

## TAKING ANOTHER LOOK AT LEADERSHIP – BASIC PRINCIPLES

It has been my consistent belief that we as Christians should take the trouble to read more about our relationship with Jesus Christ. However I must also state that when we get into the habit of reading we should be prepared to have our thinking challenged. This has been something that I have learnt to appreciate.

There is a paradox that has stared me in the face regarding the matter of leadership and servanthood. In Matt. 20:26 we read, “Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant.” The Greek word for servant is *diakonos* and actually consists of two words. *Dia* means “through” or “across” just like diameter is a measurement through the centre of a circle. *Konos* may be translated as “dust, dirt or earth.” Therefore *diakonos* literally means “through the dust.” The words *minister* and *deacon* come from this same root.

This choice of the word *diakonos* by Jesus to deal with the matter of leadership is very different to what you and I might have expected. When we read the gospels we do find that the disciples had many disputes about leadership and in most instances they all related to unrighteous self-interest.

In most instances Jesus chose not to respond to their discussions with direct answers but rather chose to *demonstrate* servanthood. It can be safely said that Jesus had very little to say about leadership and even less about how to be a leader. His few references to leaders were primarily negative, creating the impression that he viewed leadership as having secondary importance.

Most contemporary Christian books on leadership avoid using Jesus as a model for leadership, choosing rather to concentrate on Moses, David, Nehemiah or Paul. However it must be stated that just because Jesus is silent on the matter of leadership must not be interpreted as meaning that leadership is a nonbiblical concept.

Scripture testifies to the fact that God has gifted and called people to lead. Yet servanthood and leadership appear to be two contradictory concepts. Today these two concepts have been taken by leaders to create the term *servant leadership*.

Today in the Church we hear the language of servanthood used but we have become cynical about this because the person who mouths the words is not demonstrating them.

Unfortunately it must be pointed out that many interpret servant leadership as being the expectation that the leader should do other peoples work. On the other hand it can also be stated that leaders have exercised so much control over their followers that in essence they are actually abusing and exploiting other people.

People are confused about the meaning of servant leadership because they have a misconception of leadership in general, and the paradox inherent in the term *servant leadership*. The word *servant* has a connotation of someone who has no freedom to choose for himself but must do the bidding of the master. By contrast the word *leader* indicates a person who does the choosing for those he leads.

Many people conclude that a person may be either a servant or a leader but not both simultaneously. We have all read books about leaders and we have read books about servants but rarely have the two been merged into the same person.

There are three thoughts that I must bring to your attention:

First, Jesus Christ is the ultimate model for all leadership models, styles, and concepts. He was and is *the* universal leader. His leadership applies in all cultures and at all times. Secondly, not only is servant leadership not a contradiction of terms, it is the *only* way to properly lead. Finally, servant leadership is so radical, so heavenly, we have missed it.