A Paradigm Shift To Collegial Eldership: Accountability & Ethical Responsibility

BY HARTWELL T PAUL DAVIS

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Regent School of Global Leadership
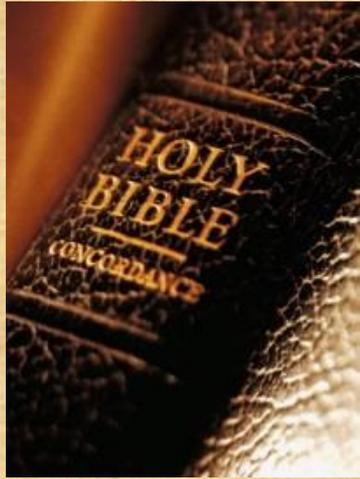
This *is* a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach; Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous; One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity; (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?) Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. **(I Timothy 3:1-7)**

Ethical Dilemmas: Why do they Exists

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THE ROOTS OF ETHICAL BEHAVIORS

- Values and belief systems of the individual
- Moral traditions
- Habits and behavioral practices
- Priorities that can impact ethical decision making (i.e. social justice versus moral issues)
- Environmental and social values
- The power and direction of decision making antecedents (i.e. powerful influences including timing, facts available, competing agendas, personal commitment, rules, roles, and relationships)

ASSUMPTIONS & PERCEPTIONS ABOUT CHURCH LEADERS

- Clergy are ranked high in perceptions of ethical integrity by the majority of Americans (Milco, Kindle Loc. 99)

- Church leaders have values grounded in Christian discipline, practice, and beliefs

- Church leaders have been trained in ethical behavior

- Church leaders live above sin or temptation

- Pastoral or clerical positional authority provides moral authority for all actions and decisions made by church leaders
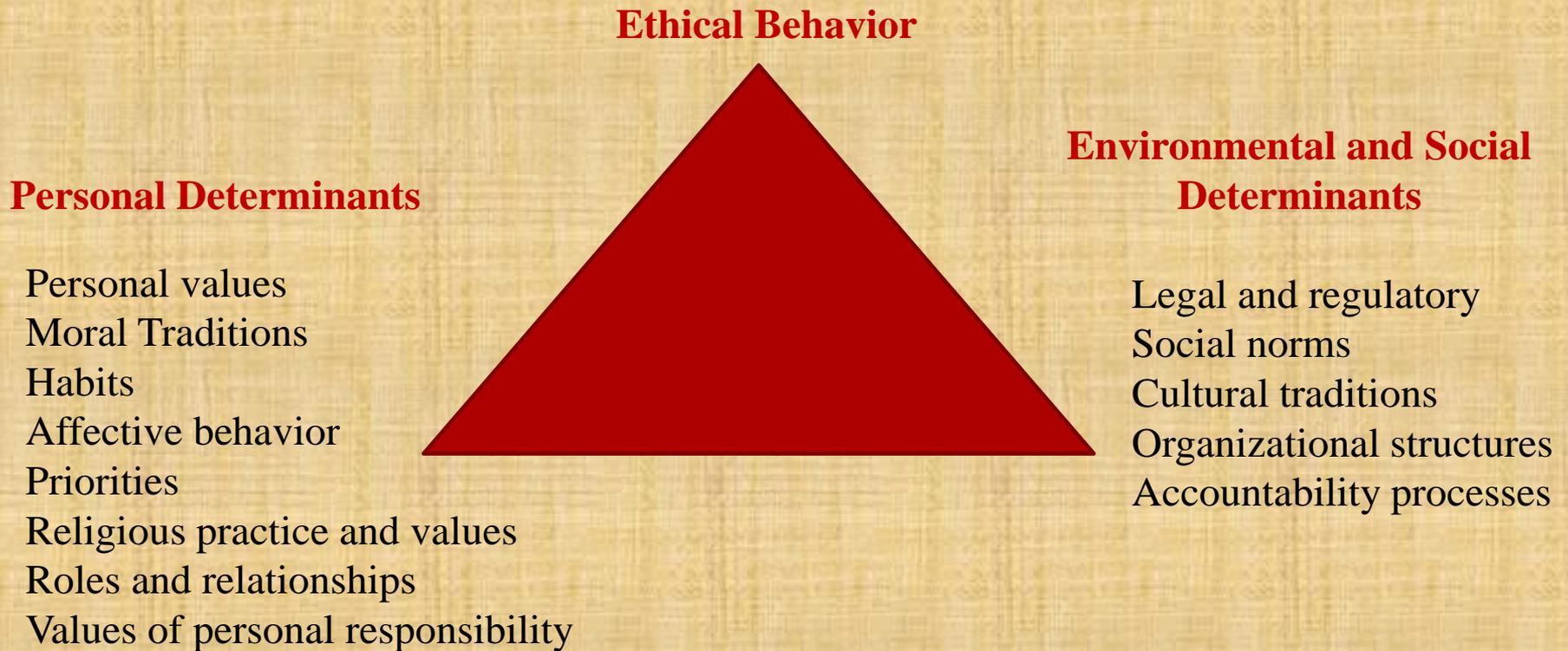
Milco, M. R. (1997). *Ethical Dilemmas in Church Leadership: Case Studies in Biblical Decision Making* (Kindle ed.). Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications.

ASSUMPTIONS & PERCEPTIONS <u>BY</u> CHURCH LEADERS

This is not true of all churches depending on structure, but is common among evangelical churches

- Pastors are the heads of their churches
- Anything with two heads is a monster (frequent counter to the concept of collegial leadership)
- A hireling is any pastor run by a church board
- Local churches must operate independently with local autonomy attributed to the pastor
- Pastoral authority is *privileged* authority granted by God that requires no human oversight

ETHICAL DILEMMAS EXISTS BECAUSE:

If ethics are a function of human agency – social cognitive theory is a valid framework for understanding ethical behavior:

Ethical Behavior

Personal Determinants

Environmental and Social Determinants

Personal values
Moral Traditions
Habits
Affective behavior
Priorities
Religious practice and values
Roles and relationships
Values of personal responsibility

Legal and regulatory
Social norms
Cultural traditions
Organizational structures
Accountability processes

Bandura, A. (1997). *Self Efficacy - The Exercise of Control*. New York, NY: W.H. Freeman and Company (p. 6).

Church Ethical Dilemmas

Encompass leadership behaviors and also leadership decision making relative to ethical behaviors of church members

COMMON ETHICAL DILEMMAS
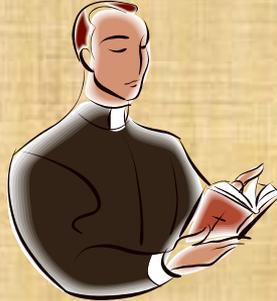
- Leadership immorality
- Leadership financial misconduct
- Mishandling privacy concerns
- Abuses of authority

- Abuse inside or outside the church: including sexual abuse, physical or emotional abuse
- AIDS among the flock
- Conflict and sin against other church members
- Financial misconduct
- Crisis pregnancies
- Immorality including gay or lesbian lifestyles, adultery, incest

ETHICAL PRACTICES IN BUSINESS ORGANIZATIONS

Modern organizations are developing or have developed both leadership practices and organizational structures that have focused on:

- Leadership development (including training, ethical training, mentoring, coaching, assessment)
- Accountability structures and processes are the result of:
  - regulatory interventions,
  - corporate social responsibility initiatives,
  - commitment to best practices,
  - awareness of the need for ethical responsibility
- Human Resource Departments are commonly tasked with responsibility for training, implication, and functional roles in both leadership and ethics practices
- Accountability structures are often vested in independent auxiliaries (such as human resources or boards of directors) in order to maintain impartiality.

CHURCHES DIFFER FROM BUSINESS, OTHER NON-PROFITS, OR OTHER NON-CHURCH STRUCTURES

- Leadership is based on positional authority that is not "created" from other management structures but is assumed as a self-contained authority role that mostly functions with full autonomy
- Church leadership for most fundamental and evangelical churches are "legacy based" either from the founder or from congregational voting that is based in *charismatic attributes* when filling vacancies
- Most churches are devoid of accountability structures that are trained in processing ethical dilemmas
- Churches do not have functional Human Resource departments to provide training, guidance, or practice for either leadership training or ethical training
- Church structures tend to be hierarchical with leadership vested in a sole pinnacle position
- Local churches operate in independent autonomy with "at will" relational structures with church organizations, boards, and government structures.
- Local churches often have no auxiliary oversight independent of the local structure.

FOUNDER'S SYNDROME IS COMMON AMONG CHURCH LEADERSHIP

- Founder's syndrome is defined as a systematic maladaptive approach by founders of organization to retain disproportionate power and control over an organization beyond the initial growth phase. It is characterized by:
- Exclusion of newcomers
- Exclusion of other founders
- Over identification with the founder
- Decision making by others is limited

Block and Rosenberg (2002) write, "Founder's syndrome refers to the influential powers and privileges that the founder exercises or that attribute to the founder".

At some point, however, boards and staff in every organization have the (unwritten) expectation that founders will become egalitarian and refrain from controlling organizational decisions. Although such an expectation exists, anecdotal reports suggest that founders do not divest themselves of their influential and domineering roles. (Block and Rosenberg, 2002)

Block, S. R., and Rosenberg, S. (2002). Toward an understanding of founder's syndrome. *Nonprofit Management & Leadership 12, no. 4,* 353-368. Business Source Complete, EBSCOhost
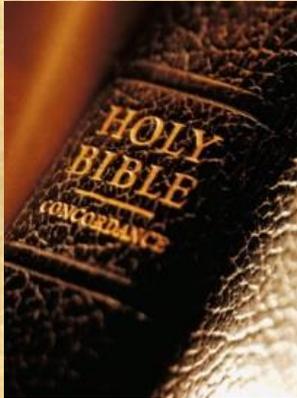
THE KEY TO ETHICAL INTEGRITY

- RESPONSIBILITY

- ACCOUNTABILITY

- REINFORCMENT OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP BY STRUCTURAL SUPPORT AND ETHICAL DEVELOPMENT PRACTICES

BIBLICAL LEADERSHIP STRUCTURE

Biblical leadership structures were intended to provide for both responsibility and accountability

THE BIBLE TEACHES LEADERSHIP RESPONSIBILITY

1 Timothy 3:1-7 (KJV)

[1] This *is* a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.

[2] A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;

[3] Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;

[4] One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;

[5] (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)

[6] Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.

[7] Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

THE BIBLE TEACHES LEADERSHIP ACCOUNTABILITY
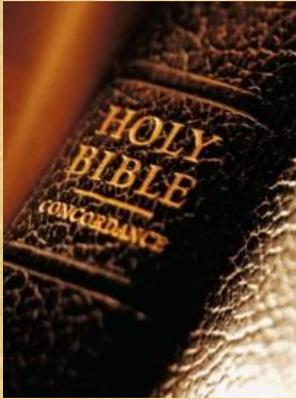
- **1 Timothy 5:17-20 (KJV)**
  [17] Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.
  [18] For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer *is* worthy of his reward.
  [19] Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses.
  [20] Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.

- There is no scripture that equates the role of pastor with sole church authority
- The term pastor is not used in reference to church leadership in the New Testament – it is used but once in reference to the five-fold ministry (Ephesians 4:11)
- The term pastor does not refer to an office but a ministerial gift (i.e. how a ministry functions) (Ephesians 4:11)
- Biblical church leadership is always in the plural for the local assembly operating as a collegial, collaborative leadership style devoid of single authorities except for that of Jesus Christ as the head of the church (Acts 14:23, Titus 1:5, Hebrews 13:17, Philippians 1:1)
- Church leadership derives from the servant-leader perspective (Matthew 20:25) that contrast with the role of "exercising authority"

PASTORAL CONCEPTS

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COLLEGIAL LEADERSHIP WAS THE PRACTICE OF THE ORIGINAL JERUSALEM CHURCH

- Which of the 12 apostles was pastor of Jerusalem?
- James is assumed but do we therefore assume James was over Peter and John. James is listed as one of three pillars of the church (Galatians 2:9)
- The 12 voted on adding a new leader (Matthias) to the group (Acts 1:26) even though Peter initiated the process
- The 12 acted in concert in the establishment of deacons, the case of circumcision, the sending forth of apostles, the sending forth of decrees

OBJECTIONS TO SINGULAR LEADERSHIP

- There can be only one pastor in the church! Anything with 2 heads is a monster:
    - Can there be more than one evangelist, one apostle, one prophet, one teacher?
    - A pastor is not mentioned in the plural leadership structure of Philippians (1:1) or Antioch (Acts 13:1-3) where prophets and teachers are the leadership structure
- The pastoral verse of Acts 20:28 was addressed to "elders" at Miletus (Acts 20:17)
- The office of "elder" may be occupied by apostles, prophets, evangelist, pastors, or teachers (Ephesians 4:11)
- All references to the office of elder in the local assembly was in the plural:
    - Acts 11:30
    - Acts 14:23
    - Acts 15:2 - 22
    - Acts 16:4
    - Acts 20:17
    - Acts 21:18
    - I Timothy 5:17
    - Titus 1:5
    - Hebrews 1317
    - James 5:14
    - I Peter 5:1

The historical records indicate local churches operated in collegial leadership until the 3rd century. There is not an implication that Jerusalem served as hierarchical authority, but operated as advisories to local assemblies. The apostolic authority of Paul, Timothy, or Titus in the ordination and oversight of local churches are not construed to be local church leadership structures – but both Jerusalem and apostolic authority suggest accountability structures "outside" of the local leadership structure which reflect on the need for stronger outside accountability structures for local assemblies.

Historical Perspective

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During the 3rd century, rising into notice by way of geographical distribution rather than in definite chronological order, this twofold congregational ministry became threefold in the sense that one man was placed at the head of each community with the title of pastor or bishop (the titles are interchangeable as late as the 4th century at least)

Ministry, in *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Electronic Database, Biblesoft, 1996.

During the 2nd century the ministry was subject to a change. The ruling body of office-bearers in every congregation received a permanent president, who was called the pastor or bishop, the latter term being the commoner. The change came gradually. It provoked no strong opposition. By the beginning of the third century, it was everywhere accepted.

Lindsey, *The Church and the Ministry in the Early Centuries*, 180, 183-85)

Jerome, one of the early church fathers wrote, "A presbyter is the same as a bishop. And until there arose divisions in religion, churches were governed by a common counsel of presbyters. But afterward, it was everywhere decreed, that one person, elected from the presbyters, should be placed over the others."

Annotations on the Epistle to Titus, as quoted by Dr. Woods on Episcopacy, p. 63.

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- Create accountability for the single-pastor/leader church by re-examining Biblical church structure and putting collegial eldership into practice
- Train church leaders in the concepts of servant-leadership
- Use team approaches in church planting and missions
- Develop leadership mentoring (analogous to discipleship) for church leaders
- Develop auxiliary accountability structures whether with other church leaders or stronger organizational ties
- Change the mindset from "my church" to "his church"
- Do not allow members to call the church by the pastor's name

THE PARADIGM SHIFT

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- Avoid reinforcing the single pastor concept by avoiding "pastoral appreciation days". If there are no corresponding appreciation days for the rest of the five-fold ministry, it demeans other ministers and dilutes the concept of ministerial gifts and servant leadership.

- Beware of the "Peter, Paul, Apollos syndrome (preacher religion) that developed in the Corinthian church (I Cor. 1:10-13).

- Instead of pastor's anniversaries, have "church" anniversaries. The church is not about the pastor – it is about Jesus Christ.

- Remember the sin of Diotrephes (3 John 1:9)

THE PARADIGM SHIFT

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- Formalize ethics procedures for both the leadership and the congregation
- Develop an ethics oversight committee and train in ethical issues
- Single pastors who are intent on retaining power should at least develop accountability relationships with other pastors who will share in training workshops, ethical discussion, mentoring, and counseling
- Pastors should consider contracting leadership development training for themselves and other church leaders

CREATING ACCOUNTABILITY

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