, 1Tim 3:11; 1Cor 12 and Gal 3:28; Phil 4:2,3; indicates that the categorical prohibition tradition came from minority circles. Scriptures which have already been alluded to as highlighting women in leadership (authority-bearing) roles strengthen this cumulative witness. On the basis of this evidence from the New Testament, it can be argued that gender-inclusiveness and self-limiting sacrificial-service are authority-impulses that set the kind of authority at play in the New Testament apart from that witnessed to in the Old Testament.

A set of Character Requirements for Leaders

We hope it has become clearer, from the fore-going, that dominant impulses associated with authority in the New Testament are inclusive participation of the priesthood of all believers, gender-inclusiveness, and the self-limiting service-oriented 'oversight-authority' typified by the house-church head and secular steward. It has been noted that it is also characterized by sacrificial service typical of the house servant.

Another important 'New Testament' authority-distinctive is a set of character requirements for leaders which must have been originally associated with the respected leader of a large household. Titus 1: 6-8 highlights the following requirements as qualifications for authority-bearing at the level of 'presbyter' (also referred to as elder, pastor, bishop or steward Tit 1:6-8; Phil 1:1; 1Tim 3:1-8; Acts 20:17, 28):

1. **A husband of one wife**: There appears to have been the assumption that the candidate for such office would be married therefore normal marital fidelity was demanded (verse 6).

2. **Good manager of home and family**: The candidate's children had to be believers and not rebellious towards the faith or parental authority and the candidate had to demonstrate capability to manage one's own household (verse 7).

3. **Not addicted to alcohol**: This is a requirement repeated elsewhere (Tit 2:2, 3; 1Tim 3:2,3,8,11).

4. **Not greedy for money**: Greediness for money was a negative quality often identified with false teachers (Tit 1:11; 1Tim 6:6-10).

5. **Mature personality characterized by moderation, fairness, devotedness and self-control**. The early Greek-Roman world was concerned about the truly virtuous man and the characteristics highlighted here coincide with those of this desirable man. 1Timothy 3:1-13 also highlights character requirements of a would-be authority-bearer at the same level mentioned in the Titus passage above and the characteristics highlighted in both passages tally. 1Tim 3:8-12 highlights character requirements of 'a deacon' who would be either

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
How Leadership and Authority Evolve
A Study of the Leadership Functions and Authority in the New Testament Community
Noah Pashapa, Ph.D. 81

male or female. Again the characteristics largely coincide with those of the presbyter, pastor, elder or bishop which were explored with the Titus passage in the preceding section.

Community participation in the appointment and disqualification of its leaders

The implication of these character-codes, for our purposes here, lies in that they effectively functioned as the mechanism by which the community participated, to an extent, both in the appointment and disqualification of would-be or incumbent authority-bearers (leaders). The processes by which leaders are appointed in the Acts of the Apostles and the Pastoral letters reflect a stage in the growth and development of the communities before they adopted formal organizational structures with clearly enunciated leadership appointment, disqualification or succession policies.

Paul is reported to have appointed Timothy (1Tim 1:1-3) with the participation of the presbytery (1Tim 4:14), and Titus (Tit 1:5) whom he leaves in charge at Ephesus and Crete respectively as well as other elders in churches elsewhere (Acts 14:23). He exercises what we will choose to refer to as 'founding-father type' of leadership or authority. However, because he is dominated by 'New Testament' dominant impulses of authority which we have argued are traceable to Jesus and evolved with the growth and development of the early church community, he provides 'character codes' to guide the various communities in their 'priest-hood of all believers participation' in both the appointment and disqualification of candidate authority-bearers.

Even though the letters are clearly addressed to individual recipients i.e. Timothy and Titus, the contents are intended for the whole believing community on whose behalf they receive the letters. Guided by the 'New Testament' authority-distinctives of self-limiting authority-bearing and servant care-giving that facilitates inclusive participation of the community in its life and coordination (in the fashion of the house church head), Titus and Timothy would have been open to scrutiny and input from the community even in matters of appointment, succession and disqualification of authority-bearers.

The community as a community could establish whether or not any candidate in fact demonstrated a life-style respectable to insiders and outsiders because they as a community picked those sentiments. It is not stated exactly what process of community participation Titus or Timothy would have solicited from their believing communities on these matters of leadership appointment, succession or disqualification of candidates, but if Acts 6:1-5 is anything to go by, then the process must have been thoroughly participatory and consultative.

Arguing from silence, it makes good sense to posit that a similar thoroughly participatory and consultative process based on these 'character codes' also applied to the disqualification of incumbent authority-bearers who erred.

It can be argued from the foregoing that the distinctive contours characteristic of authority in the New Testament include gender inclusiveness, a set of New testament based character

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
How Leadership and Authority Evolve
A Study of the Leadership Functions and Authority in the New Testament Community
Noah Pashapa, Ph.D. 82

requirements for leaders, egalitarianism of the priesthood of all believers type, love that gives choice, self-limiting 'authority-bearing' and sacrificial service.

Endnotes:

[2] Joel Gregory;*'The Churches the Apostles left behind* 1984, p.72

[3]Kevin Giles; *'Patterns of Ministry among the First Christians'* 1989, p.7

[4] James Dunn;*'Jesus and the Spirit* ' 1975, p.290

[5] Hans von Campenhausen *'Ecclesiastical and Spiritual Power in the Church of the First Three Centuries'* 1969, p.58

[6] Ibid.

[7] B. Holmeberg, *'Paul and Power'* 1978, pp124ff

[8] D.Tidball. *'An Introduction to the Sociology of the New Testament'* 1983, pp.123-136,

[9] K.Giles. op.cit. pp10ff

[10] J.D. Dunn, op.cit. 1975 p.290

[11] ibid

[12] A.Ridderbos;*'Paul: An Outline of His Theology''* 1975, p.442

[13] B. Holmeberg, op.cit. p.106

[14] Kevin Giles; op. cit. p.38

[15]M.A.H. Melinsky; *'The shape of the Ministry* ' 1992, p.3

[16] E.A. Judge;*'The Household of God: The Social World of the Pastoral Epistles'* 1 9 8 3 , p . 1 2 8

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
How Leadership and Authority Evolve
A Study of the Leadership Functions and Authority in the New Testament Community
Noah Pashapa, Ph.D.   83

[17] Hans von Campenhausen op.cit p.81

[18] E.A. Judge, op.cit. p 140

[19] M.A.H. Melinsky op.cit. p 22

[20] Phil 2:5-11

[21] 2Cor 8:9

[22] Paul Beasley-Murray; '*Power for God's Sake'* 1998, p.125-135

[23] ibid; p xiv

[24] Domitian, *'Authority'* 1976, p.87

[25] .A.H. Melinsky; 'The Shape of the Ministry', 1992; p.7

[26] Kevin Giles;op.cit; p.90 .

[27] *Epictus;Diss* 2:107 in Beasley-Murray; op.cit;1998 p.118

[28] Antony Bash; *'Ambassadors for Christ: An Exploration of Ambassadorial Language in the New Testament'* 1997, p.161

[29] ibid. p.163

[30] Rosemary Radford Ruether; *'Sexism and God Talk',* 1983, p. 62-63

[31] ibid p65

[32] ibid p.78

[33] D.M. Lake; *'Woman' an article in the 'Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* V*ol.* 5', 1982 pp.951

[34] Joachim Jeremias; *'Jerusalem in the Time of Jesus',*1969; p.360

[35] Katherine M. Haubert; *'Women as Leaders'*, 1993, p.24-25

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
How Leadership and Authority Evolve
A Study of the Leadership Functions and Authority in the New Testament Community
Noah Pashapa, Ph.D. 84

Books of the Old Testament and their Abbreviations	Books of the New Testament and their Abbreviations
Genesis-Gen	
Exodus-Ex	Matthew-Matt
Leviticus-Lev	Mark-Mark
Numbers-Num	Luke-Lk
Duetoronomy-Dt	John-Jn
Joshua-Josh	Acts-Acts
Judges-Judg	Romans-Rom
1 Samuel-1 Sam	1 Corinthians-1 Cor.
2 Samuel-2 Sam	2 Corinthians-2 Cor.
1 Kings-1King	Galatians-Gal.
2 Kings-2 King	Ephesians-Eph.
Ruth-Ruth	Philippians-Phil
Esther-Esth	Collossians-Col
Ezra-Ezra	1Thessallonians-1 Thess
Nehemiah-Neh	2 Thessallonians-2 Thess
Esther-Esth	1 Timothy-1 Tim
Job-Job	2 Timothy-2 Tim
Psalms-Ps	Titus-Tit
Proverbs-Prov	Philemon-Phile
Ecclesiastes-Ecc	Hebrews-Heb
Song of Solomon-Song	James-Jas
Isaiah-Is	1 Peter-1 Pet
Jeremiah-Jer	2 Peter-2 Pet
Lamentations-Lam	Jude-Jude
Ezekiel-Ez	1 John-1 Jn
Daniel-Dan	2 John-2 Jn
Hosea-Hos	3 John-3 Jn
Joel-Joel	Revelation-Rev
Amos-Am	
Obediah-Ob	
Jonah-Jon	
Micah-Mic	
Nahum-Nah	
Habakkuk-Hab	
Zepheniah-Zeph	
Zechariah-Zech	
Malachi-Mal	

Noah Pashapa, Ph.D.
Bethany International University
Singapore
npashapa@gmail.com

Language in India www.languageinindia.com
How Leadership and Authority Evolve
A Study of the Leadership Functions and Authority in the New Testament Community
Noah Pashapa, Ph.D.   85