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# Leadership and the Christian Community

by John B. Hulst  
Dean of Students



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A Keynote address delivered by Rev. Hulst to the National Union of Christian Schools Convention at York University in Toronto, Ontario, Canada on August 7, 1974. The theme of the convention was "A Kaleidoscope of Leadership."

We were gathered in a college auditorium to observe the graduation of 175 Christian young men and young women. The man who spoke to us was a Christian—a Christian who had purposely set himself to the task of giving leadership to the people of God in the area of politics. He described for us the biblical vision which directed him in his political activity. But he also spoke very movingly about the difficulties he faced—difficulties which arose not only from his opponents, but also from within

the party of which he was a member. However, one of the problems which weighed most heavily upon him was the lack of a Christian community to which he could give leadership, from which he could derive encouragement and support, and which would reflect in concrete ways the principles he sought to enunciate. He was a man willing and, in many ways, able to give leadership. But he found it difficult, if not impossible, to do so for lack of a visible, supportive, unified Christian community.

When he was finished I thought to myself, "How pathetic! How tragic! A Christian politician unable to lead for lack of a Christian community! A body of Christians unable to make a political impact for lack of a political leader!" It was this rather sad picture, along with the plain teaching of the Bible, which led me to the decision to speak to you this evening concerning LEADERSHIP AND THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY.

I propose in the time given me, first, to show that God has purposed to accomplish His will in this world, not through a well qualified individual placed in this or that position, but through the community of His redeemed people. Second, I wish to demonstrate that that community cannot function effectively without leadership, a leadership which God provides by means of particular offices appointed within the redeemed community. And third, I hope to describe the kind of leadership which the Christian community needs if it is going to fulfill God's purpose in this world; and to show how essential Christian education is in training that kind of leadership.

Dealing with the matter step by step, let us consider that God has purposed to accomplish His will in this world through the community of His redeemed people.

The Bible tells us that in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth and that He created man in His own image. The Bible tells us concerning man, the crown of creation, that he was given a task to perform. Man was commissioned by God to care for and exercise dominion over the creation and to perform his work according to God's law and unto His glory. Man was to perform this task not as one man in isolation from other men, but as part of the human community, as man in relationship to other men. From the beginning God dealt covenantally with the race of men, with the human community, and assigned to that community the task of ruling the creation in His Name.

Sometime after the beginning, according to Genesis 3, Adam, the first man, fell into sin. Because the human race along

with the entire creation was represented in Adam, when Adam fell the whole race fell and with the creation was estranged from God. The result? Man continued to work in God's creation, but according to his own evil will and to satisfy his own sinful pride. Man continued to seek community, but found his efforts frustrated by his own envy, hatred and greed.

In the fulness of time, God sent the second or last Adam, His only-begotten Son, into the flesh and into the sin-cursed creation to take over where the first Adam had so miserably failed. He was sent to work for His Father, obeying His will and

"The Bible tells us concerning man, the crown of creation, that he was given a task to perform. Man was commissioned by God to care for and exercise dominion over the creation and to perform his work according to God's law and unto His glory."

seeking His glory. But because of sin Christ's work, in distinction from that of the first Adam, was essentially a redemptive work. You see? He was born into a humanity at enmity with God, into a world under the curse of God. Thus it was His duty before God, as the Suffering Servant of Jehovah, to save God's elect sons and daughters out of the fallen humanity and to restore the creation and all things in it to the Father. It was through His death and resurrection that Christ accomplished this redemptive work. Ascending into heaven He was made to sit at the right hand of His heavenly Father, from which position of power and authority He rules this very day as King over the entire creation and as Head of His Body, the Church, the new humanity, the redeemed community. From the time of His ascension until the time of His return upon the clouds of heaven, it is and will be the continuing purpose of Christ to bring to expression the sovereign glory of His

Father through the service of the redeemed Body, the redeemed community of which He is the Head, and in the creation over which He rules as King. No, Christ does not merely redeem individuals and leave them "out there" as individuals. He unites the redeemed into the community of which He is Head. No, Christ does not accomplish His purpose in this world, first of all, through a devoted, but isolated, Christian here and there. He accomplishes His purpose primarily through His body; through those who confess, "We believe the communion of the saints."

And thus it is that the Apostle Paul emphasizes throughout his epistles that the redeemed are "one body in Christ" in order that they may walk worthily of the calling wherewith they are called (Eph. 4). But we have lost much of this sense of community, haven't we? And why? Because we have tended toward the individualistic conviction that our salvation is an end in itself. Because we have lost sight of the covenantal, kingdom vision just described—a vision which drove our Reformed, Calvinistic fathers to acknowledge that we have been redeemed and made members of the body of Christ not merely in order that we

tasks to which we are summoned. We must be recalled to the confession and the conviction that we are one in Christ, not simply so that we can be nice and smile at each other; but in order that, as members of the new humanity, we may live and work together solī Deo gloria.

In this connection I would address a word to those present here this evening who are representatives of the instituted, the organized church. I am sure that most, if not all of you, hold membership in the instituted church and that many of you hold special office in the church such as that of pastors, elders, and deacons. To you who hold special offices I would point out that the instituted church has a peculiar responsibility relative to the Christian community about which we have been speaking. Paul makes this clear in Ephesians 4: "And he gave some to be apostles, ...prophets, ...evangelists, ...pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ." It is the task of the instituted church, in the Name of Jesus Christ and by the preaching of the Word, to call the Christian community into being, to nurture and strengthen the Christian com-

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may be redeemed; but especially so that, as a body, we may live according to His will by serving Him in every area of life.

This evening, therefore, we must decry the divisions which exist among us, the labels we so quickly attach to one another, the polarization with which we seem at ease, and the infighting which leaves us paralyzed and inactive before the gigantic

community, and to direct the Christian community to the fulfillment of its Kingdom responsibilities in the entirety of God's reclaimed creation. Therefore, I would urge you and plead with you tonight, as those who are appointed by Christ to preach the Word, administer the sacraments, and exercise discipline, to use the means of grace entrusted to you in such a way that

we may be called together to faith in and obedience to Christ as Savior and Lord, strengthened as a body in our trust and commitment, and driven unitedly to serve Him in His world. For it is through the community of His redeemed people that God has purposed to accomplish His will in this world.

But the Christian community cannot function effectively without leadership, which leadership God provides through the appointment of particular offices.

We have already seen that Christ has been anointed by God the Father to be King and Lord over all things. He is the Great Office-Bearer. It is His right and duty to administer the affairs of the world so that God's Kingdom may come and God's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven. We have also seen that Christ exercises His office before God through the agency of the new humanity, the redeemed community. But how is that community of the redeemed to fulfill its responsibility, its task, its duty before God in this world? The answer to that question—and it is an important question—is two-fold: Christ qualifies, equips the Christian community for the performance of its task: and Christ provides the Christian community with direction in the performance of its task, direction which is given through a biblically-directed leadership.

The Christian community is enabled to fulfill its responsibility before God in this world through Christ, who qualifies the Christian community for the performance of its task. Christ is the Anointed One. But through His Spirit He causes the redeemed, all the redeemed, to share in His anointing. He puts them all into office, appointing and qualifying them to administer every part of creation in His Name. It is wrong, therefore, to distinguish between those who have office and those who do not. It is right and necessary to proclaim the universal office of believers, and to emphasize that to be a Christian is to be in office—the office of prophet, priest, and king. For it is through appointment to and qualification for office of

believer that Christ enables His people to live the Kingdom Life in this world.

Furthermore, Christ gives direction to the Christian community through the appointment and qualification of leaders. While it is true that all members of the redeemed community are in office, it must be recognized that there is a difference or variety of offices, tasks, and responsibilities within that community. This difference is the direct result of the different gifts which God bestows upon His people. God gives to some the gift of preaching, to some the gift of teaching, to some the gift of technology, to still others the gift of ruling. And along with each gift comes the responsibility to use that gift in the service of the Lord. The result is a particular or special office, be it the office of preacher, or teacher, or industrialist, or ruler. These particular offices, brought into being by the gifts of God, coincide with the various social areas of life. The particular offices do not function without distinction in all areas. Each office has an area peculiar to itself: the pastor functions in the church, the teacher functions in the school, the industrialist functions in the factory, and the ruler functions in the state. And these people, endowed with special gifts and placed in particular offices by God, we call leaders! They are leaders, men and women who have been appointed and qualified for office by God; who have been placed at the head of the Christian community in that specific area which, by its very nature, demands the exercise of gifts and offices peculiar to itself; who are to direct the people of God so that they may fulfill their responsibility before the Lord.

You ask, "How does the Christian community fulfill its responsibility in this world?" The answer: the Lord qualifies that community through His Spirit and directs that community through leaders, endowed with particular gifts, who function, of course, according to His Word. Don't you see? On the one hand, Christian leaders cannot fulfill their responsibility before God without a Christian community qualified for office by the Spirit of God

and driven by the realization that they have been redeemed to serve their King in every part of His Kingdom. And on the other hand, the people of God cannot fulfill their responsibility before the Lord without leaders qualified for their particular offices, through the gifts of God, and committed to the use of those gifts in giving direction to God's people, according to the demands of His Word.

But this—a Christian community and leadership—is precisely what is lacking in

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our time. I trust that this was your conviction when you chose your convention theme. Consider, for example, what is happening in the area of education. Why is it that leaders in the area of education—those especially endowed by God with the gift of teaching—find it so frustratingly difficult to give leadership? It is because God's people, for various reasons, are increasingly ignoring their office and responsibility in the area of education and fail or refuse to acknowledge that they have been redeemed by Jesus Christ in order that, in the area of education, they may establish, support, and send their children to Christian Schools. Why is it that, all too often, the faithful of the Lord find themselves floundering and confused relative to the nature, function and purpose of the educational enterprise? It is usually because they lack leaders with the understanding, vision, faith, commitment, and intestinal fortitude to say, "This is the way which the Lord has laid before us! Let us walk in it."

Leaders need the support of God's people! God's people need the direction of Christian leaders!

Finally, we note the kind of leaders needed by the Christian community, and the place of Christian education in the training of that kind of leadership.

I am sure that all of us here this evening recognize the responsibility of the Christian School, on all levels, to prepare the Christian community for the fulfillment of its universal office. This is the very reason for the establishment of our schools. They exist in order that young citizens of the Kingdom may come to understand the various aspects of God's creation in the light of the Scriptures, and that they may be led to see that in all areas they must be prepared to serve Christ their King.

But it is also the responsibility of the Christian School especially and increasingly at the higher levels of education, to detect the special gifts given to particular youth, and to train and prepare such youth for leadership in the various areas. Doing so, the Christian School must recognize that the Christian community needs leaders who will function as ruling-servants. The Christian leader is a ruler. He has been appointed by God to administer, direct and govern the affairs of a certain area according to the plan which God has set forth in His Word. But he is to rule as a servant; as a servant of God and as a servant of God's people, whom he must assist in such a way that they will be enabled and motivated to fulfill their responsibility to the Lord. It is my feeling that our record has not been too impressive on this score. The graduates of our Christian high schools and colleges have usually possessed a measure of expertise. But they have not always been too impressive relative to their willingness to render humble and obedient service. The Christian community resents those who act as though they are the people and wisdom shall die with them. And rightly so, for those who seek arrogantly to lead, without awareness that they are servants of God and His people according to His Word, are not leaders. It remains therefore for us, who are involved

in the training of leaders, to make clear to our gifted youth that they are under authority; that they are being trained to be ministers, servants of the Word; and that he who would be the greatest must be the servant of all.

The Christian School must also recognize that the Christian community needs leaders who are qualified for leadership. I have no sympathy with those who insist or imply that we need not recognize the authority of a man who occupies an office but does not seem to have the qualifications or insights demanded by that office. The fact is, and the Scriptures make this clear, that when someone is in office, and as long as he is in office, we are to acknowledge the God-given authority exercised by the office's occupant, and may resist that authority only when called upon to do that which is contrary to the will of God. But that does not alter the fact that office or leadership demands, by its very nature, qualification and ability. The Christian community has often been hindered in the fulfillment of its Kingdom responsibilities by preachers who were not qualified to preach, by teachers who could not teach, by businessmen who didn't know their business, and by politicians who had little or no understanding of the nature and function of government.

The Christian community needs qualified leadership, and much of the responsibility for training that leadership falls upon the Christian School. We must assist young people in discovering the gifts which God has bestowed upon them. We must insist that they seek further training relative to those specific gifts, so that, instead of being saddled with preachers who have the gift of mechanics, teachers who have the gift of business, or politicians who don't seem to have any gifts at all; we may be led by preachers who are qualified to preach, teachers who can teach, businessmen who know their business, and politicians who understand the God-ordained function of government. We must demand that our young people receive the best training, the best education. When I say this, I am not

merely thinking of quality education, as that is usually understood. I am thinking primarily of that kind of education which will qualify and enable the occupants of our pulpits to proclaim the whole counsel of God; educators to set forth and apply a biblical perspective on learning; politicians to articulate a consistently Christian direction for government; labor leaders to raise a God-glorifying banner for workmen to follow; and communications experts to establish Christian radio stations and T.V. centers setting forth a God-centered culture. I am thinking of education which is in harmony with and measures up to the demands of the Word of God.

This is our challenge and opportunity: the education and training of qualified leaders, ready and willing to serve God and His people. If we fail to meet this challenge and seize upon this opportunity, chaos and disillusionment await us. If we do meet the challenge and seize upon the opportunity, as those who are more than conquerors through Him who loved us, I can see a day close at hand when a Christian leader, such as the one mentioned in the introduction—be it a preacher, teacher, labor-leader, a politician, or a businessman—will issue the call to advance in the Name of the Lord. And the people of God to whom he speaks, instead of remaining silent or asking, "Who does he think he is?" will respond with simple but meaningful faith, singing:

Like a mighty army  
Moves the Church of God;  
Brothers, we are treading  
Where the saints have trod:  
We are not divided,  
All one body we,  
One in hope and doctrine,  
One in charity.

Crowns and thrones may perish,  
Kingdoms rise and wane,  
But the Church of Jesus  
Constant will remain;  
Gates of hell can never  
'Gainst that Church prevail;  
We have Christ's own promise  
And that cannot fail.