

Introduction

Perhaps servant leadership has been both a dream and a reality for individuals much longer than it has been a formulated theory. Based on principles such as equality, honesty, justice and the like, servant leadership is much more a brand of humanity than it is a form of leadership. Among the many principles of servant leadership that give evidence to this fact is Robert K. Greenleaf's statement, "The intent of the servant, as I see that person now, is that, as a result of any action she or he initiates, *no one will knowingly be hurt.*"¹ Here, I hope to discuss the many advantages of servant leadership and discover new ways the principles thereof, along with the core principles of Jesus' teachings, might be employed to bring about a *greater reality* for the Church and institutions as a whole.

There are many components of the philosophy of servant leadership. However, before discussing the elements that compose servant leadership, it is essential that we understand the philosophy and model of servant leadership as that which can only be truly implemented in the life of a servant. In short, one cannot hope to comprehend and implement servant leadership as a program of sorts. Rather, servant leadership must begin on a very personal level with each individual choosing to abandon the socially prescribed hierarchical, visionless institution of leadership that has failed to inspire greatness.

With this abandonment, the newly liberated individual is now able to enter the world of *voluntary cooperation*. In *The Power of Servant Leadership*,

¹ Robert K. Greenleaf, *The Power of Servant Leadership* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 1998), 45.

Robert K. Greenleaf says, “In most institutions, churches included, managing and administering, the maintenance functions, are delegated and resources are allocated in order that those to whom these functions are assigned can carry on. Those who manage and administer (maintain) may also *lead-go out ahead to show the way*. But leadership is not delegated; it is assumed. If there are sanctions to compel or induce compliance, the process would not qualify as leadership. The only test of leadership is that somebody follows-*voluntarily*.”²

Transforming the Paradigm

Indeed, what servant leadership calls for is a complete overhaul of the current leadership paradigm. Where the “right to lead” has been dependent on a title, heightened salary, advanced specialized education or all three, servant leadership calls for authority to be given to those who can inspire individuals, of their own free will, to move towards a greater reality.

At this point, Greenleaf would have us ask ourselves: “what is it that we are meant to follow voluntarily?” Greenleaf calls for leaders to direct by way of a *liberating vision*. I believe that a liberating vision combines several elements of human experience to create a *not-yet realized* goal or destination, towards which people can be directed. Among these experiences are creativity and imagination, academic rigor, spiritual encounter and relational intimacy, among others. Indeed, these elements are not only the components of that *greater reality*, they are the pillars of fire that will also help to guide those being led out of the wilderness that is the current leadership paradigm.

For these purposes, I intend to discuss servant leadership as it relates to religious institutions, more specifically, Christian ministry. Sadly, the major corporations of the world are not the only institutions that leave a trail of scarred employees and broken spirits in their wake. Christian churches, for the

² Ibid., 31.

most part, have become institutions devoid of any qualities related to servant leadership. Even those churches that aim to more closely model the practices of the early Church have been infiltrated by the hierarchical, uninspiring models of leadership that are prevalent in most major corporations. This, of course, is a great irony when we consider the principles that were true of Jesus' earthly ministry. His was not a reign of power, great wealth or even academic expertise. Jesus' life was one that emphasized care for the poor, abandonment of economic prosperity, the making of peace and the forgiveness of sins.

I fear that, under the guidance of those we have entrusted to direct our churches towards the model put forward by Jesus, the American Church has become no less and no more than one of the many businesses competing for brand recognition, product placement and increased profit margins. Of course, this can be difficult to detect. The Church, inherently, is not a financial institution, and thereby cannot outwardly operate as such. Still anyone can tell by the colossal buildings that mark the grounds of megachurches and the commercials that beckon souls to hear God's "still speaking" voice that the Church considers itself an empire just as much as the Romans or Starbucks.

Here, it is necessary to begin to imagine how the Church can transform our current model into one that more closely embodies the principles of servant leadership, and thereby, Jesus' teachings. To this point, I have identified some of the principles of servant leadership: equality of persons, honesty, justice for all those impacted by the actions and decisions of institutions, the ability to inspire voluntary cooperation and the capacity to communicate both the vision of a greater reality and the means by which to create said reality. The principles of Jesus are, to name a few, concern for the marginalized of society and a rejection of practices that perpetuate that marginalization, including excessive wealth and social classism, active nonviolence and peace making and the forgiveness of those who sin against us. These will be the guiding principles

by which the Church can reclaim its role as social servant in the emerging culture.

As I have discussed, servant leadership begins in the heart and life of the individual, and the same is true of a commitment to the message of Jesus. Therefore, every church, and indeed every Christian, must, at some point, experience a transformation at the very center of their being. It just so happens that a shift of this magnitude is currently underway as cultures move from a *Modern paradigm* to a *Postmodern paradigm*. In *A New Kind of Christian*, Brian McLaren uses a fictional tale of two people in the midst of their own transformation to communicate the qualities of this cultural shift known as *postmodernism*. Through the voice of *Neo*, a character in *ANKC*,³ McLaren says, “we have to stop thinking of modern as ‘now,’ and we have to distance ourselves from the ‘now’ we have grown up in and think of it as a ‘then,’ a period in the past.”⁴ McLaren outlines ten guiding axioms that exemplified the modern paradigm: conquest and control, mechanization, analysis, secular science, absolute objectivity, critical discourse, the modern nation-state and human organization, individualism, Protestantism and institutional religion and lastly, consumerism.⁵ So, if these were the components of the modern paradigm, and thereby, at the very least, contributors to the Church’s move away from servant leadership and the message of Jesus, what will be the elements of a paradigm that will lead us to this *greater reality*? To answer this question, it will be helpful to more closely examine the previously stated principles of servant leadership and Jesus’ teachings.

³ *ANKC* is synonymous for *A New Kind of Christian* by Brian McLaren.

⁴ Brian McLaren, *A New Kind of Christian* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 15.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 16-18.

Equality of Persons

Equality of persons does not necessarily mean equality of positions. It is important to distinguish between the ways servant leaders can value the gifts and abilities of the individuals being led as equal to their own, while still *going out ahead and showing the way*.⁶ In *Trust and Teams*, Jane L. Fryar says, “Servant leaders want each follower to fully develop his or her individual gifts and abilities. Thus, servant leaders seek to steward follower giftedness, appreciating and empowering followers to develop and use their abilities to their maximum potential. Servant leaders take the risks inherent in empowering others, because they know that it ultimately strengthens organizations and brings the joy of fulfillment to the individual.”⁷

A helpful metaphor might be the one employed by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12. A servant leader might consider the institution she or he is leading to be similar to a body. Surely, every institution is complex, having many moving parts that serve different functions, and yet must work together for a greater whole than any one part in itself. The “parts” of institutions are, in fact, the individual people who contribute to the accomplishment of the institution’s objectives. To be most effective at employing this principle of equality, a servant leader must identify the role of each individual operating under her or his leadership, and afford that individual the same resources and encouragement the leader expects for herself. Thereby, the leader is affording the individuals being led the opportunity to contribute equally, and sometimes more directly, to the accomplishment of the objectives than the leader herself.

As Fryar noted, this is a risky principle for leaders operating under the current leadership paradigm. It is expected, currently, that leaders will take a higher level of responsibility for the success or failure of an institution’s

⁶ On p. 31 of *The Power of Servant Leadership*, Greenleaf defines the word *lead* to mean “going out ahead to show the way.”

⁷ Jane L. Fryar, *Trust and Teams* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2002), 72-73.

objectives. This expectation makes the individuals within an institution anything but equal. Where leaders feel more pressure to accomplish the objectives of the institution than do the non-leaders within the institution, there is a strong tendency for leaders to *burnout* under the pressure of this expectation, and for non-leaders to *underachieve* because of the lack of recognition for their contribution to the success or failure of the institution.

Equality of persons calls for every servant leader to not only become a more capable leader, in terms of involving every member of the institution, it calls for leaders to become more relational with the people following their lead, because it asks leaders to be able to recognize the strengths and abilities of every individual, rather than simply holding individuals accountable to their job descriptions. This principle might even call for new methods in hiring and staffing institutions. Where currently an individual is hired based on their professional or academic credentials, the principle of equality might call for leaders to begin to equip their institutions with individuals who are not only professionally and academically capable, but also personally capable of sharing an equal portion of the responsibility to make the institution successful.

In the Church, this principle calls for a break down in the hierarchical model that holds a Senior Pastor or a specific committee responsible for the success of the church. Of course, because churches are not financial institutions, it is harder to measure the success of a church. Still, if the purpose of a church is to afford the community around it a place to commune with God and other individuals and to offer opportunities for individuals to contribute to the betterment of society, then we have at least two measurable objectives.

Under the paradigm of servant leadership, it is no longer the responsibility of the Senior Pastor alone to see these objectives into fruition. Rather, it is the responsibility of the *entire church*. The responsibility of the Senior Pastor or the senior committee is to equip the church with staff who are

personally and professionally gifted in ministry, and willing to accept an equal share of the responsibility for accomplishing the church's objectives. Then, along with the staff, a Senior Pastor should model the behavior necessary to accomplish the church's objectives. We ought not to say the Senior Pastor or church staff should be *better worshipers* or *better citizens* than the rest of the individuals in the church, rather they ought to model the sort of behavior they expect the whole of the church to participate in.

Honesty

Honesty is one of the most abused and distorted values of the current leadership paradigm. Presently, most leaders operate on a *need-to-know* basis with the individuals they are leading. Honesty only exists long enough for a leader to criticize an individual or to complain about a current situation within the institution. The principle of honesty calls for servant leaders to establish a relationship that exhibits *honesty at all times* between leaders and non-leaders.

Because every individual within the institution is contributing equally to the success of the institution, it becomes necessary for every individual to be equally informed about the condition of the institution. It is important to note the fact that because the very nature of leadership would have leaders operating "out in front" of non-leaders, very often leaders will acquire information before those being led. This is where it becomes crucial for a servant leader to develop her or his ability to discern the timing of the distribution of information. This discernment is something that will vary by the nature of the institution and the relationships between the individuals within the institution. Still, it should be understood that information is not to be used by leaders as a power play over the individuals being led.

Operating under the principle of honesty calls for leaders and non-leaders to be more open about their personal successes and failures within the institution. Currently, the contributions of most non-leaders towards an

institutional objective go mostly unnoticed, and at the very least, unappreciated. The principle of honesty calls for servant leaders to be “on the lookout” for the successes of individuals under their leadership and to verbally celebrate those successes with those individuals and with those leading the leaders. Similarly, honesty also means that a servant leader should be aware of the shortcomings of individuals and able to constructively critique those shortcomings. Indeed, this is the easier half of the principle of honesty for the servant leader, because the principle also calls for the converse to be true. Servant leaders should work to establish the sort of relationship with non-leaders that would allow them to celebrate the successes of the leader and offer critique of the leader’s shortcomings.

Under the current leadership paradigm, this sort of behavior might appear to be a mutiny because of the hierarchical nature of the relationship between leader and non-leader. Currently, honesty operates in a very *top-down* manner, but the principle of honesty calls for this hierarchy of communication to be leveled. If, under the paradigm of servant leadership, leaders and non-leaders are equally responsible for the success of the institution, then it is only natural for non-leading individuals to have the same opportunity to motivate the leader towards greatness that the leader has for motivating non-leaders.

In the Church, the principle of honesty calls for every individual to have the opportunity to celebrate the successes of their fellow congregates and to critique their shortcomings. This sort of accountability is unheard of in most churches, because of the individualistic nature of most faith communities. However, we must notice that, within the Church, servant leadership calls for an *all-for-one* approach, not only in the accomplishment of institutional objectives, but also in the way we live our lives. Still, it is a delicate, yet essential, balance that leaders must model for congregates between being *constructively honest* and *destructively honest*. Again, it should be said that church leaders are not asked to be *more honest* persons, rather they are called

to model and invite the sort of constructive honesty they wish to see from every individual within the church.

Justice and Concern for the Marginalized

This has become a more important principle to many institutions over the last 40 years. Many of the axioms of the Modern paradigm did not lend themselves to this principle of justice. Among those axioms, conquest and control has led many institutions to inflict monumental destruction on the natural and cultural landscape of areas around the world, with little concern for anything other than a higher profit margin. Also, mechanization has made this destruction simpler and more expedient. Increasingly, consumerism combines the worst of the conquest and mechanization axioms to create opportunities for individuals to contribute to environmental destruction and human poverty at a very local level.

The principle of justice is ultimately about the reserve of power. Where the current leadership paradigm and the axioms of the Modern paradigm called for more power and more outlets to use that power, servant leadership and the Postmodern paradigm call for some of the power created during the industrial revolution and modernity to be harnessed. As we have discussed, some of the power that is to be harnessed manifests itself in the relationships between individuals within an institution. However, much of this power manifests itself between the institution as a whole and the community, nation and even world in which that institution operates.

Robert Greenleaf says, “Since World War II, there has evolved a new sensitivity to the issue of power, particularly coercive power- its abuses and legitimate uses.”⁸ The principle of justice calls for institutions to consider the impact of their practices on the world around them. For many institutions, this

⁸ Robert K. Greenleaf, *The Power of Servant Leadership* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 1998) 81.

is a complicated ethical dilemma that will require a major overhaul of their operations. Still, just as every institution is a collection of individuals, operating towards a collective whole, the individual practices of institutions have a collective impact on the world, be it positive or negative. So, institutions ought to begin to implement the principle of justice at the most local level. For example, there is a retailer of home furnishings that operates in Newton Centre, MA. I happen to know that this retailer discards approximately 1000 lbs. of recyclable cardboard each week. This particular retailer qualifies for a recycling program that would only require them to discard the cardboard into a designated recycling dumpster, as opposed to the current “trash only” dumpster. Still, this retailer has chosen not to take advantage of the recycling program because it would require them to sacrifice two of their six parking spaces in order to make room for the additional dumpster.

How might the community of Newton be changed if those thousands of pounds of cardboard were not occupying valuable, diminishing space in the local landfill? How would the world be different if institutions would begin to make the sacrifices necessary to prolong the aesthetic beauty and valuable resources of the earth?

Most institutions do not value human life any more than they do the quality of the environment. Currently, there is a move among many institutions to incorporate *fair trading* into their practices. Fair trading means, simply, that when institutions use individuals in various countries to accomplish some aspect of their objectives, the institutions will compensate those individuals in a way that allows them to have a *decent* standard of life according to their own society. However, even within the practice of fair trading, there are moral and ethical ambiguities that cannot be clarified in the course of this text alone; for instance, how does one define the term *decent*? Because of these ambiguities and complexities, most corporations forego their responsibility to consider issues like fair trading all together.

The principle of justice requires institutions to begin to consider their impact on communities and the world, to such a degree that some institutions might even consider those communities active participants in the institution. Servant leaders should seek to establish an equality, not just among the individuals directly connected to the institution, but also with those individuals impacted by the decisions and actions of the institution. This means, of course, establishing an honest dialogue with the members of those communities affected by the institution, allowing those individuals to celebrate the successes of the institution and to call the institution into accountability for the ways in which the community believes the institution is failing it.

The application of the principle of justice should be a pressing consideration for any religious institution. If one of the most basic objectives of a church is to better the society around it, then issues of justice for the environment and the people of that society should be central. Jesus asks his followers, “When I was naked, did you clothe me? When I was hungry, did you feed me? When I was in jail, did you visit me?”⁹ Churches ought to make it their central aim to be able to answer these questions with a resounding “yes!”. Here again, servant leaders, as the very name implies, ought to be so concerned about the betterment of their society that in some way, their own comforts and desires are hampered. In the Gospel of Mark, a follower of Jesus’ asks him what he must do “to inherit eternal life.” Jesus replies, “go, sell what you own, and give the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”¹⁰ The modern church has been a place of wealth, social unconcern and environmental neglect. In the Postmodern world, Jesus is calling his disciples, once again, to sell everything and follow him to a greater reality.

⁹ In Matthew 25:31-46, The Son of Man separates the people of every nation into two groups: those who helped him when he was in need, and those who did not.

¹⁰ Mark 10:17-22

Inspiration of Voluntary Cooperation

As discussed previously, Greenleaf calls for leaders to direct by way of a *liberating vision*. Greenleaf says, “A mark of a leader, an attribute that puts him in a position to show the way for others, is that he is better than most at pointing the direction.”¹¹ A liberating vision is a hypothetical destination at which the leader and those being led can expect to find a greater reality with a deeper sense of satisfaction and productivity. Here, it is important to note that the *greater productivity* to be found at this hypothetical destination is not synonymous with an increase in profit, conversion rates or any other measurable unit. This *greater reality* is a place where individuals are more autonomous, more beneficial to society and generally more satisfied with the conditions of their lives.

Greenleaf puts forward a standard by which every servant leader can measure her or his effectiveness: “do those served grow as persons; do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? *And*, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will he benefit, or, at least, will he not be further deprived?”¹² This standard ought to give servant leaders a measure by which they can assess the appropriateness of their vision, by which they hope to inspire others to follow.

Sadly, the Church has become as visionless an institution as any, in spite of the instructions of Habakkuk 2:2.¹³ If the Church is to be a place of communion with God and a force for social improvement, servant leaders of the Church must develop vivid images of that *greater reality* and begin to inspire Christians to partake in the transformations of life that will bring about that

¹¹ Robert K. Greenleaf, *The Servant As Leader* (Indianapolis: The Robert K. Greenleaf Center, 1991), 9.

¹² *Ibid.*, 7.

¹³ Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it.

reality.

Communication of Vision and Means For a Greater Reality

Communication is a buzzword within most institutions. However, in spite of the popularity of the word itself, the practice is severely under utilized. Greenleaf says, “only a true natural servant automatically responds to any problem by listening *first*... because true listening builds strength in other people.”¹⁴ This principle relates directly to the first two: equality and honesty. Servant leaders ought to approach communication with those whom they are leading as an open exchange between equal contributors. Often, leaders *talk* only long enough to express the demands or concerns of a very specific situation, but servant leaders ought to approach every exchange as an opportunity to gain insight into how the institution is *truly* functioning. If leaders dominate and control the lines of communication, they can only expect to get a very limited, one-sided perspective of the condition of the individuals and the institution as a whole.

Once a liberating vision has been developed, and the leader has communicated the objectives of that vision, a servant leader ought to be prepared to offer practical means for accomplishing those objectives. At times, the means for accomplishing those objectives will be clear: discarding ineffective practices, refreshing the duties of individuals within the institution, perhaps even rearranging the office furniture.¹⁵ Other times, the means for going from the institution’s current condition to that greater reality might be

¹⁴ Robert K. Greenleaf, *The Servant As Leader* (Indianapolis: The Robert K. Greenleaf Center, 1991), 10.

¹⁵ Often the setup of an office makes a clear statement about the power structure of the individuals within that office. Mayor Michael Bloomberg of New York, in an attempt to counter this, works out of a cubical, which is the same size and in the same room as the rest of his staff.

unclear and complicated. Regarding this, Greenleaf says, “[the servant leader] needs to have *a sense for the unknowable* and be able to *foresee the unforeseeable*... There usually is an information gap between the solid information in hand and what is needed. The art of leadership rests, in part, on the ability to bridge the gap by intuition, that is, a judgment from the unconscious process. The person who is better at this than most is likely to emerge the leader because he contributes something of great value... Leaders, therefore, must be more creative than most; and creativity is largely discovery, a push into the uncharted and the unknown.”¹⁶

For church leaders, this push into the unknown ought to be coupled with fervent prayers for God’s guidance. We observe the fact that Jesus, at several points during his earthly ministry, removed himself from the pressure of his current conditions to seek God’s guidance. These times often took place in the desert or the *wilderness*. Servant leaders ought never to neglect their responsibility to employ Divine guidance. Church leaders confident of their own ability to *fill in the information gap* ought to take a closer look at the model of Jesus’ prayer life.

Peace Making

At first glance, this principle might seem to have no relationship to servant leadership. But, this could not be further from the truth. The sort of violence that is intimately related to servant leadership is the violence individuals commit against one another and themselves by refusing to allow one another to be wholly themselves. At its very center, human wholeness, as presented by Parker Palmer, is an integration of one’s life decisions and the guiding voice of the soul within. Thus, the principle of peace making requires servant leaders to employ an element of themselves that is often severely

¹⁶ Ibid., 14-15.

neglected under the current leadership paradigm: the soul. More specifically, the soul is the guiding voice within every individual that is recognized as authentic and results in “the ‘integrity that comes from being what you are.’”¹⁷

Within institutions, “the divided life,” as Palmer calls it, manifests itself in many ways. Leaders who experience burnout or non-leaders who underachieve are often the victims of the divided life. The principles of servant leadership call for a very intentional cooperation between the very personal qualities of each individual and the gifts and abilities that individual contributes. Without this sense of personal integrity and authenticity, how can any of the other guiding principles of servant leadership be applied?

Palmer says, “Institutions have been known to punish people for living integral lives.”¹⁸ How many individuals have been reprimanded or even replaced for voicing concerns regarding the implications of their institutions’ decisions and practices? How many individuals have been promoted up through the ranks of institutions because of their willingness to play by the *company rules*. These are both examples of the sort of violence we commit against ourselves and each other by forcing individuals to live the divided life.

Servant leadership, and every principle thereof, calls not only for honesty between individuals within an institution, but also within those individuals. The principle of peace making should operate as an extension of the other guiding principles of servant leadership to the internal life of every individual. For individuals within an institution to experience the peace of living wholly as themselves, a deep sense of equality, honesty and justice are essential for both the leaders and those being led.

In the Church, the inner voice of the individual is identified as the Holy Spirit. We believe this voice, guiding us towards authenticity and integrity, is

¹⁷ Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 4.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

the voice of God. Still, many people are forced to live divided lives, even though we attribute the possibility for wholeness to God's voice. In *A Hidden Wholeness*, Palmer says, "I think, for example, of the plight of many gay and lesbian young people in a society that 'disapproves' of them. Stuart Mathis was a gay man who grew up in a religious community that regards homosexuality as a sin. His church insisted that he 'change his sexual orientation,' and when he found it impossible to do so, he committed suicide, leaving these words behind:

[My] church has no idea that as I type this letter, there are surely boys and girls on their callused knees imploring God to free them from this pain. They hate themselves. They retire to bed with their fingers pointed to their heads in the form of a gun. I am free now. I am no longer in pain and I no longer hate myself. As it turns out, God never intended for me to be straight. Perhaps my death might be a catalyst for something good."¹⁹

Homosexuals are not the only members of the Church who are often forced to live a divided life, but surely the example above is a clear and striking example of the result of a life divided. This young man's violence against himself was wholly destructive. Servant leaders within churches ought to strive for openness and equality that affirms every individual as a child of God and a welcome member of the Church.

Forgiveness of Sins

No one is perfect, Jesus recognized that. One of the essential elements of Jesus' earthly ministry was the forgiveness of sins. Indeed, most Christians

¹⁹ Ibid., 41.

would say that Jesus is still forgiving sins in the lives of individuals. Servant leaders ought to follow Jesus' lead by recognizing the limitations of humanity and the limitations of each individual.

Allowing individuals some room for error only serves to enhance the rest of the principles of servant leadership. Parker Palmer says, "Wholeness does not mean perfection: it means embracing brokenness as an integral part of life... The divided life, at bottom is not a failure of ethics. It is a failure of human wholeness."²⁰ As servant leaders, we must strive to create institutional relationships and practices that see error as an opportunity for growth.

Under the current leadership paradigm, most individuals are considered a liability when they fail to produce perfect results. However, this model places unrealistic expectations on the performance of individuals and does not make space for individuals to exceed their current expectations. These sorts of rigid, inflexible expectations are the product of the Modern paradigm. McLaren says, "modern people have dedicated themselves to controlling people, results, risks, economies, experiments, profit margins, variables, nature, even weather... modernity has been the story of organization and reorganization."²¹

By affording people the opportunity to make mistakes, servant leaders break free of the organizational bins of the current paradigm, in pursuit of even greater productivity and satisfaction. By demoralizing and forbidding mistakes, institutions make it possible to project the results of any given individual on any given day. Thereby, institutions can project the total net profit of a given product, market, time period or other measurable unit. When an individual makes a mistake, the whole system is rendered *broken*, and the individual is then responsible not only for the very local repercussions of that mistake, but also for the break down of "the system."

²⁰ Ibid., 5-7.

²¹ McLaren, 16-18.

When this “system” is disregarded, and individuals are allowed to make mistakes and encouraged and given the opportunity to learn from those mistakes, that individual might actually perform her or his tasks better than “the system” might have accounted for. As Jesus recognized, forgiving sins is not only about removing guilt, it is about enabling individuals to be better people living in a *greater reality* than before.

For the church, this ought to be another central concern. Following Jesus’ model, individuals within the church ought to be encouraged to seek forgiveness and to issue it freely and readily. Pride is often the greatest hindrance to this principle. Servant leaders ought to remember the fact that they are not asked to be *better*, rather, servant leaders are called to live in humility, seeking and issuing forgiveness each time a wrong occurs. Because the Church’s objectives cannot be measured in units, the Church seeks rather to accomplish its objectives by way of changing lives. Those individuals living under the oppression of unrealized and unforgiven wrongs ought to find in the Church both compassion and accountability. Every individual ought to inspire in each other the humility and boldness necessary to seek out forgiveness and even to seek out those who need to be forgiven. There is great power in the act of forgiveness; the power to change lives, free captives and transform institutions rests in the act of forgiveness.

Transforming the Church

In this section, I hope to discuss some of the ways in which servant leadership and the teachings of Jesus will guide my ministry in the Postmodern Church. Brian McLaren says, “when you’re on a really long voyage, you have to get beyond asking, ‘Are we there yet?’ and instead start asking, ‘Are we making progress?’”²² I believe that the journey from the current condition of the

²² McLaren, xviii.

Church, as an institution, will take an unknown number of years and countless proponents of change to effect the sort of transformation that the principles of servant leadership and the teachings of Jesus call for. Still, I am hopeful that the principles discussed here will one day be a working reality in the Christian church.

Greenleaf says, “I suggest that human service that requires love cannot be satisfactorily dispensed by specialized institutions that exist apart from community...”²³ I am hopeful that one of the greatest improvements the Postmodern Church will make on its predecessor will be to reconcile itself with the cultures of which it is a part. Perhaps, as a result of the organizational impulse of modernity, the Modern Church separated itself from the cultures in which it operated. Possibly, when the Modern Church realized that culture is not something that can be *conquered*, it opted rather to sequester itself.

There is already some evidence that this reconciliation will, in fact, take place. Movements such as alternative worship, house churches and Christian organizations involved in issues of social justice are leading the way for such a reconciliation, among many, many others. Still, this reconciliation will only be accomplished in the hearts and actions of individuals, living and working within the institutions. I hope to continually seek out and create opportunities between individuals within the Church and non-religious individuals to dialogue and learn from each other, as equal contributors. Surely the Church of Jesus, which is missional at its core, as Jesus was, must not seek to convert those outside the institution, rather we must learn from those people how it is that the Church is not meeting their needs and begin to envision a greater reality that includes those people as well.

Within my lifetime, I believe that the hierarchy which is the status of ordination will be leveled, and at most be the consideration of only a very small

²³ Robert K. Greenleaf, *The Servant As Leader* (Indianapolis: The Robert K. Greenleaf Center, 1991), 29.

sect within Christianity. This issue, which has become as divisive as indulgences was for the Catholic Church of Martin Luther's day, serves only to further build up practices and principles contrary to servant leadership and the teachings of Jesus.

As Greenleaf says, "leadership is not delegated; it is assumed."²⁴ Surely, Jesus' authority was not delegated to him by some committee or council of religious leaders. Jesus' authority as a religious leader was granted him by the people who followed him: his disciples. It should be said, I do not expect that the Postmodern Church will operate by way of radical leaders, accountable only to those who follow them. I do expect, however, that the means by which leaders currently come to authority within the Church will be radically undermined within postmodernity.

On the whole, I expect the Postmodern Church to be equally as grounded in relationships as the Modern Church is in doctrine. I believe that my primary role, and the role of anyone aiming to lead as a servant in the Postmodern Church, will be to establish relationships that are grounded in equality, honesty and justice. For me, these are not three guiding principles among many, these are *the* principles upon which all institutions will be expected to operate under the Postmodern paradigm. Where the current role of a Pastor in the Modern Church is to deliver sermons, the Postmodern Church will look to Pastors for rich, meaningful conversations. Where worship in the Modern Church has been dependent on motifs and elements very much associated with this world, i.e. bar tunes turned hymns, rock songs turned praise songs, TVs turned hymnals, etc., the Postmodern Church will expect a worship experience that both incorporates and transcends the experiences of this world, but most of all is inclusive and involves every participant equally.

²⁴ Robert K. Greenleaf, *The Power of Servant Leadership* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 1998), 31.

Conclusion

My role as a servant leader, and the role of every servant leader in the Postmodern world, will be to build intricate webs of relationships that will support and sustain the institutions in which we are all involved. Under the Modern paradigm, institutions have been envisioned to operate like buildings, from the ground up, with authority resting at the highest heights of those institutional structures. However, the model of the web will replace the hierarchical building model in the Postmodern paradigm because these principles of equality, honesty and justice *will* eventually dominate the ways we lead institutions, and these principles cannot be supported by a hierarchy.

The seven principles listed here, I believe, will be the rubric by which servant leaders can develop liberating visions to lead institutions into the Postmodern world. In the Postmodern world, we will no longer say that our practices are *built upon* our principles, implying that our principles exist somewhere below our practices. This is the very model that has delivered the institutional catastrophes we associate with Enron, World Com and the like. Rather, under the Postmodern paradigm, we will say that our practices are wrapped up in our principles, like objects caught in a web. This web will keep our practices and our principles side by side and interrelated as we operate within institutions.

The Church, too, will be forced to abandon many of its institutional models, especially those that are so obviously the result of the Modern paradigm. Servant leaders within the church should begin to incorporate these principles into their ministries. Still, this particular guide will not be the web itself. As Greenleaf says, “the leadership of trailblazers... is so ‘situational’ that it rarely draws on known models.”²⁵ Current servant leaders will have to forge ahead of the masses of leaders who will, undoubtedly, be somehow surprised

²⁵ Robert K. Greenleaf, *The Servant As Leader* (Indianapolis: The Robert K. Greenleaf Center, 1991), 25.

by the paradigm shift when it is more obviously underway. Those who wish to be ready for individual and institutional success in the *new world* will begin or continue to practice servant leadership now, and those church leaders who wish to be successful will couple the practices of servant leadership with the teachings of Jesus (as if the two could be separated).