

“THE QUESTION OF LEADERSHIP”
JUNE 2007

I recently watched one of the televised debates between a group of ten presidential candidates. Each one did his best to project the image of a leader. As they answered questions, they tried to seem confident and winsome in their replies. People watching the debate were “sizing up” each candidate and assessing them as the potential leader of our country.

With the early start of the presidential campaign, the subject of leadership is on the minds of many people. Those who study leadership in the world of politics and business have defined different styles: authoritarian, passive-aggressive, assertive, team-building, laissez faire, and others. Each individual has his or her own preference as to what constitutes an ideal leader.

Is there anything unique about leadership in the Christian Church? Is it dangerous for the church to simply adopt “secular” understandings of leadership? These questions are important for us as we seek to be followers of Jesus in our local congregation. Each newly planted church in the New Testament was governed by a council of elders. When Paul and Barnabas finished their First Missionary Journey, they dealt with the question of leadership. We read,

*“And when they had appointed elders for them in every church,
with prayer and fasting they committed them to the Lord in
whom they believed.” (Acts 14:23)*

Paul and Barnabas were following the Jewish practice of having a council of elders for each of their communities. Christian elders were to be the leaders in the newly planted congregations.

It’s clear from the New Testament that the leaders in the early church were expected to lead in a uniquely Christian way. Prof. Christopher Beeley has done an extensive study of leadership in the early church. During the third week of June, he will be offering a special course on his findings at the Yale Divinity School. I will be attending Prof. Beeley’s course entitled, “Christian Leadership in the Early Church.” I look forward to participating in this educational event. Prof. Beeley’s research has helped to clarify the uniquely Christian aspects of leadership in the early church. We live in a time when the question of leadership is on the minds of many people. It’s essential that, as followers of Jesus Christ, we do not settle for secular models and strategies. I am eager to learn what Prof. Beeley has discovered.

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