

Leadership in the Church

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Brethren Educational Network

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Introduction

This booklet addresses an issue which I believe is crucial for the effectiveness of churches of Brethren background in the English-speaking world. My limited travels and knowledge suggest to me that it is also a crucial issue for the many churches of that background in other countries too.

These churches make no negligible contribution to the work of Christ worldwide. The remarkable (and continuing) missionary enterprise of the Christian, or Open, Brethren has left many congregations in very many countries. We do not know the exact numbers. There are probably 20,000 or more congregations in as many as 130 different countries, with a total of 2,000,000 adult adherents. These numbers could even be under-estimates. So the continued spiritual health and dynamism of these churches matters to the wider work of Christ. It matters in itself. And it matters in some countries, particularly in the English-speaking world, because of the contribution which those nurtured in Brethren circles make to Evangelicalism much more widely. So it would be a pity if carelessness, neglect, lack of thought, wisdom or spirituality, or even outright denigration and rejection, were unnecessarily to damage the work that these churches can continue to do for the kingdom of God. That would, I believe, lay those responsible open to criticism from the Lord when they come to give their account.

That the issue of leadership is crucial for these churches is partly a question of theology (everywhere) and partly of fashion (in the West especially).

It is theological because, despite some variations of emphasis from church to church and country to country, the evangelistic endeavour to which I have referred succeeded in conveying a remarkably consistent theology, and in particular a remarkably consistent ecclesiology, to these churches. As I shall explain at greater length, at the heart of that ecclesiology (i.e., doctrine of the structure and working of the Christian community) was an uncertainty about the role of human responsibility in leadership in the church as against divine leadership of the church. (Typically, the theology put these two in opposition to each other.) This faultline – this defect in the

Brethren genetic code, so to speak – has an often-unnoticed influence in many places. Mixed with other defects in the practice of leadership in the churches, the effects are often baneful.

As I shall also explain at more length, the importance of this defect is magnified in those societies which for cultural reasons now lay great store by charismatic and competent managerial leadership. In those societies, it is all the more important that local churches should pay attention to the need for effective spiritual leadership.

This booklet is in effect a policy paper, as will be a number of others in this projected series. We hope that those who read will reflect carefully upon it and ask the question, what does this mean for the way in which my local church is led? What does it imply for leadership in my area or country at levels beyond that of the local church? I hope, too, that key groups will discuss what is said and ask what collective action ought to be taken, bit by bit, in the light of the argument.

While the booklet has been written with a specific group of churches in mind, it may well be that people from other traditions will be able to read it with profit. That it is rooted in analysis of the history of a particular church tradition reflects both the experience and the intellectual inclinations of the writer! It may nevertheless be valuable to others, if they make necessary adjustments to take account of their different circumstances.

I thank the brethren in Malaysia for inviting me to address this topic at their biannual Assembly Leaders' Conference in 2003. The booklet is the result of their stimulus.

1

Brethren effectiveness in the English-speaking world

The missionary zeal of the Brethren movement (the Exclusive Brethren in the period of J.N.Darby in particular, and the Open Brethren throughout their history) has left churches connected with the movement in a surprising number of countries. Particularly with the departure of the missionaries, these national movements have developed in very different ways, including ecclesiologically. In some countries (for example, Angola, Chad, Zambia, Brazil, Argentina, and Guatemala), they have experienced dynamic growth in recent years. Even in continental Europe, though the growth has been less dynamic (reflecting the deeply-unfriendly intellectual and cultural environment in which Christianity has to operate in that continent), there are in some countries lively efforts at outreach and church-planting which are bearing some fruit.

By contrast, the Open Brethren have been struggling throughout the old English-speaking countries for the last 40 years. In the United Kingdom, for example, the 100 years up to 1960 saw much evangelism and church-planting as the natural manifestation of local church life. An hypothesis yet to be documented is the comparative lack of strategic thought which characterised this activity. With the possible exception of the church-planting encouraged by Sir John Laing on his new housing estates around London, church formation and church-based outreach was (I suspect) dictated to a large extent by Brethren population movement. This was energised by socio-economic rather than spiritual considerations, though the strategic evangelistic endeavours of individuals like Robert Gribble, John M'Vicker and Russell Hurditch in the period 1870 - 1900 should not be ignored. But even where the prior motive was socio-economic considerations, the impulse of those who had moved was nevertheless to establish a new fellowship in their new area, and to set about the work of evangelism, particularly among youth.

In the 1960s, however, church-planting and effective outreach by

these churches in Britain virtually collapsed. There was a flight of younger dynamic people from the existing churches. And the total number of churches in the group declined between 1959 and 2002 by some 30% in Britain. (In Northern Ireland, where both the religious and popular culture is very different, the number has remained broadly constant).

Partnership's latest survey of churches, in 1998-99,¹ suggested that many small churches comprising, now, mainly elderly people can be expected to close over the next few years. The bulk of medium-sized churches (between 40 and 70 members) were tending to decline slightly in numbers in the 1990s. Though these churches are often discontented with their present experience, and want to see growth, they struggle to see anything significant. There was however a comparatively small group of larger churches which had radically changed in character (staff workers, a radically-different pattern of meetings, participation of women, etc). These were growing strongly. But they were achieving this more through attracting Christians (of whatever denomination) who were moving into their area than through conversion growth. Typically, these churches are anxious to hide their Brethren origins, because the label is either mysterious even to other Evangelicals, or has a strong negative connotation for those who are aware of TV and tabloid criticism of the Taylorite Exclusive Brethren.

The same sort of pattern can be discerned in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and perhaps in the USA, though the picture in the last country has been somewhat obscured by the ructions in these churches there in the last 15 years.

A number of factors account for the radical change in fortunes which occurred in the 1960s.

Some are general to Christian groupings in the western countries (apart from the USA) in the period. Mixed denominations have seen a sharp decline in congregations and numbers. Even the most favoured among the classic Evangelical groupings have at best only broadly maintained their numbers. In this context, however, the growth of what are now called the New Churches, with roots in the Charismatic

¹ Graham Brown, *Whatever happened to the Brethren?: A survey of local churches in 1998-99*, Carlisle: Paternoster Press for Partnership 2003.

movement, must surely be regarded as significant since their general cultural environment was exactly the same as that of the historic mixed denominations and the classic Evangelical groupings. So too should the growth of the Pentecostal streams be noted, though that has to a considerable extent been attributable to the fortunes of the black churches.

If, however, we search for particular factors in the experience of local churches of Open Brethren background, lack of leadership and incompetent leadership must, in my view, be regarded as significant factors. These have been the more important since the general culture in the West today attaches particular importance to the role of dynamic, not to say charismatic (small 'c') leadership (e.g., Thatcher, Clinton, Blair, etc.). Open Brethren churches suffered for an extended period from a combination of lack of leadership of any kind and leadership (or at least government) which either failed to enable its congregations to make necessary adaptations to changing cultural circumstances – or opposed such adaptations altogether.

By contrast, it can be said that the closely-related New Churches, many of whose leaders had their formation in the Open Brethren, succeeded precisely because of positive leadership and because that leadership encouraged and reinforced the adoption of cultural forms which suited the times. What in particular the experience of the Holy Spirit conferred upon them was a combination of leadership and cultural aptness.

2

The leadership crisis: historical and theological roots

Historically, the Brethren approach to church leadership needs to be considered against the background of the ecclesiology of both main branches of the movement. This is because, despite the decisive organisational separation, even hostility, from 1848 onwards, theologically the two branches remained intertwined for a century or more, thanks to the extent to which the works of J.N.Darby and his disciples were read among the Open Brethren. The Exclusive approach to church leadership certainly influenced the Open Brethren. The two branches, however, typically developed distinctive approaches to church leadership at both the congregational and supra-congregational levels.

The Exclusives adopted a strongly charismatic (small 'c'), not to say democratic, view of leadership of the local company. There were no designated office holders, and activity and development were left to the informal interplay between the male members of the company (perhaps with female members exercising an indirect influence behind the scenes). We can speculate that this followed in part from the deep anti-institutionalism of Darbyite theology, reflected in his doctrine of the ruin of the church and in commitment to the leadership of the Spirit unmediated by human intervention.

There were, however, at the same time strong connexions between the various companies of believers which fell under the government of a group of leaders in the area. In time, this developed into a global leadership. (Recognition of this leadership seems to have involved a mixture of self-appointment and informal recognition by the believers in general. Later, in Taylorism, dynastic succession seems to have become the practice.) In this respect, it could be argued that the Exclusives practised a form of government which was closer to that of the New Testament. For they sought organisationally to have regard to the evident unity of the church in each particular city-region of the

first-century Roman Empire and to the wider visible unity of the New Testament church, as evidenced not only by what is known as the Council of Jerusalem (*Acts 15*) but also in later Pauline practice and writings. As a result, Exclusivism was essentially synodical, not congregational, in its polity. The same kind of ecclesiology influenced the 'Needed Truth' schism from the Open Brethren in the 1890s.

By contrast, the Open Brethren gradually opted for government/leadership of the individual local church by elders (in the plural), with the addition of deacons (in the English-speaking world at least) in the second half of the twentieth century. On the question of relationship between congregations, they opted for congregationalism, i.e., self-government of the local church without any superior level of control.

In opting for rule by elders, the Open Brethren churches, in contrast to the Exclusive branch, accepted in the leadership of the local church the notion of formal 'office', with related notions of formal authority and responsibility. This was in addition to the principle of spiritual gift. In doing so, of course, they were seeking to reflect the role given to elders in the city-churches in the New Testament documents. They were clear however (at least most of the time!) that the person appointed should have the requisite qualifications, spiritual gifts and performance – this was implicit in the notion of recognising as elders those who were already giving evidence of doing the work of an elder. Appointment was traditionally by the existing body of elders. This could, perhaps a little cruelly, be defined as self-perpetuating oligarchy. Crucially, appointment normally came to be seen as being for life (on the grounds that resignation could not remove the qualifications and spiritual gifts).

Turning to the congregationalism of these churches, this was in a strict form and was perhaps influenced by Anglo-Saxon non-conformist practice. A 'local church' was constituted and should be recognised wherever a body of believers gathered habitually for, crucially, the Lord's Supper: where the Lord's Supper was celebrated, there was an independent local church, the argument went.² In such circumstances, the local church was therefore to be responsible to the Lord for its own affairs, whatever its internal form of government. It

² This is why some have had difficulty in the past generation with the notion that communion might take place in a local church's home groups.

was, and should be, 'autonomous', refusing the right of any outside individual or body to interfere in its internal affairs, even in cases where the church itself or its leadership might be inclined to call for such outside help.

I have put the key characteristics of the Open Brethren churches relating to leadership and constitution in stark form. In practice, however, in the old English-speaking world, and in many other places it appears, there were important factors diminishing the influence of these principles. First, there was the widespread influence of Darbyite ecclesiology, despite the decisive fracture of 1848. His writings, and those of Mackintosh and others, circulated widely in Open circles. His ideas were mediated by preachers and magazine articles, for example, by *The Believer's Magazine*. Moreover, the Brethren rediscovery of the principles of spiritual gift and every-member ministry also had influence in many places. For example, the practice of appointing speakers in advance, even at Saturday conferences, was a mid-twentieth century innovation in the UK (though somewhat earlier it had, to the disapproval of G H Lang at least, become the practice to invite individuals *sub rosa* to ensure that the platform was satisfactorily occupied!). In many places, churches, particularly smaller ones, were in the hands not of appointed elders, but of a meeting of the men of the assembly.

Secondly and notwithstanding the principle of autonomy, the churches were linked, and individually were greatly influenced, by a vibrant informal network of individuals, organs, institutions and practices. These greatly watered down in practice the stated principle of the autonomy of the local church. They were also the means by which extra-congregational leadership was provided to the local church, particularly where adequate leadership was lacking within an individual local church. There were, for example, itinerating Bible teachers of varying ability and influence in the churches. There were itinerating evangelists with the ability to lead and catalyse the frequent evangelistic efforts of local churches. There were area summer camps which were a focus of evangelism and discipleship among young people. There was the institution of the Saturday conference which joined churches in a district together for a variety of spiritual and not-so-spiritual purposes and which often gave a platform for the supra-church leader. In the United Kingdom, institutions increasingly grew up like 'Counties Evangelistic Work',

'Echoes of Service' and the 'East of England Evangelization Trust'³. These discreetly performed inter-church functions. There were national meetings of these bodies which were inadvertently a meeting place for key people at the national level. They were also a rallying point for the identity of the movement. There were national residential conferences like the Missionary Study Conference. There was the influence of magazines which circulated among the churches and which had rather different platforms from the 'progressive' to the 'conservative' ends of the spectrum. (In a recent paper, Professor David Bebbington rightly characterised their role as 'government by magazine').

I refer particularly to the position in the United Kingdom, but this account could be matched in many other countries. Striking features of these supra-church 'institutions' (in the sociological sense) were their vibrancy, longevity, tendency to adapt themselves to new conditions, their decentralisation (in the sense that they relied on the initiative of a wide variety of individuals and bodies), and their lack of strategic central direction. Collectively, they could perhaps be characterised as a work of the Spirit and not of man, or even of a small group of men. They were certainly in the nature of 'folk' institutions. They provided the independent local churches of the Open Brethren connexion with resources, support, inspiration, leadership, and an infrastructure of identity beyond the local church.

But sometime about 1960, this network of 'institutions' began to 'run out of steam' in a catastrophic manner for a variety of reasons. For example, local churches came to see themselves not only as being autonomous, but as intended to be self-sufficient (on the questionable biblical principle that God provides each local church with all the spiritual gifts and resources which it needs for its survival). Thus each local church began to depend more on its own leaders and teachers for ministry. In a related development, they also began, commendably, to introduce more systematic teaching from scripture. Later, recognising perhaps the inadequacy of this source of ministry, churches began to call their own resident staff teachers and pastors. These factors together had an inevitable impact on the ministry of itinerant leaders, who, it must be said, sometimes also lacked the courage and vision of the previous generations. The traditional

3 Later designated, the 'United Kingdom Evangelization Trust' and now known as 'Stewardship Services' (with a largely non-Brethren remit).

conference, whether at the local or national level, failed to adapt its form and content to changing cultural expectations. Similarly, the magazines failed to make themselves attractive enough to keep up with a changing market. And so on.

Overarching all was a crisis of identity. Many key leaders, as well as ordinary church members, began to doubt whether the this group of churches had a future, or *ought to have* a future. This was compounded when it was taught (emphasising another strand in their thinking, dating from the very beginning) that local churches were not and should not form part of either a denomination or a sect – that local churches, and the movement itself, should and could be non-denominational. This also had the effect of implying that each local church should be self-sufficient - unless ‘non-denominational’ churches were to group themselves together in effect in a denomination, or unless they were to join some other denominational grouping, or unless they were to draw promiscuously on the resources of church groupings and para-church bodies at large.

It is of interest that the more-formally constituted supra-church bodies (e.g, Counties, Echoes of Service, and Stewardship Services) have been able to adapt themselves better to the changing environment. This may have been because they were an outlet for some able people who were denied leadership opportunities in their congregations. It may also have been because these bodies had a more formal existence than some of the other ‘institutions’ that have been enumerated. So they had committees asking themselves, under the Holy Spirit, key leadership questions about mission, role, objectives, and changing environment. These questions were seldom asked by local church leaderships, or by the more informally-organised ‘institutions’. It is noteworthy, however, that in the United Kingdom, some of these more formal institutions have over the last 30 years displayed an increasing tendency, drawing on the (laudable) non-denominational inspiration of Open Brethrenism just noted, to non-denominationalise their activities. This makes some of the best features of the Open Brethren impulse available to the wider church of Christ, but at the same time tends to make their ministry less relevant to the churches which gave birth to them⁴

4 This tendency for the Open Brethren connexion to ‘lose’ its institutions for one reason or another is noteworthy. Examples are colleges like Moorlands and Emmaus (Australia), presses like Pickering and Inglis and Paternoster, magazines like *Aware*

To my mind, this analysis, if it is correct, raises the question of how, in respect of this group of churches in each succeeding generation, biblically-grounded inter-church leadership and inspiration can be revived, renewed and adapted to changing cultural and organisational conditions. For the New Testament does not lead us to believe that there neither is, nor should be, anything more than the local church and the invisible universal church of Christ. Rather, it is clear that the body of Christ needs concrete, supra-local church ministries, relationships and activities if it is to function as the New Testament intends. The evidence is not only the so-called Council of Jerusalem (*Acts* 15) and the nature of the epistles. It is also in the mutual support and obligations that the church in different parts of the eastern Mediterranean showed to other churches, and in the office and gift of apostle, the work of apostolic delegates (Timothy, Titus, etc), the work of the apostolic teams more widely (proto-parachurch bodies, if not denominational bodies?), the work of other travelling teachers, evangelists and prophets, and so on. Nor is it correct to read *Ephesians* 4: 11 – 14 as applying only to the local church: that is to read the text through a lens of local church assumptions. So the question for biblically-based churches, especially independent ones, is, how are supra-local church 'institutions' to be kept alive, developed, adapted and led in the coming decades?

and *Stimulus* (New Zealand), and support bodies like Stewardship Services. If my own casual observations are correct, the trend continues. Nor has the re-invention of connexional bodies kept pace with the attrition. There is a cautionary tale here for others.

3

Leadership?

An important question which arises from the history of this group of churches is, what place should be accorded to 'leadership' as a function in the church, whether local or supra-local? There is a strand of thinking which is still quite commonly encountered in churches of Brethren background, to the effect that the leadership of the church is the sole prerogative of the Lord: he alone should lead the church through the Holy Spirit. So, leadership is not, and should not be, mediated through humans at all. Thus it is not necessary for any of us to lead the church, whether at the local or at any other level. The point was put to me recently in a less grand way, when it was suggested to me that the ideal for the elder in the local church was to be neither seen nor heard! Incidentally, it is a manner of thinking which fails to engage with the point that spiritual gifts are inevitably exercised by human beings! It also fails to engage with the fact that the New Testament undoubtedly speaks of office as well as gift in the church, for example, those of apostle and elder.

Moreover, if we review the practice of eldership in these churches, we can see that traditionally the accent was on ruling and governing (exercising authority in a disciplinary manner) rather than on teaching, pastoring, steering and leading. Similarly, in selecting elders, the accent has tended to be on the personal qualifications enumerated in *1 Timothy 3* and *Titus 1*, to the exclusion of regard for the functions and duties of elders as emphasised by Paul in *Acts 20*, and as implied by the references to gifts in *Romans 12*, *1 Corinthians 12* and *14*, and *Titus* (throughout).

It is true that the modern accent on leadership in the West is something of a cultural phenomenon; other societies have not necessarily placed the same stress on it among the various functions which relate to office-holding in society. Some societies, possibly including that of the Mediterranean in the first century of the Christian era, place more emphasis on age, or wisdom, or experience than on leadership *per se*. Indeed, the dominance of American culture in the

world today should not mislead us into thinking that the individualistic chief executive mode is the unique way in which leadership should be mediated in all societies: books on Christian leadership emanating from North America are sometimes guilty of failing to recognise their own cultural context. On the other hand, we do need to recognise that there are many today who, influenced by that culture, do not feel safe in the absence of strong, charismatic monarchical leadership. There is here a real challenge for a tradition of plural leadership. It is, how can a group or team give clear and certain leadership, so that individual congregational members have the psychological security that they often crave in an uncertain world (while at the same time continuing to enjoy the consumerist individualistic freedom which the Western paradigm continues to encourage them to hope for!)?

It is also true that the New Testament does not, in strict terms of words themselves, make much reference to leadership as one of the functions of eldership. The New International Version refers, in *Romans 12: 8*, to a spiritual gift of 'leadership', but older versions speak of 'ruling' and even the NIV goes on to say 'let him govern diligently'. Rather, the New Testament stresses that the particular functional gifts which elders/leaders between them need above all are those of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, teacher, ruler and administrator (i.e. steersman or strategist). The conclusion which we must derive is that if elders do not collectively have these gifts, and if individually they are not each strong in some sub-set of them, they should not be made elders; or, if they are elders, they should stand down. It was also manifestly the case that apostles, prophets and evangelists at least had, in part, inter-church roles, a point relevant to some of the discussion in the previous chapter.

In this context, however, it would be a mistake to focus simply on the particular terminology of scripture. That risks failing to see the theological wood as a result of concentrating exclusively on the exegetical trees! For it is clear that scripture is from beginning to end full of the concept of leadership, as demonstrated by the patriarchs in the context of the family, by Moses, Gideon, Samuel, David, Jeremiah, Paul and the other apostles, and by the Lord himself. It is a leadership which the Holy Spirit mediates to his people through the human beings concerned. It is a leadership which is prophetic in character, depending as it does on the spiritual contact with the Lord. This is so, whether it is Moses in the tent of meeting, or David

(whether directly from the Lord or through the prophets whom the Lord directed to speak to him), or Peter and Paul as guided in vision and dream. In the case of Moses, we can see both the direct leading of the Lord through the pillar of cloud and fire, and mediated leadership through the leader's experience on the mountain and in the tent of meeting. Thus, leadership is a crucial requirement for the fortunes of God's people, old and new. But it is a leadership which must be spiritual, not carnal, in character.

The challenge for the church in each succeeding generation, is how can it ensure under God a continuing supply of such spiritual leadership, at both the congregational and the supra-congregational levels.

4

Positive, united leadership

Positive, united leadership is a particular challenge within the Open Brethren connexion. This is true at the congregational level, and it is also true at the supra-congregational level.

At the congregational level, it is a particular challenge precisely because of the principle of plural leadership. Monarchical leadership has much less difficulty in giving clear and definite leadership to a congregation. The individual needs simply to be clear in his (usually) mind about the direction which the Lord wants and to communicate that to the congregation clearly, effectively, in the right 'style' and by the right means. This is true even where the leader has a staff team assisting him: the individual members of the team must be content with the vision and strategy suggested by the leader, or they (or he) must depart. (The same is true of individual congregational members, and it often happens that on the arrival of a new senior leader, there is a turnover of church membership where individuals or families do not like the new strategy, style, personality etc.) Of course, monarchical leadership does not prevent tussles between the leader and junior members of the team, or between the leader and the congregation, particularly today in individualistic Western society. The leader does not always win in these power struggles. Monarchical church leaders sometimes make some fearsome misjudgments in these circumstances, and terrible shipwrecks sometimes result. And it is clear that sometimes the issues are not of policy, strategy or doctrine, but are driven by conflicts of personality and style.

A plural church leadership needs, however, to give even more attention to how it is going to give a clear, definite and persuasive lead to the rest of the congregation. To achieve this, it is essential that they should act as a true team. They need to focus on giving a clear vision, strategy and policy to the congregation – acting not as a distant body which hands down its judgments, but evidently listening to the congregation as a whole and allowing it to influence the views of the leadership. In particular, it is essential that a plural leadership

should communicate effectively, coherently and clearly with the congregation. It is not sufficient to be united and to have a clear view of the direction in which they should be leading the church. The church has to know that the leaders are of a common mind and what the direction is. Dissent, or lack of commitment to the approach, within the leadership will very quickly convey itself to the congregation as a whole and will empower those who are unhappy.

If a plural leadership is to act as a true team, they need to give careful attention to their own internal workings. The dynamics between them must be positive and constructive. There cannot be sharp divisions, whether of doctrine, policy or personality, between them. (If there are differences on these matters, they cannot be brushed under the carpet: conscientious efforts must be made to resolve them in a way which is mutually acceptable.) The members of a plural leadership must know each other well. There must be respect and strong friendship in Christ between them, and there must be confidence in one another. There must be mutual understanding and appreciation of each other's spiritual gifts and of the contribution which each can make to strengthening the life of the congregation. There must be a willingness to set each other free to exercise those spiritual gifts. There must be a recognition that roles (and perhaps prominence) within the group will differ. There needs to be recognition that the leadership group itself needs leadership. Therefore there needs to be a willingness to allow one or two within the group to provide that internal leadership. Without all this, it is difficult to see how it can be said that there is true love and fellowship between the leaders. Without all this, a plural leadership certainly will not carry conviction with the congregation.

Regrettably, I have to say that in my experience this is often a far cry from the relationships actually to be found within elderships in many churches. Too often, elderships meet only monthly, and then only to transact administrative and managerial, rather than truly spiritual, business. In any case, often they are concerned with detailed practical matters which should be left to church stewards⁵.

⁵ I do not say 'deacons' because typically the job description of the deacon in Brethren churches needs complete overhaul, if it is to have proper regard to the New Testament. See N.W. Summerton, *A Noble Task: Eldership and ministry in the local church*, Carlisle: Paternoster Press, second edition, 1994, pp. 128 – 129; and

Relationships, fellowship, and mutual regard and confidence between elders are weak. They spend little time deepening relationships and understanding between each other. They spend little time listening to one another, little time in prayer, and little time considering pastoral matters, the teaching needs of the flock, and church strategy and development. Their congregations are not in the least sure that they are 'one in heart and mind' (*Acts 5: 32*), nor do the congregations feel at one with their elders. They are certainly not 'one as we are one' (*John 17: 22*). As a result, it is scarcely surprising that such eldership groups spend much time in debate and discussion of particular issues relating to their churches, but without reaching conclusions which they are united about and to which they can commit themselves wholeheartedly, conclusions which, because of their mutual agreement, they feel that they have received from the Lord. On the contrary, the elders arrive home late at night, frustrated and resigned to sleeplessness.

Such eldership or leadership groups need to give priority to improving their internal dynamics, to working as a team, to increasing mutual regard, respect and love. This is a spiritual task. It requires prayer and discussion. The process of improvement will often be accelerated by moderation and counselling by an appropriate person or persons from the outside.

But unity in leadership is also a challenge at the supra-local church level. This is particularly so in the light of the diverse and fragmented character of supra-local church leadership in the Open Brethren as described above. This is not to be interpreted as an implied plea for greater organisational unity and concentration at regional, national or international levels. Nor is it a plea for formal recognition of supra-church leadership. In some circumstances, some degree of rationalisation and elimination of duplication between quasi-para-church bodies might perhaps be desirable. And it is interesting that in some countries, for a variety of sometimes rather prosaic reasons having to do with government and the law, there are formal, national bodies which do not seem to have caused the roof to cave in on the independence of the local church. But for consistency and conformity with the principles of the New Testament, it can be argued that those involved in supra- and inter-church ministries should also find ways

and means of expressing a fundamental unity of fellowship and purpose between these various ministries, even if it is a question only of meeting from time to time to compare notes and identify ways in which ministry might be developed for the benefit of the churches. And, somehow or another, under the Lord's leading, individual and collective supra-church leadership, of a spiritual rather than a carnal kind, does need to flourish for the benefit of these churches.

5

Servant leadership; spiritual leadership

A consideration of the need for Christian leadership, plural or otherwise, cannot conclude without reference to its crucial, not to say distinctive, feature as required by the Lord and enjoined by the apostles. Suffice it to say that leadership has to be clear, positive, effective and united while remaining, indispensably, servant leadership (see, e.g., *Luke 22: 24 - 30; Phil. 2: 1 - 8; and 1 Pet. 5: 1 - 11*). Our Lord's example is determinative. Let us also remember Moses of whom it was said, despite his extraordinary leadership achievement (aided of course by Aaron, Miriam, Joshua, Caleb and others), 'Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.' (*Num. 12: 3*)

Here is a challenge for Christian leaders, both as individuals and collectively. How is positive and effective leadership to be given, the kind of leadership which will be welcomed and responded to by God's people, while at the same time remaining humble leadership? The answer lies in focussing on service, rather than on status, office or position. Servant leaders are at the call of those whom they lead, rather than *vice versa*. They have the duty, the obligation, of serving, and need to focus their attention on the rights of the flock to be served. If the leadership they are offered is truly servant leadership, then the flock have reciprocal obligations of following, of course.

Christian leaders need constantly to examine their motives, attitudes and performance carefully before the Lord. Why am I leading? What are my objectives in leading? Am I responding to the Lord's call? Is my goal the good of the flock, individually and collectively? Is my passion that the church should grow spiritually and numerically? Or am I engaged in the task because of what I get out of it, for the status, and because it is a limited sphere in which I can exercise control and power, and in which I can ensure that things are arranged in a way which satisfies me and my personal needs? And can I (or the group for that matter) accept comment and criticism, or does it provoke passionate resentment? If I am financially supported

by the church, am I in it for the money and security (however limited it may be) or some satisfaction of personal ego, or is my purpose humble service of the congregation in collaboration with others?

Christian leaders need also to be spiritual. This should go without saying for anyone familiar with scripture. But it is often the case that elderships and leadership teams become simply managerial in character. This is a particular danger in Western culture where the modernist watchwords are management, efficiency, effectiveness, success, goals, targets, strategies, vision statements, competence and so on. This is not at all to suggest that to be spiritual is to be incompetent. In the real world which God has created, carelessness and incompetence are not virtues. The local church needs, and deserves, good quality oversight, accomplished with diligence. But leadership of the church should not be just a business function. It calls also for a manifest walk with God. Leaders in the church must be people of Christian character, experience of the Lord, prayer and knowledge of the word. Leadership groups must also be known as groups to have those characteristics. This is essential if they are to command the confidence and support of their congregations as large. Christian sheep are not fools, and know perfectly well when their leaders are spiritually unworthy. This is why the pastoral letters focus so much on the personal qualifications of elders, deacons and office-holding widows.

So church leaders have to be effective. They have also to be servants and to be spiritual. It is a case of doing the one and not leaving the other undone.

Conclusion

This booklet aims at improving the quality of Christian leadership. As such, it reflects the continuing perception that the health and growth of local churches, and God's kingdom more widely, depends on the quality and effectiveness of spiritual leadership. I believe that this in turn reflects the teaching of scripture in many places, particularly the history of God's ancient people as recorded for our learning in the Old Testament.

As was asserted in the introduction, this booklet is not intended to be dispassionately academic, to be of merely passing intellectual interest. The question is whether the analysis and prescriptions are correct. If they are, then the question is whether the policy pointers suggested or implied will be implemented practically, whether they will make a difference to church leadership on the ground.