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JACQUES B. DOUKHAN

LEADERSHIP IN THE CREATION NARRATIVE

Abstract: In the very first verses of the Bible, we see God set an example of leadership through His creation of the world. In this article, the author examines different elements of leadership exemplified in the Genesis account of creation; he maintains that this account demonstrates that to lead is to initiate, relate, serve, communicate, share, and create. While divinely exemplified in the story of creation, each of these traits has application to human leadership—namely the servant leadership style.

Keywords: *leadership, servant leadership, creation narrative, relationship, initiate, relate, serve, communicate, share, create*

Introduction

The first word of the Hebrew Bible, *bērešit*, which is generally translated “in the beginning” (Gen. 1:1, NKJV), encapsulates the essence of leadership; it is derived from the word *rōš*, which literally means “head” and is the technical term normally used to designate one who is leading in a given situation.¹ Thus the creation event is described as an act of leadership. Creation is leadership *par excellence*. The passage on creation covering the first two chapters of Genesis (Gen. 1:1–2:4a and Gen. 2:4b–25)² provides valuable insights regarding a Biblical view of leadership. In order to explore these lessons, the Biblical text will be approached inductively, but without conducting a comprehensive exegesis. The interrogation of the text and even the technical discussions will be engaged only insofar as they serve this purpose: What does this Biblical account of creation have to say about leadership? A careful examination of the text requires thoughtful theological inquiry but will yield rich Biblical insight into

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¹See Numbers 31:26; 32:28; 36:1; 2 Samuel 23:8; 1 Chronicles 9:34,11:10; 23:8.

²For more on the delimitations and structure of the two creation stories, see Jacques B. Doukhan, *The Genesis Creation Story, Its Literary Structure*, Andrews University Seminary Doctoral Dissertation Series 5 (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1978), 78. For a discussion on Genesis 2:4a as the conclusion to the preceding creation account rather than the introduction to the text that follows, see P. J. Wiseman, *Clues to Creation in Genesis* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1977), 34–45; cf. James McKeown, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008), 29.

the concept of leadership.

The first premise of the Bible is an affirmation of God's leadership: "In the beginning, God" (Gen. 1:1). It is certainly significant that the first word *bērešit* ("in the beginning"), which connotes leadership, is both syntactically and liturgically attached to God as Creator. This connection is first of all indicated syntactically: not only does mention of the creating God follow immediately after the word *bērešit*, but also the three Hebrew words of the phrase "In the beginning God created" (Gen. 1:1) are intended to be uttered in one single breath. Indeed the phrase seems to be used in the construct form and could be rendered "In the beginning of the creation . . . God said" (my literal translation), a reading that has been attested to in early Jewish tradition and is reflected in John's statement, "In the beginning was the Word" (John 1:1).³ The liturgical chanting of the text which follows the directions of the accents confirms this orientation, since we have a conjunctive accent under the verb "created" (*bārā*), indicating that it has to be read in close connection with the following word, namely, "God" (ʿēlohîm). More importantly, the use of the greatest disjunctive accent, the *Athnach* that is attached to the word *ʿēlohîm* (God), suggests that the most important lesson in this story of leadership in creation is God. God is the subject of this work, not only the most important One, but indeed the only One. God is the only Leader, not simply because He is the Creator, because of His creating power, but more importantly because He is the One who preceded everything and everyone else. The Bible insists, indeed, that unlike the other ancient Near Eastern myths, there was no competitive power besides God in the genesis of the universe.

The first lesson about leadership that the apprentice leader should hear in this distinct emphasis is a lesson of humility and, at the same time, an implicit warning against assuming the prerogatives of God, against claiming power or prerogative that belongs to the Creator alone. Leadership opens one to the dangerous temptation to abuse power or to assume superiority over others. A desire for leadership should be closely examined, since it may be inspired by an ambition to dominate—to assume God's place. The Bible makes it clear from the very beginning that no one has a right to positional leadership. Only God, the Creator, the only One who came before, has the right and the power to lead.⁴

To Lead is to Relate

The Biblical story of creation is the testimony of a relationship: the God of heaven, the God of the universe, took the initiative to come down and create the

³For a discussion on this syntactical observation, see Jacques Doukhan, "The Genesis Creation Story: Text, Issues, and Truth," *Origins*, 55 (2004): 12–33.

⁴For more on the cosmogonic conflict as a means of creation in ancient myths from the Near East, see, for instance, the Mesopotamian epic of Enuma Elish, in E. A. Speiser, "The Creation Epic," *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, ed. J. B. Pritchard, 3rd ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 60–70; cf. M. K. Wakeman, *God's Battle with the Monster: A Study in Biblical Imagery* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 38–39.

human realm. He did so for the particular purpose of having a loving relationship with humans. As humans appear on the scene of creation, this intention is immediately revealed through a number of specific observations, giving a unique character to God's relationship with humans.

The coming to be of humanity is the only creative act introduced by a preliminary statement of intent or divine deliberation. The expression "Let us make" (Gen. 1:26) replaces the seemingly impersonal words of divine fiat that characterize the other creation acts. Unlike the animals who come from the land (Gen. 1:24), humans are created by means of some other physical action besides the speaking of the divine Word. The human being is the only creature who is created in God's image: "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness'. . . . So God created man in His own image" (Gen. 1:26–27).

In the light of ancient Near Eastern and particularly Egyptian texts, this expression has been understood as a reference to the unique relationship between God and humans. It was believed that the image (as with the idol-image in other cultures) contained the spirit of the represented deity, thereby ensuring a shared unity between the god and his or her image. To say that humans were created in God's image means that they received the capacity to relate to God. This emphasis on relation has received a theological affirmation in the works of Karl Barth, who interprets the image as a capacity of relationship between God and humans. For Barth, humankind's divine image means that God can enter into personal relationships with humans, speak to them, and make covenants with them, and that humans have the ability to relate with each other.

As noted above, the human being is the only one whose creation implies an actual physical relation: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Gen. 2:7). The divine creation of humans involved the physical touch of God; God formed humans with His own hands, as a potter forms the vase of clay.

An intimate relationship is also clearly implied: God breathed into humankind His own life-spirit. Thus, in His act of creation, God is not indifferent or detached; He is personally, physically, and intimately involved in His act of creation. He gets His hands (and even His mouth) dirty in the process.

The human being is the only one with whom God shares the same holy time:

⁵For the blessing as implying "an intimate relationship," see Joseph Scharbert, "brk," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. David E. Green, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1975), 285. For the concept of holiness as implying the idea of "a special relationship with Yahweh," see Helmer Ringgren, "qđš," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren and Heinz-Josef Fabry, trans. Douglas W. Stott, vol. 12 (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2003), 533. Cf. Niels-Erik A. Andreasen, *The Old Testament Sabbath: A Tradition-Historical Investigation*, Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series, no. 7 (Missoula, MT: Society of Biblical Literature, 1972), 208.

“Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested [*šabat*] from all His work which God created and made” (Gen. 2:3). God’s blessing (*brk*) and His sanctification (*qdš*) of the Sabbath mean that God set apart this particular time at the end of the creation week for a manifestation of His special relationship with humanity.⁵ Indeed the Sabbath day will be explained later in the Decalogue as the day of relationship par excellence, vertically between God and humans, horizontally between humans and humans, and again vertically, with humans in an *Imago Dei* application, between themselves and the creation over which they have been given dominion (Exod. 20:8–11). The fact that the Sabbath—a day of relationship—was given as the commandment to help commemorate creation is another evidence of the connection between creation and relationship. Note also that Genesis 2:23–24, in the second creation story, refers to the relationship of the couple in a manner not used in reference to animals, thus confirming the relational dimension of the Sabbath.

The human being is created as a social being in need of other human beings. God Himself recognizes this strong social dependence as He emphatically observes: “It is not good that man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18). It is also significant that this social dimension of the human being is expressed linguistically in the second creation story through the Hebrew word for “man,” *iš*, which has the connotation of “weakness” and “dependence.”⁶ It is also significant that the word *iš* (man), which is specific to the second creation story (in contrast to the word *ādām* in the first creation story), reappears only at the end of the chapter when its bearer fulfills his social vocation in relation to the woman, the *‘iššah*, the other being who will ensure he will no longer be alone (Gen. 1:23–24).

The testimony of the Biblical creation story affirming God’s personal involvement and relationship with humankind and the human need for relationship contains a lesson about the nature of leadership. Instead of staying aloof, above his or her community, a leader should be part of a community, participating in their shared work, being spiritually one with them, devoting his or her prayers to the community, engaging with them, jointly initiating projects with them—in all things working together with them to fulfill their purposes.

To Lead is to Communicate

Because creation was meant to produce relationship, the Biblical creation story presents itself fundamentally as a work of communication. “In the beginning . . . God said” (Gen. 1:1–3). Creation is bestowed through the Word of God:

⁶The root *‘anaš*, from which is probably derived the *‘iš*, is also attested in Akkadian with the meaning of “weak;” see Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. Arthur W. Heathcote and Philip J. Allcock (New York: Harper, 1958), 156–157. See also the use of the word *‘enôš* for “man,” especially in poetic texts which stress the weak character of the human person (Job 10:4–5; Ps. 8:5; Isa. 13:12).

the phrase “God said” is repeated throughout the Biblical account. This emphasis on God’s Word is not just a message about the mechanism of creative activity. The emphasis itself is an act of communication. The message is designed to be heard. God did not create only with an intention to reveal Himself; He also wanted the story of this particular creation to be communicated.

God’s first communication with humanity (Gen. 1:28–29) described both their similarity to and difference from the Creator. Verse 28 concerns what humans and God have in common, namely the capacity to create, while God’s second address (v. 29) concerns what makes humans essentially different from, and dependent upon, divinity. God is the provider, the One who gives, while humans are those in need, those who must receive their existence from Him.

This structure of communication, based on similarity and difference, is confirmed later in the second creation story as it describes the relationship between the first human persons, Adam and Eve. After God’s observation that “it is not good that man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18), He creates the woman as a helper who is *kēnegdô*, translated variously as “suitable,” “comparable,” “just right,” “fit,” and so on. This expression is composed of two words, *kē*, “like,” which implies similarity and *neged*, “against,” “in front of,” “opposite,” which implies confrontation and difference. It is noteworthy that this root *ngd* refers also to verbal communication; it is associated with the expressions “open the lips” (Ps. 51:15), “in the ears of” (Jer. 36:20), or to the voice (Gen. 44:24). The verb is also used to describe nonverbal communication, when for instance “the heavens declare [*ngd*] the glory of God; . . . without speech or language” (Ps. 19:1, 3, my literal translation).

The fact that this relationship is built upon the reality of difference indicates the nature of this relationship. The recognition of difference and the respect for that difference are fundamental in the process of communication. There is no real communication if in the process the “other” is crushed and silenced. Unlike the ancient Near Eastern myths of a genesis that made humans out of the divine (either from his member, his spit, or his sperm), hence of the same nature,⁷ the Bible dared to conceive the creation of humans out of *what God is not*, that is, essentially different from Him. It is this difference that paradoxically makes humans like God. They are unique like God is unique. The uniqueness of human individuals is another application of the *Imago Dei* principle. As McKeown comments, “Although it is difficult to ascertain the meaning of the ‘image,’ it is closely associated with the uniqueness and distinctiveness of humans.”

This sense of communication that defines the nature of relationship between

⁷See the Mesopotamian myths of *Atrahasis* and *Enuma Elish* where the blood of a god is used to create humanity, in Kenton L. Sparks, *Ancient Texts for the Study of the Hebrew Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2005), 313, 315; cf. the Egyptian myths of “Atum Creation Stories” and “The Creations of Re” where creation is achieved through masturbation, sneezing, and spitting, in Sparks, *Ancient Texts*, 323, 326.

Adam and Eve, the first human beings, sheds light on the leadership semantics implied in the creation story. Leadership, whether it occurs on the vertical level between God and humans or on the horizontal level between and among humans, should entail relationship and communication with the “other.” The revelation that God not only set the tone and provided an example of communication in the exercise of His own leadership, but also implanted the necessity of communication through the manner in which He created humans reveals an important lesson for the exercise of leadership. Leaders collaborate, listen, and dialogue with mutual respect—a process that is crucial, especially considering the many leadership difficulties that emerge from poor communication.

The leader’s duty to communicate obliges him or her to take into consideration the other person and therefore to lead with respect for the other, in a spirit of service, rather than with a spirit of oppression. Unlike the ancient Near Eastern myths that describe the god who creates for his own benefit,⁸ the Biblical creation story depicts, by putting God not only at the beginning but also at the end of the process, a God who creates uniquely for the happiness of creation and, more importantly, for the happiness of humankind. Unlike the ancient Near East mythology which believed that man was only created by the gods to supply the gods with food, Genesis 1 presents humans as the climax of creation; and instead of humankind providing the gods with food,⁹ God provides the plants as food for humans. The literary structure of the Biblical text of creation accounts for this particular focus and divine interest in those He creates. In Genesis 1, the creation of humans comes at the end of the creation project, because everything has been created as a gift for their benefit: “I have given every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food” (Gen. 1:29). Humankind is here the climax of creation. Only at the end, after humans have been created, God says, “it is very good” (Gen. 1:31). God does not just provide what humans need to survive. His gifts are not just “good;” they are “very good;” they overflow (Ps. 23:5).

It is also significant that at the end of the creation week God shares the holy time of Sabbath with humans (Gen. 2:1–3). This rest is all the more a gift to humankind, as humans were not involved in the work of creation and did not require physical rest that first Sabbath. God’s leadership is thus characterized by grace and generosity. Genesis 2 describes God placing humans in a garden He had prepared beforehand especially for them (Gen. 2:7, 15). God’s first commandment to humans concerns His gift of “every tree of the garden,” that they

⁸See the Mesopotamian myth that teaches that human beings are created “to carry the toil of the gods,” in Sparks, *Ancient Texts*, 313.

⁹See, for instance, the Babylonian stories of *Atrahasis Epic* 1.190–191 and *Enuma Elish* 6:35–37.

“may freely eat” (Gen. 2:16). God precedes humans not for His own benefit, to serve Himself first, as many corrupt leaders would have done, but, on the contrary, for the definite purpose to serve humankind. Creation thus is not an act of dominance but an act of service.

From the divine example of leadership, humans should learn a lesson of service. The Biblical text implies that Adam and Eve both learned and applied this lesson. The verb that describes the first human action, the first human duty in the Garden, as a direct response to God’s blessing is ‘*bd*, “to till” (Gen. 2:5; 3:23), which means literally “to serve.”¹⁰ Service is, then, given as the primary lesson of humankind’s role, indeed their vocation,¹¹ an idea that will be later recognized in Ecclesiastes’ reading of that passage.

To Lead is to Share

The Biblical story of creation contains a paradoxical element: Although God was the only One who created, because He created in order to serve, He went so far as to share His creative power with others. The use of the plural form “Let us make” (Gen. 1:26) to refer to God’s creation of humans in His image is particularly intriguing as it suggests that God shared His creative operation with one or several other beings. Although there is a diversity of opinions on how to read this passage, the majority of interpretations recognize that a real plurality is intended¹² and suggests some kind of cooperation with the divinity. Generally, Jewish tradition held the plural to refer to God addressing His heavenly court,¹³ the angels, as supported by Job: “when I [God] laid the foundations of the earth . . . all the sons of God shouted for joy” (Job 38:4, 7). An important Jewish tradition reported by the great medieval commentator Rashi explains this text as a lesson of humility on the part of God: “The superior must take counsel and ask authorization from his inferior.”¹⁴ The text of the *Midrash Rabbah*, which is the source of Rashi’s remark, is even more explicit; it reports that when Moses

¹⁰This connotation of ‘*bd* appears especially in association with *šamar* (“to keep”); these two verbs occur together to apply to the cultic service (cf. Exod. 12:25; Num. 18:4–6). Umberto Cassuto, *Commentary on Genesis*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1967), 122; Luis Alonso-Schökel: “These verbs are technical terms used frequently for the service of God and observance of the commandments,” in “Sapiential and Covenant Themes in Gen 2–3,” in James Crenshaw, ed., *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*, Library of Biblical Studies (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1976), 474.

¹¹This lesson is also inferred in the book of Ecclesiastes 5:9.

¹²A minority of scholars has rejected the reference to plurality, yet their argumentation has not been convincing. The theory of “plural of majesty” (see S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, 3rd ed., Westminster Commentary [London: Methuen, 1904], 14) has been rejected on Joüon’s observation (Paul Joüon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, trans. and rev. T. Muraoka, vol. 2 [Roma: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1991], 114e) that the “we” as plural of majesty is not used with verbs. The view that this was a plural of self-deliberation, thus implying the singular of the subject (see Joüon, 114e), cannot be retained either since it is based on Genesis 11:7 and Psalm 2:3, where the context supports a plural intention. In Genesis 11, the “Let Us” of God echoes the “Let us” of the men of Babel; in Psalm 2:2, the subject of “let us” is clearly a plural, i.e., the kings of the earth and the rulers who take counsel.

¹³This interpretation has also been supported by recent commentators such as John Skinner, Gerhard von Rad, Walther Zimmerli, and so on. See Gordon J. Wenham, Genesis 1–15, Word Bible Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 27.

¹⁴*Miqraot Gdolot*, ad loc.

received this phrase by revelation he was disturbed and asked God to explain it. And God answered: “Since man will be the lord of creation, it is appropriate that I ask their agreement to the higher and lower spheres, before I create him. Humans will then learn from Me that the greatest should ask the agreement from the smallest before imposing on him a leader.”¹⁵ From the time of the church fathers, Christian theologians in general saw the plural as a reference to Christ or/and the Trinity.¹⁶

Certainly, the traditional Christian interpretation would not exclude the traditional Jewish interpretation, insofar as the divine council (the heavenly host) is understood in a broad and larger sense, though with some nuances. In the former interpretation, the sharing operation involves beings other than God Himself. In the latter interpretation, it takes place within the Godhead and is here understood as an inherent quality of God Himself. Whatever interpretation one chooses, whether He shares with other heavenly beings or within Himself, the God of creation is presented as a God who shares.

The creation story goes further by suggesting that God also shares His creative initiative with humans. This human status of co-creator is already alluded to through the “image” that is tied to the human power of procreation through “male and female” (Gen. 1:27; cf. 5:1–2), as if human procreation alone contained a divine dimension—which would be absent in animal procreation. To be sure, animals are also capable of procreation, yet only human procreation is retained in the creation story as directly connected to God. It is also significant that the creation story is qualified as a “genealogy” (*tôldôt*) at the conclusion of the creation account (Gen. 2:4a), just as the human genealogies that follow in the Pentateuch and in the whole Bible constitute human history (the word *tôldôt* also means “history”), thus suggesting that the human shaping of history was identified as a creation, just as in Genesis 1:1–2:4a. It seems clear that humans have received from God the capacity to create the humans of tomorrow and thus to create future history.

God, in the leadership expressed by His creative initiative, did not keep only for Himself the power to shape events. He entered into the risk of sharing His creative power of history with humans; hence the covenants that characterize God as walking side by side with Israel, and with every human individual. Further, God’s sharing time with humans on the Sabbath day, the first day of human history, reveals God’s intention to share His control over the course of history with humans.

¹⁵*Genesis Rabbah* VIII, 8.

¹⁶Among more recent interpreters who advocated this view, see Clines, “Image of God in Man,” 68–69; and G. F. Hasel, “The Meaning of ‘Let Us’ in Gen. 1:26,” *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 13 (1975): 65–66.

The same status of co-creator reappears in Genesis 2 when humankind is granted the power to give names to animals, just as God gave names in the process of creation (see 1:5, 8, 10). Here also the human word is immediately followed by its fulfillment: “Whatever Adam called each living creature, that was its name” (Gen. 2:19). This syntax reminds us of the description of the divine creation: “Let there be light”; and there was light” (Gen. 1:3). The human power of co-creation concerns the other living beings of creation, thus suggesting that their existence, even their identity, was then dependent on humans.

The lesson of sharing is immediately applied horizontally on the human level. Since humans are created in God’s image, they are then by implication also created as beings who by nature share. This social, relational, and sharing dimension of the human person, as we have already noted in the creation of “male and female” (Gen. 1:27), is in fact made explicit in Genesis 2 where the creation of the couple plays out. The woman is created out of the same flesh as the man. As a result, they share the same flesh, as Adam himself recognizes: “This is now bones of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man” (Gen. 2:23). This sharing is again emphasized and based on the original formula; further, it is still presented as an ideal to be reached in the future: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). Because they were created one flesh, they will have to constantly strive to achieve that unity, that becoming one with each other. (It is interesting and perhaps significant that contrary to what some cultures might expect, it is the man who is supposed to “leave” in order to be joined to his wife.)

This movement that replicates God’s movement toward humans contains the same lesson of humility that was discerned on God’s level. The human sharing parallels and imitates the divine sharing and is therefore another expression of the *Imago Dei* principle. Now, in case one would be tempted to infer from this observation the equation that God is to humans as man is to woman—and ironically conclude the superiority of the man over the woman— one should remember that the same movement is attested reversely. Indeed in Genesis 2:18, the woman is identified as the “helper” (*‘ezer*), a qualification that usually refers to God as the Savior, that is, the one who assists and shares the burden (Exod. 18:4; Deut. 33:29; Pss. 20:2[3]; 121:1–2; 124:8). As the helper-savior, the woman replicates God’s function. The downward sharing movement, mirroring God’s sharing movement, exists, then, in both directions, and could be identified in both cases as an act of leadership of the same quality.

Immediately after this recognition of shared experience and nature, the Biblical author concludes: “And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed” (Gen. 2:25). In addition, the two statements are connect-

ed through a chiasmic structure AB B₁A₁ (the corresponding elements are indicated in bold):

A: be joined to **his wife** (*‘ištô*)

B: **and they shall be** (*wēhāyû*) **one** (*‘ehād*)

B₁: **and they were** (*waiyihyû*) **the two of them** (*šēnêhem*) naked

A₁: and the man and **his wife** (*‘ištô*), and were not ashamed (Gen. 2:24–25)

A is related to A₁ through the same word “his wife;” and B is related to B₁ through the same verb “to be” in the imperfect and the reference to a number (“one,” “two”).

If one takes the literary connection between the two statements as a clue to suggest some kind of thought connection between them, one is allowed to infer that their nakedness without shamefulness (v. 25) had something to do with the particular nature of their relationship (v. 24). In other words, the condition described in verse 25—feeling no shame though naked—was due to the state described in verse 24, the sharing of the same flesh. In the Bible “nakedness” (*ārôm*) is in most occurrences associated with poverty and need (v. 26), and is a sign of vulnerability and defenselessness (Job 1:21; 12:22; Ps. 139:8; Isa. 47:2–3; Hos. 2:3). From our post-Fall perspective, the seeming risk they took in exposing themselves and being vulnerable (in a world where they actually knew no risk or vulnerability) was instead a natural, unclouded willingness derived from the complete trust they manifested in their sharing experience. “They were both naked” precisely because they had “become one flesh.” This causal connection between the two attitudes suggests a lesson of leadership that deserves our reflection: to lead is to share, and to lead is to trust.

To Lead is to Create

The creation story not only provides us with lessons about how we should lead as sharing and relational servants, but also about the sense and the direction of this service. Just as God created as a manifestation of leadership, humans are now invited to create: to produce what has not yet existed. Leadership is not about maintaining the status quo. The leader is called to change the world, just as God has changed the world, from the state of nonexistence to a state of existence and potential. The first duty of the leader is to bring things into existence, to produce life. It is significant that Adam’s first human assignment, as soon as he has been created in God’s image, is an act of creation. Humans are urged to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28). It is also interesting and significant that this commandment of creation is directly associated with the commandment of stewardship: “Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen. 1:28). It is even possible

that the *wāw* in Hebrew that precedes the verbs expressing “subdue” and “have dominions”¹⁷ functions as an exegetical *wāw*, and serves “to clarify or specify the sense of the preceding clause.” In that case, this syntactical construction would suggest that the act of creation should be understood more precisely as an act of leadership. Initiating something and working to construct order are implied.

The same ideas reappear in the parallel text of Genesis 2, the second creation story, where animals are brought to man that he may give them names (Gen. 2:19–20). Indeed both the ideas of creation and dominion are conveyed by this practice of giving names. In Biblical civilization, as well as in ancient Near Eastern culture the giving of the names was a part of the traditional covenant making between suzerain and vassal. By giving a name to his vassal, the suzerain would not only suggest creation, since the giving of a name gave new existence to the vassal, but he would also and consequently mark his dominion and lordship over him. God named the humans of His creation, but He then designated to the humans the responsibility of naming the animal realm. That act implied a sharing of creative activity.

Humans are qualified for leadership insofar as the leadership they exert is intended to build up and create in the service of life. This testifies not only to the unselfish nature of the work of creation, which implies, as we indicated above, the responsibility of service and leadership, but it also clarifies and purifies the meaning of leadership. Instead of connoting the abuses of dominion and the brute power of destruction and death, the leadership that is inscribed in this perspective of creation will mean productivity and life.

Conclusion

An exegetical and theological analysis of the Biblical creation story reveals the importance of servant leadership in the divine operation of creation. God’s work of creation has been identified as the first act of leadership, to be followed as a model for human leadership. Thus this study should provide not only an understanding of the nature and quality of the Biblical view of leadership, but also specific and practical lessons that are relevant in the delicate exercise of leadership.

God the Creator did not initiate His creative work simply because He wanted to create. He created with the definite purpose of relationship. Yet God did not just create for the pleasure of socializing—just to enjoy the company of humankind. Creation was to be approached not only *for* humankind, as a service for humankind but also *with* humankind, as a cooperative act. In order to accomplish this task, God submitted Himself to all the risks of the creative ini-

¹⁷The term translated as “subdue” (*rādah*) in Genesis 1:26, 28 is commonly used to define royal dominion (see, e.g., 1 Kings 4:24; Pss. 8:5–6; 72:8).

tative and all the pains of humiliation. God moved away from His place and created humans, who were different from Himself. He shared with them His physical presence: He created them with a status that would allow them to confront Him, hence with the capacity to go a different way. God came down and communicated with them, using their own language, and respecting their differences and limitations. God went so far as to share His power and His time with humans. Thus the story of God's leadership is seen in the story of His incarnation.

The creation story does not confine itself to divine leadership; it applies the lessons to human leadership. From the perspective of the Biblical story of creation, a human leader who unwittingly assumes the position of God and chooses to lead all by him- or herself, not relating, not serving, not sharing, not communicating, would be completely disqualified. For such leadership would not be like God's; instead, it would be a leadership of control, oppression, and death. Being created in God's image, humans are all called to lead by following God's model—leadership that initiates, relates, serves, communicates, shares, and creates; a leadership that is productive and creates life and a future.

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