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FOUNDATIONS OF ADMINISTRATION THE BOOK OF ACTS AS CASE STUDY

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The Book of Acts narrates function finding form, power directed into meaningful channels, and fire energizing and creating, rather than consuming and destroying. How can religion, the most privatized and internalized of human emotions and personal values, discover an institutional home and public form? How can organization simultaneously be human-directed and God-controlled? *Organism* and *organization* are derived from the same root word, but their common usage often connotes antithetical meanings. Both an organism and an organization necessitate interdependent parts, but the latter is often considered the death of the former.

Ironically, spirituality, the human experience that has been most mysterious and immaterial, has become a most visible and institutional cultural entity. Institutions require administration, the management of persons and machinery. Yet the demands of management often accumulate until the original intentions are lost in the evolving complexity of policies and offices. No one would argue that the infantile existence of Christianity, as narrated in Acts, is replicated in the twenty-first century church. Some very committed Christians would even argue that the explosion of miraculous spirituality, Christianity's supernatural mode of operation 2,000 years ago, has little to do with how the Church should function in contemporary society.

My personal observation is that primitive Christianity has provided, as it should, ethical, missional, and inspirational direction for the Church but seldom has it been considered a model for administration. Nowhere in the New Testament are we told how to organize a church. Nevertheless, though the Book of Acts cannot be translated into a manual on ecclesial management, this essay will argue for principles of church leadership and administration as relevant today as they were in the Church's earliest existence. In fact, a newly discovered trust in a theologically centered administration as narrated in Acts would solve many of the conflictual issues in today's church. I will also suggest that current

administrative procedures are often far removed from New Testament thought and Christian intention.

Luke narrates God's formation of community, a story of communal life in the first thirty years after the resurrection and ascension of Christ. Community health presupposes rules of conduct and persons granted the authority to interpret and enforce those rules. The question is not whether administration is going to exist, but whether it is going to become an end in itself rather than a means for the stability and advancement of communal life. Salvific communities discover leaders who place the community's redemption beyond their own advancement. Early Christian leaders went about the daunting task of creating a government that renders more energy than it absorbs, an organizational structure sufficient for facilitating the community's mission rather than becoming the mission. The actors in Acts create organizational practices and procedures that add more than they subtract.

For this reason, the ongoing interest in the images and ideas of "church" in Acts should focus on emulating its missionary vocation and prophetic message, its resurrection practices, and the nature of its spiritual leadership—important claims on any congregation in any age—rather than on replicating outward forms of governance and worship or other time-conditioned practices.¹

One may legitimately question whether any New Testament word represents a twenty-first century normative understanding of the word "administration." No Greek New Testament word can be translated "administration." The Authorized King James twice translates *diakonia* (service) as "administration" (1 Cor. 12:5 and 2 Cor. 9:12). The *New International Version* uses "administration" three times for the words *kubernēseis* (leading, guiding) (1 Cor. 12:28) and *oikonomia* (stewardship, management), from which we get the word "economy" (Eph. 3:2, 9). The *New King James* translates *kubernēseis* (1 Cor. 12:28) and *diakonia* (2 Cor. 9:12) as "administration." The *New American Standard* uses the word or a form of it five times: *kubernēseis* (1 Cor. 12:28), *diakonia* (2 Cor. 8:19-20), and *oikonomia* (Eph. 3:9 and 1 Tim. 1:4).

Though none of the above words accurately represents administration as executive oversight, they do enable us to definitively conclude that administration as a concept does exist in the New Testament and consequently in the Book of Acts, since the Epistles are addressed to the "Acts" churches. If we combine the ideas of the three Greek words above, we might define "administration" as guiding management through servanthood. We are tempted to infer from its

1. Robert Wall, "The Acts of the Apostles," *The New Interpreter's Bible*, ed. Leander Keck, et al. (Nashville: Abingdon, 2002), 10:28.

Latin twelfth-century origin that the word carries the Christian concept of ministry, to minister, but the English word “administration” refers more to carrying out duties of governance than it does acts of Christian service.

None of the above words appear in the Book of Acts. Yet Acts is the history of the Church finding its organizational legs. William Willimon refers to the Acts of the Apostles as “Christian Leadership 101.”² The Book of Acts records life in community and the problems endemic to people with common purposes and differing perspectives about how those purposes should be carried out. Collective allegiance does not eliminate conflict inherent to communities living and working together, no matter how well intentioned they may be. Even the purest of motives are liable to misunderstandings generated by perceptions, temperaments, and ulterior motives, sometimes undetected by even the most sanctified individuals. Much of the New Testament was written as a historical response to crisis. The Book of Acts, as our earliest and most reliable history of the Church, documents the Christian community’s action in the context of opportunities and problems. It is a plan of action in action, a series of situations comprehended by persons who claim to be followers of Jesus Christ.

GOD-DIRECTED GUIDANCE

The first administrative question the Church faced was how much to allow the Old Testament to dictate both its structure and its methodology. The first chapter of Acts (v. 26) narrates the choosing of a twelfth apostle by the casting of “lots.” (The Greek word for lot is *klēros*, from which we derive the word “clergy.”) This particular administrative procedure was rooted in the Old Testament. Most of Canaan was divided among the twelve tribes by the casting of lots. In other words, critical choices would be taken out of the hands of fallible persons and be placed in the hands of an all-knowing God. The Urim and Thummim, possibly two stones placed in the breastplate of the high priest, directed kings into war and other decisions of governance. We do not know how these stones gave direction. Possibly “yes” was written on one side and “no” on the other. Two yeses indicated that God was affirming rather than negating the action in question.

The methodology for choosing Matthias as the apostle to replace Judas sounds, if not irresponsible, at least archaic and primitive, today relegated to groups such as the Amish, who scorn modernity. But notice that the apostles selected two candidates through agreed upon criteria. “So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken

2. William H. Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 275.

up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection” (Acts 1:21-22 ESV). The person selected would have eyewitnessed both Christ’s earthly ministry and, at least, one post-resurrection appearance.

But even more importantly than prescribing rational and empirical parameters for making the above critical choice, the apostles prayed specifically for God’s guidance, for his will to be accomplished. The rolling of dice was saturated in prayer. Rather than writing this administrative decision off as obsolescence cloaked in mysterious divining, we need to be reminded that church, unlike McDonald’s and Microsoft, is a supernatural business. While the Church need not and should not circumvent sound business practices, these same practices should not negate dependency upon God enabled by consistent and constant prayer. Finding God’s direction demands that we both carefully collect data and examine it with spiritual eyes.

Church administration, if it is not going to be undermined by self-serving interests, must be saturated with prayer. Prayer that takes place only in the face of crisis simulates “water witching”: “God, please don’t let us make a mistake, because if we do, it will be very costly.” The magic of divining by looking at a weather vane, or even depending on the Bible to fall open at a supernaturally delivered reference, is much different than a constant attitude of prayer, which is open to God’s sovereign direction. Robert N. Bacher and Michael Cooper sum up the divine-human synergy operative in God-controlled administration: “In and through these processes, the community seeks a theological outcome to determine God’s intention in the situation. Is Yahweh a local deity or Lord of all? Having found a communal answer to the question, they proceed to develop corresponding strategies for preaching, fellowship, and exercise of authority.”³ The casting of lots extended the Old Testament’s radical monotheism, the exact opposite of superstition and the shirking of responsibility.

Prayer does not eliminate good decisions based on all available criteria. Rather, it grants God his due in the direction of his Church. Honest transparency releases control to God. For instance, Quakers historically have not voted on the choice of leaders or business decisions. They have relied on a collective consensus, directed by the Holy Spirit, referred to as the “sense of the meeting.” The plus side of this methodology is maintaining unity within the body. The downside is that the administrative process moves quite slowly for those of us who immediately want to draw a line in the sand. “For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (Acts 15:28 NASB), while enhancing both spiritual confidence and dependency, plus granting God authority in all matters great

3. Robert N. Bacher and Michael Cooper, *Church Administration* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 5.

and small, does not lend itself to immediacy—the urgent settling of all questions through a democratic process. The difference between Christian decision making in Acts and majority versus minority forging ahead by the contemporary church are often lost on us who have adopted an administrative mentality more akin to corporate America than Christian worship. Traditional Quakers never pronounce a benediction or dismissal prayer between a worship service and a business meeting. Business is a form of worship, a sacrament, a means of grace no less than singing or preaching.

Church administration is a sacred act done in the same way on both Sunday and Monday. Administration, which covets the wisdom of God, evidenced in prayer and Scripture reading, declares dependency upon God. Church administration, which is blessed by God, will eliminate self-sovereignty and self-sufficiency and at the same time demonstrate acquaintance with the most current management literature. All of us can benefit from reading Daniel Goleman and Peter Drucker and learning why Wal-Mart has become the largest retailer in the world.

A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO COMMUNAL CRISIS

The Acts of the Apostles should be more accurately titled “The Acts of God” or “The Acts of the Holy Spirit.” Acts narrates observable manifestations of God’s actions in the world: healings, ecstatic languages, supernatural interpretations, tongues of fire, visions, and God striking people dead. This supernatural activity camouflages the everyday details of communal life—details that become disruptive if not given immediate attention. The discernment of direction, systemic to any group enterprise, is part baseball strategy and part utopian experiment, the creating of a game plan for implementing mission and, sometimes, sheer survival. Luke Timothy Johnson precisely expresses this joint venture between God and human instrumentality in the Book of Acts: “With literary artistry and genuine theological sensitivity, Luke shows through the narrative itself how the diverse experiences of God’s action by individuals are slowly raised to the level of a communal narrative, which in turn must be tested by the entire community in a difficult and delicate process of disagreement, debate, and the discernment of the Scripture.”⁴

The “difficult and delicate process” is at no place better exemplified than in Acts 6, when disagreement arises between the Hellenistic Jews and the blue-blooded Hebrews over the distribution of food to the widows. What we don’t know, since complaining is inherent to human nature, especially to church

4. Timothy Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 16.

members, is whether the griping was motivated by actual inequity or by bickering between first cousins. Whatever the case may be, the apostles interpreted the accusations as sufficient to warrant action. The Jewish apostles, instead of siding with their national kin and alienating the Hellenists, authorized the church to select from themselves “seven men of good reputation, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task” (Acts 6:3 NASB).

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE OR CHARISMATA

The seven appointed to wait on tables are historically interpreted to be the first deacons in the Church. However, no one is referred to as a “deacon” in the Book of Acts. (Neither does the word bishop appear, unless the word *episkopēn* is translated bishop instead of leadership or office in 1:20.) Is there a distinct difference between Luke’s understanding of church leadership and Paul’s, the latter appointing elders in the various churches that he planted? Is administrative structure (bureaucracy) a necessary evil in the Christian Church? This question does not grant an either/or answer. It is clear that communities necessitate leadership. It is also clear in Acts that the Church deemed Holy Spirit-enabled gifts and graces far more important than trained and innate ability. The spontaneous and charismatic administration evidenced in Acts is largely absent from the normative practices of the twenty-first-century American church, which operates with a blend of both autocracy and democracy.

Is the government of the church going to look more like a micromanaged bureaucracy or a charismatic organism where lines of authority are unclear, programs are not neat, and ministries are unpredictable? This tension is genuine. Organization can overkill and stamp out life, or it can be so nonexistent that counterproduction and fragmentation undermine efficiency. Thus the Book of Acts narrates a tension between the structure of Judaism and the *laissez-faire* of Pentecost. Throughout Acts, hardly anyone asked permission to do anything. God directed Peter to go to Cornelius’s house and Philip to wander out into the desert on an odyssey that was not even clear to him. Gradually, the church of Acts moved toward consensual sending, a communal blessing that does not so much grant permission but rather extends its blessing to what God has already ordered.

Administration in Acts increasingly distances itself from the traditions of Judaism, but structure and organization by the fourth century had developed to an extreme. Roman contamination afflicted church leadership to the point that they behaved much like heads of state. David Smith writes concerning ecclesiology “that the Church is within the confines and limitations of time and space. It cannot perform its mission without some kind of organizational features. It cannot minister effectively to the needs of mankind unless responsible officers

perform acceptable offices.”⁵ How to prevent “organizational features” and “acceptable offices” from reifying and calcifying, becoming ends in themselves, has been a perennial problem for the church. Willimon prophetically declares, “An openness to the leading of the Holy Spirit requires a structure that is flexible, adaptable, lean and trusting in the surprising intrusions of the Spirit among us. The church is not meant for the mere maintenance of internal organizational machinery. The church is meant for proclamation and enactment of the gospel.”⁶

Throughout the church’s history the Holy Spirit has revived new forms of administration more reliant on New Testament images than on prevailing management models. The return to Scripture in a humble waiting on God produces egalitarian, sacrificial communities more in tune with the Holy Spirit than General Motors. Administration in the Book of Acts is nothing less than the reign of God. The church is a *sui generis* theocracy, a form of government that will not work in the world’s institutions. This is not to say that New Testament models for governance cannot leaven worldly, administrative structures.

FLEXIBILITY IN STRUCTURE

Leadership in Acts was spontaneous, contextual, and often intuitive. The only way to lead others was to be a doer of the Word, equipped and energized by the Holy Spirit. Thus the leadership in the individual churches was neither monolithic nor unilateral. Henry Klopp argues that “a great deal of freedom was allowed in determining leadership structure and organization. Churches were not required to have the same structure. Contextualized needs helped shape church structure and organization. The church in Jerusalem, with its strong Jewish background and involvement of the first apostles, was organized and operated differently than the church in Antioch, with leaders such as Paul and Barnabas, than the churches planted by Paul in his missionary journeys.”⁷

Administration in Acts is far less about earning a union card, paying one’s dues, and longevity in the community, than it is about being called and equipped by God. New Testament administrators were servants. They were not people who told other people what to do. They did something. They were people in action, which characterized the highest-ranking apostles, Peter, John and later Paul. They led by example instead of giving orders to lesser subordinates. They gave themselves to the primary work of prayer and Scripture study so that they

5. David L. Smith, “Ecclesiology,” *A Contemporary Wesleyan Theology*, ed. Charles Carter (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 2:608.

6. Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice*, 282.

7. Henry Klopp, *The Leadership Playbook: A Game Plan for Becoming an Effective Christian Leader* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2004), 62.

themselves might enter into the work of travel and proclamation. They created missional models for others to do the same.

The short attention span that Stephen focused on busing tables is surprising. Whether the apostles observed him as an effervescent personality spouting memorized Scripture as he served a heaping helping of mutton stew and discerned a promotion was in order, or Stephen simply took the initiative to do some street preaching, we do not know. What is even more critical to observe is that no job was too small for the most talented and that the apostles were not threatened when a waiter on tables invaded their territory. Stephen preached the longest recorded message in the New Testament, a sermon that demonstrated narrative proficiency in Old Testament history. Providence mandated that job descriptions were quite temporary, indexed by and open to the moment-by-moment nudging of the Holy Spirit. Both Stephen and Philip exemplified that there are no peripheral jobs in kingdom administration. Kingdom administrators are both humble and grateful for where God has placed them. And changes in office are not promotions but simply repositioning and redirecting in obedience to the Holy Spirit.

That the New Testament church as an organization was inchoate in regard to policy, structure, and practice does not mean it was careless about belief in procedure. It also does not mean that there was an egalitarian democracy that ensured everyone had an equal say in what defined the church's message and mission. Administration emerged and evolved in Acts as authority vested in persons, rather than a policy manual distributed to the various churches. Thomas Bandy notes that "the servant empowering organization does not need many policies; the fewer the better. . . . Even with a huge diversity of people in many different programs, the actual number of policies must remain relatively small. This means that policies must be made with extreme care."⁸

We know almost nothing of the job description given to the leaders appointed by Paul and Barnabas in newly planted churches (see Acts 14:23). Again, direction was gained through the spiritual disciplines of prayer and fasting. By reading the Pastoral Epistles we can conclude that character, love for God, self-control, and graciousness of temperament were at the top of the list. The ability to articulate the kerygma—the life, death, and resurrection of Christ supported by the Hebrew Scriptures—qualified the appointee for teaching. Most importantly, there existed a resonance between people and leaders who had been chosen by God. Darrell Guder contrasts the New Testament methodology of discerning leadership with the normative adversarial win-loose debates, parlia-

8. Thomas Bandy, *Spiritual Leadership: Empowering People to Do What Matters* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2007), 41.

mentary maneuvers, special interest lobbying, and majority rule that dominate the North American church. Guder writes that the ecclesial practice of discernment in missional communities is not simply to discover the will of the community but instead together to discern the will of God:

It is the role of the Spirit to correct, convince, and lead those who profess faith in Jesus Christ into God's truth. Discernment requires this guidance because God acts, speaks in, and through the ambiguous circumstances of worldly life. . . . As the ecclesia of God, a people gathered and sent to be about God's business, the church is called to a way of making decisions that articulates and correlates with listening, hearing, testing, planning, and obeying together in the power of the Holy Spirit.⁹

CLARITY OF THE MISSION AND MESSAGE AS ADMINISTRATIVE TASK

The mission of the church in the Book of Acts is clear and unencumbered. Its purpose is to represent and spread the truth clearly articulated by Peter on the Day of Pentecost: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him" (Acts 2:38-39 NRSV). Peter had built his theological case from the Old Testament prophet Joel: "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21 NRSV).

In Acts, one clear message defines and drives the mission. Christ is risen! He is alive! Do whatever it takes to let as many people know as soon as possible. The plan would not be accidental but proceed according to Acts 1:8. The "Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (NKJV) progression would at times be perceived through dreams and visions and at other times be directed by persecution—evil translated into good. The day Stephen was martyred, "a severe persecution began against the church in Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout the countryside of Judea and Samaria" (Acts 8:1 NRSV). Stephen's martyrdom was a tipping point, not ordained by God, but used by God to move the church out of its comfort zone. Stephen's sermon had ended with the most powerful conclusion of any message yet to be preached in the history of gospel proclamation: "I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" (Acts 7:56 NRSV).

9. Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998), 172-73.

Leaders in Acts are first and foremost stewards of the identity and integrity of the gospel. If these are lost, compromised, or contaminated, the organization has lost its reason to be. The Jerusalem council became the landmark case, an existential opportunity once and for all to state who makes up the church. "Council" may be an inadequate term for what is recorded in Acts 15, because one would hardly use the word "conciliar" in describing the meeting that took place in Jerusalem. Willimon states that "the Jerusalem conference serves as an example of biblical, adaptive, and transformative leadership, even though it served later as a proof text for fossilized conciliarism in the church."¹⁰

Paul and Barnabas had fallen into dispute with the Judaizers about whether "the Way," now called "Christianity," was going to require Gentile converts to be circumcised. Circumcision was the primary mark of identity for both Jewish nationalism and monotheism. Circumcision was the covenantal sign no less important than its covenantal creed, the Shema, Hebrew for "listen": "Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone" (Deut. 6:4 NRSV). Simply put, was the mark of Jewish identity going to be imposed on Gentile converts as essential to salvation? In fact, some would interpret Acts 15 as the historical event representing the entire theme of the Book of Acts. New Testament scholar Ernst Haenchen writes that in Acts "Luke the historian is wrestling, from the first page to the last, with the problem of the mission to the Gentiles without the law."¹¹ George Eldon Ladd may overstate the case but nevertheless accurately argues that "one of the central motives in Acts is the explanation of how a small fellowship of Jews in Jerusalem, for all intents and purposes, hardly distinguishable from their Jewish milieu became a Gentile fellowship in the capital city of the empire, completely free from all Jewish practices."¹²

This question was answered by appealing to the apostles and Pharisees who had converted to Christianity and were residing in Jerusalem, still interpreted as Christianity's headquarters in spite of Antioch's growing prominence. Peter presented the center of the argument, appealing to the event that had sealed the deal of God's promise of universal grace and the possibility of salvation for all peoples and all races. The command to eat unclean animals in his Joppa vision had liberated Peter, a very prejudiced Jew, to journey several days to the home of a Roman centurion named Cornelius living in Caesarea. Cornelius, having supernaturally received advance notice of Peter's visit, was more than ready to accept the message of salvation through Christ alone and lead his entire house-

10. Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice*, 280

11. Ernst Haenchen, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1971), 100.

12. George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1993), 391.

hold in a confession of faith. His extended family was baptized both with water and with the Holy Spirit.

Peter stated with no hesitancy to the Jerusalem leadership that the real distinction between Christians and non-Christians was not circumcision but the gift of the Holy Spirit. “And God, who knows the human heart, testified to them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as he did to us; and in cleansing their hearts by faith he has made no distinction between them and us” (Acts 15:8-9 NRSV). Paul and Barnabas, at the same meeting, narrated similar accounts of inclusion that demonstrated God’s acceptance and affirmation of persons who weren’t particularly sensitive to and versed in the Jewish requirements for salvation. The only frame of reference that mattered for the new covenant was not circumcision, but faith in Jesus Christ.

James, the brother of Jesus, then quoted from Amos, who prophesied the offer of salvation for all people. James, who wasn’t even a believer during Christ’s earthly ministry, had unofficially evolved into the arch leader of Christianity. To believe in your brother as the Messiah requires greater faith than to believe in a miracle worker observed only at a distance. James declared in a somewhat arbitrary manner, “Therefore I have reached the decision that we should not trouble those Gentiles who are turning to God [with requiring circumcision]” (Acts 15:19 NRSV). James’s statement, accepted by the majority (we have no evidence that the decision pleased everyone), was anything but a compromise. The decision was the clearly stated *sine qua non* of Christianity. Salvation is by faith alone, sealed by the transforming power of the Holy Spirit.

The additional requirements that would provide continuity between Judaism and Christianity were addendums, ethical requirements that were perceived to be important to Christian behavior rather than a preservation of Jewish nationalism. A person could be a Christian without being a Jew, but at the same time Jewish ethics helped inform Christian identity: abstention from sexual immorality, idol worship, and improperly prepared food (with the latter partially lost on those of us benefiting from the modern conveniences of refrigeration and chemical preservation). The watershed decision made within the context of a historical event would not only forever inform Christianity’s message and mission but also demonstrate the dynamic nature of truth, an ongoing appeal to tradition and Scripture in the context of recurring situations. Thus quite possibly the most important administrative job in the Book of Acts was to historically and theologically interpret the faith and practice of the church.

There could be no doubt that the Holy Spirit enabled James to preserve the best of both worlds, to show respect for Jewish mores and at the same time, more importantly, to discern and disseminate the defining doctrine of Christianity, a

creed that undermined the theological foundation of Judaism. Salvation would not be obtained through an adherence to the law but by belief in the sufficiency of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus the central administrative task in Acts was to explore how to interpret, apply, and deliver this message.

THE CHARACTER OF LEADERSHIP

No narrative in the New Testament is more descriptive of the nature and character of New Testament administration than the farewell address by Paul to the Ephesian church. Acts 20, the narrative of Paul's longest pastorate, approximately two years, demonstrates Leonard Doohan's claim that "leadership is not what one does but rather who one has become through the opportunity of interaction with others in organizational life. It is a response to a vocation heard in the depths of one's heart."¹³ Paul's leadership characterized communal life, empathy, endurance of persecution, hands-on help wherever possible, honest love, and house-to-house visitation, all the while supporting himself with a "tent-making" ministry. Paul conjures up Old Testament imagery from Ezekiel when he states, "Therefore I declare to you this day that I am not responsible for the blood of any of you, for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God" (Acts 20:26 NRSV). John McNeill writes in *A History of the Cure of Souls* that Paul, as the father of a great mission church, "was no iron hearted disciplinarian or bureaucratic official, but a brotherly Christian in need of the moral and spiritual support of the others."¹⁴

Church administration in the Book of Acts was anything but top-down management. Servant leadership expresses and exercises deep compassion for the needs and hurts that are constantly endemic to human existence. One of the primary purposes of communal life is to discover and minister to those communal hurts. Paul's authority was derived from a lifestyle that constantly stated that "I am one of you." His authority was earned, not imposed. Anthony Robinson and Robert Wall make the clear distinction between leadership arbitrarily imposed on a congregation because of credentials and titles, and authority that earns respect from servanthood. They state in *Called to Be the Church: The Book of Acts for a New Day*: "But there is a crucial difference between the expert and the leader. You make an appointment, have a consultation, get an estimate, obtain a service, and that's that. By contrast, a leader is part of a com-

13. Leonard Doohan, *Spiritual Leadership: The Quest for Integrity* (New York: Paulist Press, 2007), 17.

14. John McNeill, *A History of the Cure of Souls* (New York: Harper and Row, 1997), 83.

munity and belongs to that community. You go to see an expert, but a leader belongs to a community."¹⁵

Church administration needs to do everything in its power to circumvent the top-floor, corner office, "my time is more important than yours" demarcation between clergy and laity. Availability and communal life rather than a seminary degree or M.B.A. are the pillars that provide confidence in church leadership. This does not eliminate the problem of discerning a line between one's personal and professional life. It also does not disparage an acquaintance with management resources that is not dominated by them.

COMMUNAL AUTHORITY

Leadership in Acts is not trained but spiritually ripened and disciplined. This was the case in Antioch, Christianity's first developed community after Jerusalem. Persons came to the forefront through both spiritual gifts and disciplined commitment to the Christ who had saved them. Governance in Acts is defined by confidence in persons rather than a planned program or policy. We might assume that Simeon, Lucian, and Manaen, along with Saul, were mentored by Barnabas. They had comprehended the meaning of community, especially its corporate disciplines in the context of worshiping, and the spiritual disciplines of prayer and fasting. "While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them'" (Acts 13:2 NRSV).

The response to the Holy Spirit's direction was not to vote, though there must have been discussions in the form of such questions as, "Are you perceiving what I am perceiving?" Prayer took the form of collective listening to both God and one another. Only after further fasting and praying did they enact the community ritual of laying hands on Barnabas and Paul, a rite of consecration and community blessing. Granting authority via symbolic rite was inherited from Old Testament practice. Kevin Giles explains that "the laying on of hands by those assembled therefore does not signify the bestowal of a ministry, or of the Spirit, but rather that from now on their ministry is no longer an individual one; they are from this point on representatives of their community. What they do, they do not undertake in their own name, but in the name of the community that has set them apart as its representatives."¹⁶

15. Anthony Robinson and Robert W. Wall, *Called to Be Church: The Book of Acts for a New Day* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 2006), 237.

16. Kevin Giles, *What on Earth Is the Church? An Exploration in New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 95.

Barnabas and Saul were so successful in their first mission that upon the healing of a crippled man the witnesses to the event attempted to confer on them the names of Greek gods. The two vehemently protested by tearing their clothes, a sign of abasement, assuring the crowd of their humanity. These first missionaries averted a primary temptation of charismatic leadership, the corruption of power, personality cultism that characterizes much of today's church leadership, especially in the contemporary megachurch. The incident also clarified the real mission of the church. More important than signs and wonders was the good news of salvation through Christ, a displacement of allegiance to false gods by the liberating grace of the living and true God.

LEADERSHIP AS GODLY OBEDIENCE

Leadership in the Book of Acts often depended on a direct line to God. Visions were often God's medium of choice in guiding the church and setting the agenda. It would have taken nothing less than a vision for Ananias to affirm and accept Saul, the Pharisee hit man who may have been headed to Damascus with Ananias as his target. A vision, which was divine instruction for Peter to trash most of the theology he had ever learned, sent the very prejudiced Peter to the house of Cornelius. A vision sent Paul to Athens, a city saturated with gods and pseudo intellectuals. Not the kind of place to peddle the "foolishness" of the cross.

Though visions may not be God's primary means of communication for the twenty-first-century church, the operational paradigm that God is in charge, or at least needs to be, is the same today as it was two thousand years ago. Though God doesn't always directly communicate in such dramatic fashion, he is no less concerned with the administrator doing his will. Every pastor's closing statement on life and ministry needs to be the same as was Paul's, who declared before King Agrippa, "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those in Damascus, then in Jerusalem and throughout the countryside of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God and do deeds consistent with repentance" (Acts 26:19 NRSV). God had told Paul where to go, where not to go, and even how long to stay (see Acts 18:9).

CONCLUSION

Administration in the Book of Acts is not a designated role, separating or positioning a person above others. Leaders evolve out of what they do: service, prophecy, evangelism, and the various gifts of the Spirit that are recognized as valuable to the edification of the community. These roles emerge as persons intimately relate to God, an intimacy evidenced by loving concern for those

both inside and outside of the Body of Christ. The overarching theme for administration is that it seeks the guidance of the Holy Spirit for both the community's internal life and missional outreach. Administration is able to lead the flock without lording over the flock (see 1 Pet. 5:3). Its success is found in the sufficiency of God, diligently sought through prayer and often fasting. The three constants we have discovered are flexibility of form, attitude of servanthood, and supernatural empowerment. Administration in the Book of Acts is a spiritual authority, grounded in a relationship with God and a loving identity with those who are of the household of faith.

FOR FURTHER READING

Bacher, Robert N., and Michael Cooper. *Church Administration*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.

Willimon, William H. *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002.