

# SCRIPTURAL MODELS OF CATHOLIC LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT

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*I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.*

”

JOHN 13: 14-15

It is in and through the person of Jesus Christ that the Catholic Church understands its relationship to God and who we are called to be. The life of Jesus provides a model for each one of us to follow as daughters and sons of God. It is a model for those in leadership, as well as for anyone seeking to follow Christ.

At this time of crisis in our global Church when the Body of Christ has been wounded from the sins of abuse and leadership failure, it is timely to once again explore scripture's models of leadership.

## Leadership and Management Models from Scripture

Christian scripture offers a generous array of metaphors for leadership and management. Jesus himself uses multiple metaphors and models to refer to his leadership, for example, the metaphor of the good shepherd (“I am the good shepherd. A good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” John 10:11) or the metaphor of the protective hen (“...as a hen gathers her young under her wings...” Matthew 23:37).

Archbishop Charles Scicluna of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, a leader in the Church's response to the abuse crisis, has offered five scriptural metaphors to explore qualities of leadership and management in our times: witness (*martyr*), steward (*oikonomos*), overseer (*episkopos*), shepherd (*poimen*), and servant (*diakonos*).

The first metaphor of a “**witness**” is appropriately linked to leadership as a leader is called to be a missionary disciple, a witness to Jesus Christ. Some qualities of witnesses in scripture from which we can continue to derive wisdom are those of being a credible truth-teller and having integrity. The Book of Revelation refers to “Jesus Christ, the faithful witness” (Revelation 1:5) and

the Acts of the Apostles says, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, throughout Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8).

A second metaphor for Christian leadership and management that we find in scripture is that of a “**steward**”. The qualities of a steward include being held accountable for using gifts and resources properly and being transparent in one's use of them. The First Letter to Peter reminds the disciples that everyone is called to be a steward of the gifts they have received, saying “As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace.” (1 Peter 4:10). Jesus himself says that there will be accountability of stewards, saying, “Much will be required of the person entrusted with much, and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more.” (Luke 12:48).

A third metaphor for Christian leadership and management is that of “**overseer**” which derives from the Greek word for supervisor and is used repeatedly in scripture. Some of the qualities of a good overseer are delineated in the First Letter to Timothy as being “irreproachable, married only once, temperate, self-controlled, decent, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not aggressive, but gentle, not contentious, not a lover of money.” (1 Timothy 3:2-3). Additionally, the Acts of the Apostles speak to the fact that overseers must “keep watch over [themselves] and over the whole flock.” (Acts 20:28).

A fourth metaphor is that of a “**shepherd**” whose qualities remain relevant to Christian leaders today, including a love for the flock, an accountability to the community, and a kindly watchfulness over them. There are multiple references to this metaphor in scripture, ranging from Jesus who calls himself “the good shepherd” (John 10:11, 14) to the early Christian communities who pick up on

this metaphor as seen in the First Letter of Peter where the author exhorts the elders to “shepherd the flock of God that is among you...not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.” (1 Peter 5:2-3).

A fifth metaphor from scripture is the leader as a “**servant**”. The qualities of a servant leader include the notion of humble service and a willingness to pick up a mantle of co-responsibility. We see this when Jesus washes the feet of his disciples and says, “If I, therefore, the master and teacher, have washed your feet, you ought to wash one another's feet. I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do” (John 13:12-17).

It is important to note that trustworthiness is lifted up as central to leadership: “Thus should one regard us: as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Now it is of course required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.” (1 Corinthians 4:1-2). The multiple crises of recent decades in the Church have resulted in a broken trust. In order to lead our faith communities in a meaningful way, it is imperative for Catholic leaders not only to take the right actions, but also to be attentive to the way that they lead if trust is to be restored. Scripture's leadership metaphors offer multiple approaches that can lead toward restored trust.

## Servant Leadership: A Model for a Church in Crisis

Of scripture's many metaphors for leadership and management, servant leadership stands out as being particularly helpful for our Church today that faces numerous crises. In fact, it is the model to which Christ turned at his own moment of crisis as he faced his impending death. Servant leadership is certainly a way to help us rediscover the Paschal Mystery of our own times, through the cross and the tomb, toward Resurrection and a renewed Pentecost.

It is this model of servant leadership as part of a synodal and discerning Church to which Pope Francis calls us. In his address on the 50th anniversary of the institution of the synod of bishops, he shared:

*Synodality*, as a constitutive element of the Church, offers us the most appropriate interpretive framework for understanding the hierarchical ministry itself. If we understand, as Saint John Chrysostom says, that “Church and Synod are synonymous”, inasmuch as the Church is nothing other than the “journeying together” of God's flock along the paths of

history towards the encounter with Christ the Lord, then we understand too that, within the Church, no one can be “raised up” higher than others. On the contrary, in the Church, it is necessary that each person “lower” himself or herself, so as to serve our brothers and sisters along the way.

Pope Francis went on to emphasize his point about ministry as servant leadership, saying, “Consequently, those who exercise authority are called ‘ministers’, because, in the original meaning of the word, they are the least of all.”

## Christ's Invitation to Catholic Leaders Today

At Leadership Roundtable's 2020 Catholic Partnership Summit, Archbishop Scicluna took up this same theme of servant leadership. He reminded participants that the model of servant leadership is not only reserved for bishops and priests, but is a model for a synodal and co-responsible Church, for all the People of God. Each one of us is invited to share in this model by virtue of our baptism. Archbishop Scicluna reflected, “It is baptism that makes us servants, prophets, and also makes us priests. This is what we call the common priesthood.” Archbishop Scicluna's comments referred back to the Second Vatican Council's document, *Lumen Gentium*, that states, “These faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; they are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ...” (31).

Of note, Archbishop Scicluna mentioned the “*Munus Regendi*” which is the term used to refer to the gift of pastoral governance to which we have been called. While this role is often referred to with the metaphor of “king”, Scicluna remarked that Pope Francis “would actually prefer ‘*Munus Ministrandi*’, the role of being a servant.” This interpretation adheres more closely to the gospel metaphor of servant leadership to which Jesus invited his disciples.

During the Last Supper, knowing that the disciples would soon shoulder the responsibility of his mission, Jesus gave them the model of servant leadership. He said, “I have given you a model to follow, so that as I have done for you, you should also do.” (John 13:14-15). The same invitation remains true for us today. May we have the courage to answer this call.