

sure, no preacher can claim apostolicity for himself, yet he is to see that his sermon preparation follows the same pattern of preparation we can ascertain the apostles followed in the writing of their Epistles. Of course we don't know the details of that preparation, but we do know that although their writing was inerrant, infallible, and the very Word of God without qualifications, we also know that the apostles did not gain their knowledge of the Gospel from direct or immediate revelation. The revelation which they gained was taught them by Christ Himself, who actually spoke to them when He was with them. Even St. Paul's reference in Ephesians (quoted above) to "revelation," by which was made known unto him the mystery, need not be understood as a direct or unspoken revelation; for we have record of this revelation: it occurred on the road to Damascus, and was witnessed by others who were present with Paul. The fact that Paul was already quite familiar with the Scriptures played a key role in the knowledge he gained by that vision, that Jesus is the Christ. Now, having gained the Key to the Scriptures, he was newly able to interpret them according to their fulfillment in and by Christ.

What was evidently undertaken in the crafting of an apostolic Epistle was a passing on of understanding that in Jesus all the Scriptures find their fulfillment, as Jesus Himself taught these men. When He then made them apostles, by His own authority He gave them preeminent authority as guardians of the Word of revelation, as He said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations" (Matt 28:18–19). Similarly, what ought to happen in the crafting of a sermon is the continued passing on of this understanding, following the pattern set by the apostles, as well as a necessary verification that the sermon is fully in accord with the apostolic record. In this way we call the sermon the preached Word of God.

Behr's observation (above) that the early church's preachers saw the Old Testament's fulfillment in Christ as the key to their understanding of it, and the very basis and essence of their own preaching, is a critical one. Their mindset was the same as that of the Apostles, and indeed it is this mindset that every preacher of the Gospel must seek to gain. This is the starting point. The extent to which this mindset can be gained is bound to be the extent to which a sermon may be privileged to rank as the Word of God, which we, fearing and loving God, should hold sacred and gladly hear and learn.

To be continued. 

Notes

¹ Scripture quotations in this essay are from the King James Version.

² John Behr, trans. and ed., *On the Apostolic Preaching: St. Irenaeus of Lyons* (Crestwood, New York, 1997), 9.

³ *Ibid.*, 13.

Oracular Aphorisms

of Fritz the Penguin – on the public reading of Scripture



1. He who keeps his eyes on the page directs the hearers' attention to the reading.
2. He who looks up from the page fails at reading.
3. He who employs dramatic interpretation thinks the Word of God need his help.
4. He who employs dramatic interpretation gets in the way.
5. He who rushes the Reading is forgetting the Source thereof.
6. A reader and a herald are the same thing. The words are not his own.

Commentary on the War: Toward Gaining Ground in the Ministry

A Primer on Leadership in the Church

David H. Petersen

I. What is Wrong with Church Growth's Love of Leadership?



friend recently remarked that both he and I have been pretty uncomfortable in the past with Church Growth leaders emphasizing leadership, yet now we are thinking and talking about it. What has happened? Is there anything different

from our approach to the Church Growth approach?

Some of what has happened is that we have changed our minds. Some of our past responses were overreactions. The simple reality is that pastors are called to lead even as fathers are called to lead their families. If it weren't for sin, this would be easy, but because of sin it isn't. Leadership benefits from clear thinking about it and deliberate effort.

It is impossible to speak entirely accurately of the Church Growth movement in generalities. It exists on a spectrum and varies greatly by individual. Nonetheless, I am going to speak in generalities. This isn't meant to condemn everything that has been written or said by anyone in the movement but rather to try to get at the philosophical differences on leadership. I think what I am saying is generally true of the movement, much in the way that it is generally true to say that Americans like hot dogs. It doesn't mean everyone likes hot dogs. It means this is fairly typical.

It seems the dominant leadership emphasis coming out of Church Growth has been non-theological. The movement has sought to gain wisdom from the secular world and thought of CEOs, visionaries, and entrepreneurs. Besides treating the church like a business, these individuals and churches have also treated God's children as though they were customers. This isn't to say that there are no lessons to be learned from business or military leaders. The Church Militant cannot live anywhere except on this fallen earth. We have to do business with the world at some level. But the Church is different. The Church is a family.

This truth is key. We can find useful lessons in the world and history, from war and business and even scientific ventures, but we have to remember how entirely different the Church is from the world. We don't get to recruit or attract those we lead. They don't come to us from rigorous programs or with credentials. We aren't trying to persuade them to be customers or to stay. In the end, we simply get who we get. In some ways, they are like volunteers. For the most part, even though there can be extreme circumstances, they typically cannot be fired or even punished. Nor can we reward them financially or with great honor. But they are not volunteers. They are family.

Leadership in the Church is more like being a dad than anything else on earth. It is deeply vocational, relational. Leaders in the secular world always have strategic goals. They lead teams to obtain those goals. People are, to some degree, tools for these goals. Generals sacrifice those they lead to win battles in order to win the war. CEOs chase profit. They take care of people because a smart leader takes care of his tools. A good CEO might sacrifice short-term profit for a person if it serves long-term profit, but in the end, he is not driven by love of his employees but by his strategic goal. He is just as ruthless as a general.

II. The Church's Goals for Leadership

In the Church the people are the goal. They are the mission. They are not tools. They are the end. I expect that most every adherent of the Church Growth movement would agree with that statement if it was put to him, but I also think a lot of business and military leaders would agree with it, also. Nonetheless, no matter how many times military units and businesses pretend they are a family, they are not. When the boss dies, he doesn't divide the business equally among his employees. They are nowhere in the will no matter how many times he said they were family. I think this is even more exaggerated in the military. Their mission is to win the war. People are tools.

The Church Growth movement's view of leadership lands them in the same place as the business world and the military because that is who they follow. Their strategic

goal is numeric growth. The more people they attract the better. They don't necessarily realize this viewpoint, but that is because, just like the boss who is always saying that his employees are family, they are deluded by their own platitudes. Their language and intent is to honor family and individuals, but the emphasis and nuance is clear that it is not the same honor that exists within a true family. If it were not so, they would not be led to an almost desperate and frenetic need to reach the lost.

A family is not driven by a need to grow numerically. A dad loves his children. He wants what is best for them and looks at each of them almost as if that was his only child. He wants to help each of them grow and thrive. He wants to spend time with and enjoy them. He wants to be proud of them. His love and care for them is personal. Such an approach grows directly out of our relationship to our heavenly Father.

We are in a war, but the war is already won. Jesus lives. We don't have to save ourselves, nor do we need to save anyone else. We can't do that in any case, but we also don't have to. Jesus has already done it. None of the elect will be missing on the Last Day. Our failures will not make the number of saints in heaven fewer, nor will our efforts make it greater. This is the Church of Jesus Christ. He is working all things together for good to those who love Him without fail. If we think that our strategic goal is to save the lost, we have a Messiah complex. We think God needs us or that He might fail without us. This thinking is false and dangerous. It places burdens on us that don't belong to us. These burdens tempt us to make the message more appealing to the flesh than the message is in the Bible. We are tempted to think that doctrine is a hindrance to the Gospel. These Church Growth leaders might have good motives and they might sound biblical, but they are not. Therefore, they are harmful.

Our strategic goal isn't to get ourselves or anyone else into heaven. That has already been promised to us. That is God's work. Our members are not soldiers or customers that we manufacture in test tubes or convince by reason or eloquence. They are those whom God gives to us even as He gives children to parents. We get what we get and we are glad for it. Our strategic goal, that which drives us and our tactics, is to lead them deeper into the reality of God's grace by His Word. We do this because we know them and love them. We are not dealing with some abstraction for a certain class of people, like the "lost," but are in real relationships. We love them as individuals even as Jesus loves us, in their particularities and peculiarities, as God made them and gave them to us. We want what is best for them, to see them grow and thrive. It is deeply personal.

Thus, we aren't trying to make the lives of our people easier or keep them here. We are not trying to make them successful by earthly standards. We are trying to

help them become holier, not in terms of justification, but in terms of sanctification. We want them to live the good life with us, that is, the life of faith demonstrated in good works. This Christian way of life will not only benefit them and enable them to carry out their own vocations and help others; it will also be a beacon of light in the world of darkness.

Some might fear that teaching the doctrine of election from the Bible and the Formula of Concord will harm our evangelism efforts. It will not. To the contrary, it will aid our efforts greatly. Some might be tempted to neglect the whole counsel of God and just choose the gentler parts, but such people will be called least in the kingdom of heaven or worse. Pure doctrine is never a hindrance to love, nor does it ever hurt the Church. The Church loves evangelism the same way that it loves babies because the Church loves life.

Evangelism isn't our strategic goal or even our primary purpose. Rather, it is simply part of being a Christian. Our leadership is not managing a sales force or a SEAL Team. It is leading a family, so we lead them as we lead our children. Suffering and hard work are part and parcel of the good life. So is sharing it with others. We engage in evangelism because it is commanded and because God brings His people to Himself through the Word. In the end, evangelism is a good work like other good works. It is an act of faith that expects God's blessing. It sits alongside teaching the faithful, praising God, giving thanks, and the like.

It seems the Church Growth movement mostly, though certainly subconsciously, gets this wrong, dead wrong. They appear to be trying to train a sales force and are unhappy to let anyone be a follower. They want everyone leading, everyone ministering, etc. They are also in competition with other churches, casting a vision that will set them apart—not from the world but from the Church. They need to offer something distinct and are highly focused on what they imagine to be their unique circumstances and contexts.

Rather than acting in that manner, pastors should act like dads trying to help their kids get their homework done who are also inviting the neighbor kids over to help them.

III. Leadership in the Church with Examples

The results-driven, business-like approach of the Church Growth movement is at least part of what has made me uneasy in the past about their leadership talk. But again, leadership in the Church is needed. It is real. So what is it? For the most part, leadership is self-discipline born of self-awareness, a sacrifice of self for the sake of subordinates that seeks to help them thrive and accomplish their goals. You could certainly say that leadership is all summed up in our Lord's summary of the two tables of the Law. That is true, but it is not that

helpful if it is left there. That would be rather like telling someone who wants to invest in the stock market to buy low and sell high.

In addition to a careful reading of Scripture, reading leadership books and studying history can bestow upon us an ability to think more clearly and categorically about leadership. This is not easy, but it is useful. It is not easy because none of it is written for the Church, but a dad can learn things for his own house from Julius Caesar and Steve Jobs if he is attentive. He doesn't learn tricks or manipulation techniques, he learns about people. He learns to think more deeply about others and how they are affected by his communication and example, which has real value for men serving in vocations to others.

In my experience, this way of thinking is most useful in helping to diagnose mistakes after the fact and helping the leader to make amends and move forward. A constant effort and awareness can help keep leaders from making the same mistakes over and over again, but that is the tough part. Consider a couple real-life examples from my ministry in the last six months.

The first event happened this past September. After years of wrangling with it, the associate pastor and I decided that it was time to bring incense to Sunday morning services on a regular basis. Before this we had only used it at the Easter Vigil and very rarely on other weekday services. We planned to do it on St. Michael's day which fell on a Sunday this year. First, we cleared it with the musicians, the elders, and the acolytes. Then we rehearsed it repeatedly and made sure everything was in place. The elders, the musicians and choir, and the acolytes were all on board.

So what went wrong? I forgot to talk to the congregation, the very people it was meant to help and whose worship we hoped to enrich. I didn't warn or prepare them. A few of them were upset. They had medical issues and concerns. They weren't outraged and throwing temper tantrums, but they were saying, more or less, that we should never have incense again. In the moment, I was tempted to become defensive and blame them. I wanted to say that they were being hard-headed and unreasonable, that they were ungrateful for all the work I put into this and were simply refusing to see the good in it. After all, I had followed the proper channels, I had the authority to make changes, and I had good reasons. Who were they to complain and tell me what to do?

By God's grace, however, I realized that I was at fault. I am the leader. I had failed them. If they don't receive what I am giving or understand what I am doing, then I bear the blame, not they. This is one of the most critical realities for leaders. We have to take responsibility for failures and not blame others. If our team fails, it is our fault. When we blame others, we aren't leading, we are defending and emoting. Worse than that, we are destroying our relationships and trust. We are not helping

those we are serving to grow and thrive. We are not teaching or comforting.

So what did I do? First, I listened. I let them tell me why it was such a bad idea. I apologized, sincerely, for not including them in the planning and surprising them with it. I asked them for forgiveness and promised to do better. After they gave it, I told them why I still thought the regular use of incense in worship was a good idea, even if they didn't like it. I asked them if they could think of ways to ameliorate what they disliked about it. At first, they said there wasn't any way to do that. The only solution was to ban the use of incense forever. I just let that sit there. I didn't respond but waited. Then they started trying. They offered suggestions. Together we were able to come up with a few things to lessen the pain. The first was the most obvious. We would announce in the bulletin and other places when and if we were going to have incense at a worship service, so that anyone who needed to could take proper medication in advance or, if necessary, not come to that service. We also figured out how we could create some cross ventilation and keep the incense from piling up in the back of the Church. Then I wrote an apology to the whole congregation and outlined how we would handle it in the future. We had incense again on a Sunday not too long after that. I heard no complaints, and I think the use of incense was edifying for all.

Did this positive result come about because I am a leadership genius? No, I messed it up. The only reason I was able to salvage the situation was because I am a married man with children who has read not only a lot of leadership stuff but also the Bible. Will I do better next time? I hope so, but most of these lessons have to be learned the hard way and over and over again. It would be most ideal if we never messed up, but that just isn't going to happen. So we have to learn how to respond appropriately, for the good of others, when we do mess up.

Just this past week I had another failure. For various reasons, I had a lot on my mind and found it difficult to focus during worship. After the service, as we walked into the vestry, without thinking, I told my associate rather bluntly, and without warning or context, that I needed to talk to him about some things this week.

The way I said what was on my mind was completely careless, selfish. I meant nothing by it, really. I was just talking without thinking. But imagine how it sounded to him. He didn't know if I was upset about the sermon he just preached or disappointed about how he handled something while I was gone or if I had some other bombshell to drop on him. It was nothing. I just wanted to talk a bit about some long-term plans I had been thinking about. I knew better than to say something like I did, but because I was preoccupied, caught in my own internal world, I blurted it out. I wasn't thinking about him or how it would sound.

Fortunately, he didn't stand for it. He simply said, "That sounds ominous, can we talk right now?" We did. I apologized and said it was nothing. Then I briefly filled him in. Even then, though, I didn't realize what I had done. Later that afternoon, reflecting on it, I did. So Monday morning I apologized again, not just because the conversation wasn't significant, but because I saw my own moral failure in it due to a lack of self-control. I said something stupid that could have caused real pain. So I asked for forgiveness. He gave it. I thanked him for responding immediately instead of allowing it to escalate or enduring needless stress for the rest of the afternoon.

I really did nothing to fix this situation. He did the work. He led from the second chair, led up the chain of command. His kind response and immediate attention saved the relationship. I probably didn't have to apologize and ask for forgiveness or thank him. We would have been fine because he stopped the potential confusion and anxiety before it could begin. Here, though, my ability to think about our relationship in terms of leadership helped me to think about my behavior and how it affected him and our relationship. While perhaps this wasn't completely necessary, taking pains in this way also helped me to cement the lesson in my mind. My words to him matter. I can't be careless and self-absorbed.

In both cases, very little damage was done, but we don't want any damage. I think both injuries were also corrected and healed. But if they had not been addressed, they could have festered and become terrible. Learning to be mindful of these things, of how our example and our speech affects others, especially those we are called to serve, is most useful to carrying out our duties as leaders. While it is true that Jesus wouldn't need any help with these things because He perfectly obeyed both tables of the Law at all times, we do need help. He gives help with His Spirit through His Word. I don't think my associate was consciously thinking in leadership terms or about the impact this could have on the team if he let it fester. He was simply responding, as a Christian, in the moment according to the wisdom that God has nourished in him. God be praised! Nonetheless, some deliberate effort and analysis afterwards, along with some vocabulary and concepts to help us think about these things, can help us to learn and grow much more efficiently and perhaps avoid some pitfalls and pain.

While most of my experience and thinking in leadership has been about leading congregations, my wife and adult children, and, a long time ago, a company of tanks, all these concepts, this self-discipline and self-awareness for the sake of others, applies across all our vocations. This is also how we are called to lead and follow in districts and synods and bowling teams, as well as law firms, homeschool classrooms, and SEAL teams, whether we are pastors or laity.