Caring for God's Household: A Leadership Paradigm among New Testament Christians and its Relevance for Church and Mission Today
By David Feddes

Qualifications and expectations for church leaders vary with different implicit metaphors of church. Churches that require pastors to have academic credentials have an implicit metaphor of church as school. Churches that expect leaders to be entrepreneurs and organizers have an implicit metaphor of church as business enterprise. Churches that look for leaders to attract crowds through gripping performances have an implicit metaphor of church as theater. Churches that want leaders to be therapeutic facilitators have an implicit metaphor of church as support group. Churches that emphasize deference to hierarchies or councils have an implicit metaphor of church as government. Churches that expect leaders to have model families and to cultivate family-like relationships with others have an implicit metaphor of church as household.

This list is far from exhaustive, and the items need not be mutually exclusive. A church may mix metaphors. Leadership may blend different paradigms and involve a number of roles, varying with personality, gifting, culture, need and opportunity. None of these implicit metaphors or its corresponding leadership paradigm is entirely wrong.

The church may properly resemble other entities in varying degrees, yet it is identical with none of them. Church leaders may bear similarities to leaders in other spheres, yet they must remain alert to ways that God's church differs from other social units, and they must pursue leadership in tune with gospel values, not mere worldly values.

Recognizing such considerations, we may still ask whether any metaphors for church loom larger than others in the New Testament and its cultural settings; and, if so, what some implications might be for contemporary Christian leadership. I contend that church as God's household is a central metaphor for the NT community of disciples and that a major NT paradigm for leadership is caring for God's household. I suggest that this bears practical significance for contemporary leaders in church and mission.

Exploring New Testament materials and related research by biblical scholars and cultural historians is a worthy enterprise in itself; practical concerns make it even more worthwhile. A recent *Missiology* article by Dana Robert bears the provocative title, "What Happened to the Christian home? The Missing Component of Mission Theory."[1] What is missing from theory can have practical impact on missionary families and on the paradigms they convey to people in other cultures. Inattention to the household paradigm in Scripture or to indigenous structures in a culture may be a key reason why, in the words of Paul Hiebert, "the coming of Christianity and modernity have often led to the breakdown of extended family and kinship systems."[2] On the other hand, overemphasis on a family paradigm for church leadership (especially when family structure itself is flawed) can cause practical damage, as Kiriswa says of an "African model of church as family."[3]

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[1] Dana Robert, "What Happened to the Christian Home? The Missing Component of Mission Theory," *Missiology,* no. 33 (2005): 325-340.
[2] Paul G. Hiebert and Eloise Hiebert Meneses, *Incarnational Ministry: Planting Churches in Band, Tribal, Peasant, and Urban Societies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 175.
[3] Benjamin Kiriswa, "African Model of Church as Family: Implications on Ministry and Leadership," *African Ecclesial Review* 43 no. 3 (2001): 99-108.

Other key issues related to a household paradigm include ancestor veneration and household rites, multiple marriages, family qualities required for church leaders, leadership style, the nature of women's leadership, and the wellbeing of the Christian family itself. Such practical matters heighten the urgency of grasping the significance and limits of "caring for God's household" as a key paradigm for leadership.

Early Christian House Churches

Households were catalytic in the spread of early Christianity and formative in the structuring of its groups. Meeks, in his landmark study *The first urban Christians*, asserts that the household "was the basic unit in the establishment of Christianity in the city, as it was, indeed, the basic unit of the city itself."[4] A prosperous household included immediate family plus "slaves, former slaves who were now clients, hired laborers, and sometimes business associates or tenants. To be part of a household was thus to be part of a larger network of relations."[5] Christians commonly met in private houses. "The house as meeting place afforded some privacy, a degree of intimacy, and stability of place."[6]

"The centrality of the household," insists Meeks, "shows our modern, individualistic conceptions of evangelism and conversion to be quite inappropriate." On many occasions, not just individuals but entire households would become Christian. Indeed, "the whole church would be construed as 'the household of God,'" with church leadership analogous in key respects to family leadership. However, church was not synonymous with household. Itinerant apostles, their delegates, or Spirit-gifted members of a local group could wield more authority than the head of the household hosting the assembly. Moreover, Christians did not limit their loyalty to the assembly in a particular home but felt a "sense of unity among Christians in the whole city, the region or province, and even beyond. Apparently there were other models and social ideas at work"[7] in addition to the household model. Nevertheless, the household was the key social unit for spreading Christianity and a key analogy for Christian leadership patterns.

In *Pagans and Christians*, Robin Lane Fox declares, "It was through the household and the house church that Christianity and its otherworldly 'assembly' first put down its roots, then grew to undermine the old civic values and the very shape of the pagan city."[8] Fox goes on to note that youth in pagan cities often organized into groups and societies with others their own age, "yet we never hear of Christianity spreading horizontally between people of the same age… It tended to spread vertically, not horizontally, from older teachers, from a Christian parent or a Christian head of household."[9]

Fox is right that the early Christian church took root in household settings and evidently did not form age-segregated peer groups as pagans did. But this does not entail that the faith spread only vertically and not horizontally. The pagan Celsus complained that Christian women recruited other women, that Christian children recruited other children, that

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[4] Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: the Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 29.
[5] Ibid., 30.
[6] Ibid., 76.
[7] Ibid., 77.
[8] Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 89.
[9] Ibid., 312.

Christian slaves recruited other slaves, even if heads of households or other authorities did not approve. "The subordinate members of households were especially prominent… as targets for Christian missionaries [and] as active in the missionary enterprise themselves."[10] Thus Fox is mistaken to claim that Christianity spread mainly in a top-down manner to the exclusion of "horizontal" witnessing.

Fox remains correct, however, that the household was the key structure and setting for early Christian expansion. By forming in the pattern of a household rather than a society of peers the same age, "Christianity did not open a generation gap in families."[11] At the same time, tight living quarters and lack of privacy provided a setting for Christians to gossip the gospel to others, for "it was simply not possible or necessary to conceal one's prayers or worship of God from everyone's eyes."[12]

Early Christian worship did not occur in a building set apart solely for that purpose. A house was the most common meeting place, though not the only one. Christian groups "also met in the open or in rented rooms or buildings."[13] As worship did not have its own building, religion did not have its own social sphere or compartment separate from other spheres and aspects of life. For people in that social context, "there was no free-floating social institution that could be designated as 'religion' or a purely religious communion or group, nor any difference between church and state or church and family… ancient religion was embedded religion."[14] Christians were no more likely than non-Christians to compartmentalize their faith. It was enmeshed in social relations and structures, even as it altered and sometimes challenged those structures.

Houses of that time were not separated from public activities. In their lively book *A woman's place: House churches in earliest Christianity*, Carolyn Osiek, Margaret MacDonald, and Janet Tulloch point out, "The Roman *paterfamilias* conducted much if not most of his business and political activities—the two intrinsically interwoven through the patronage system—at home, in the front part of the house."[15] Still today in some cultural settings, a leader's house can be a place for conducting public affairs. Such cultures bear more similarity to the New Testament social context than does the contemporary West, where a house tends to serve as a strictly private residence. As a house could function in a public way, so a house church could be more public than a modern Westerner might conceive. "Rather than thinking of the house church as a private haven, we should probably think of it as the crossroads between public and private."[16]

If a home could host public gatherings, the converse was also true: the public gathering could resemble a home.

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[10] Margaret Y. MacDonald, "Was Celsus Right? The Role of Women in the Expansion of Early Christianity" in *Early Christian Families in Context: an Interdisciplinary Dialogue,* ed. David L. Balch and Carolyn Osiek (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 158.
[11] Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 312.
[12] Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986), 316.
[13] Ekkehard W. Stegemann and Wolfgang Steggemann, *The Jesus Movement: a Social History of Its First Century*, trans. O.C. Dean, Jr. (Minneappolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 276.
[14] Ibid., 286.
[15] Carolyn Osiek and Margaret MacDonald with Janet H. Tulloch, *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 3-4.
[16] Carolyn Osiek and Margaret MacDonald with Janet H. Tulloch, *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 3-4.

> On the basis of the frequency of births and the presence of children, house-church meetings must have been noisy and bustling places. The sounds of a woman in labor somewhere in the background, the crying of infants, the presence of mothers or wet nurses feeding their children, little toddlers under foot, children's toys on the floor—all could have been part of the atmosphere.[17]

Early Christians usually gathered not in a sedate academy nor in a silent shrine but in the lively hubbub of a home. This "picture of church life… challenges preconceived notions of solemnity in favor of the boisterous and somewhat chaotic exchanges of household life.[18]

Diverse Social Structures

While recognizing the significance of households and house churches among early Christians, we must avoid the error of assuming monolithic uniformity. Jewish households could vary considerably from Greek or Roman households. Moreover, we must be cautious of sweeping generalizations about "the Roman family" or "Greco-Roman culture." The Roman Empire encompassed a vast area and a variety of cultures, and different places had considerable "cultural differentiation," notes Beryl Rawson. "Christian communities were likely to share many of the characteristics of the city or area in which they were developing."[19]

Even within a single city or community, households varied widely. "The big urban *domus* could be a very large unit with scores or even hundreds of members."[20] Other households were comprised of blood relatives with few or no slaves or clients. While some households were headed by wealthy patrons and occupied splendid homes, these were not the only setting for house churches. "Some Christian groups must certainly have met in more modest accommodations, even in some of the grimier apartment houses (*insulae*) or 'tenement churches.'"[21] It is thus a mistake to suppose that all house churches were hosted by wealthy patrons who expected to hold top leadership positions.

It is likewise a mistake to view the household as the only social institution that influenced the patterns and practices of early Christian groups. Among the other notable group types of the time were voluntary associations, Jewish synagogues, schools of philosophers, and political assemblies of citizens.[22] Aspects of each group were reflected to at least some degree in different facets of church life: "The institutional character of the ejkklesiva can best be compared with the popular assemblies; the character of fellowship is best compared with the ancient household or nuclear family. The connection of meeting and meal fellowship suggests an analogy with the associations."[23]

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[17] Ibid., 67.
[18] Ibid., 247.
[19] Beryl Rawson, "The Roman Family," *Biblical Interpretation* 11, no. 2 (2003): 135.
[20] Richard Saller, "Women, Slaves and the Economy of the Roman Household," in *Early Christian Families in Context: an Interdisciplinary Dialogue*, ed. David L. Balch and Carolyn Osiek (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 196.
[21] Carolyn Osiek and Margaret MacDonald with Janet H. Tulloch, *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 9.
[22] Ekkehard W. Stegemann and Wolfgang Steggemann, *The Jesus Movement: A Social History of Its First Century*, trans. O.C. Dean, Jr. (Minneappolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 273-274.
[23] Ibid., 286.

The household was very important for spreading Christianity and for "the solidarity of their social relationships." But Christian assemblies were not synonymous with households whose heads had become Christians. Household members did not always convert, and individuals who belonged to households headed by non-Christians were welcome at Christian gatherings.

> Christ-confessing communities, in their self-understanding and social relationships, were based on the model of the ancient household or nuclear family. Yet they were not simply organized and structured like ancient households or families. They neither fulfilled the family's central purpose (the subsistence of the extended family), nor was their organizational form a crude imitation of the household or family's institutional forms.[24]

Stegemann and Stegemann are right that diverse models influenced early Christian groups. But they go too far when they assert that the original Pauline churches "contained no developed *institutional* leadership function" but only "roles in the context of charismatic groups… based not on the division of roles of an ancient household but at most… on that of associations and synagogues."[25]

This reflects a line of thought which supposes a gap—even a contradiction—between Paul and later "pseudo-Pauline" writings such as Ephesians, Colossians, and the Pastoral Epistles. Some of the more radical expressions of this view hold that early NT writers were quite egalitarian and socially revolutionary, while later writers were social conservatives trying to impose institutional control patterned on authoritarian household structures.[26]

Thiessen has portrayed a scenario of power struggles between two types of itinerants: "charismatics" and "community organizers."[27] Horrell suggests a further level of power struggle, pitting "itinerant leadership" against "resident leadership."[28] In his estimation, power shifted from itinerants to resident leaders, accompanied by a shift from viewing the church as a brotherhood of equals to viewing it as a household hierarchy.[29]

These scholars underestimate the consistency of the New Testament witness and overestimate the role of differing social structures as a cause of conflict. Certainly there was opposition against the authority of the apostles and their delegates, as the New Testament frequently attests. But such conflict arose more from doctrinal deviation or rebellious pride than from any inherent conflict between charisma and institution or between itinerant and local household leadership.

Veteran missionaries know the tensions that sometimes attend relations between missionaries and local bodies, as well as the benefits and dangers of increasing

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[24] Ekkehard W. Stegemann and Wolfgang Steggemann, *The Jesus Movement: a Social History of Its First Century*, trans. O.C. Dean, Jr. (Minneappolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 279.
[25] Ibid.
[26] David C. Verner, "The Household of God: the Social World of the Pastoral Epistles" in *Society of Biblical Literature* Series 71 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 186.
[27] Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* (Edinburgh: T&T. Clark, 1982).
[28] David Horrell, "Leadership Patterns and the Development of Ideology in Early Christianity," *Sociology of Religion* no. 58 (1997): 323-341.
[29] David Horrell, "From Adelphoi to Oikos Theou: Social Transformation in Pauline Christianity," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 120 no. 2 (2001): 293-311.

institutionalization.[30] Such knowledge can enhance interpretation of NT books as missionary documents but must not pit one part of divinely inspired Scripture against another, nor treat every type of institutionalization as a betrayal of the founder's pioneering vision and pattern. As the Jesus movement spread and put down roots, its institutional shape became more defined, a development recognized and encouraged in later NT writings. But this hardly puts later NT writings at odds with earlier ones.

Those who see contradiction and conflict between NT writings tend to suppose that Jesus and his early followers (such as Paul) bypassed or even set themselves against the household; only later did the household gain institutional prominence in Christian gatherings, with codes for various household members, offices for church leaders, and an expectation that overseers and deacons be men whose families were models of faith and propriety. Such an approach tends to reveal more about academic fashions and presuppositions than about NT texts and social context. It relies on dubious assumptions about authorship of New Testament documents, and wrongly views NT variations in emphasis as indicating contradictory beliefs and practices in different NT authors.

Even if I did not recognize that Scripture never errs or contradicts itself, I would still be skeptical of claims that the first participants in the Jesus movement were radical egalitarians who dispensed with family structures. Elliot titles a persuasive article, "The Jesus movement was not egalitarian but family-oriented."[31] Elliot is a fervent egalitarian who wishes that "the Jesus movement had been egalitarian, at least at some point in its early history," but, he ruefully observes, "wishing and politically correct ideology cannot make it so."[32] He says,

> To imagine what amounts to two 'sea changes' within half a century—a revolutionary shift from traditionally patriarchally structured households to households structured as 'communities of equals' and then within a generation a reversion back to patriarchal arrangements—is as sociologically naïve as it is historically indemonstrable.[33]

Rather than view the household emphasis of the pastoral epistles as a move away from the imagined egalitarian practices of Jesus and his first followers, Elliot holds that Jesus himself "turned to the oikos and the family as the focus of his ministry… This focus on household and family as both basis and model for the movement was maintained by his followers after his death and well into the second century."[34] Their main concern was not equality but inclusiveness. Differences of responsibility and rank "were not eliminated but relativized." Such differences no longer impeded access to God or salvation and "no longer defined insiders and outsiders." However, differences continued to shape "the statuses, roles, and relations within the Jesus movement." From Jesus through Paul and well beyond, "The household provided one of the chief models, if not *the* root metaphor, for depicting the

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[30] Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 159-172.
[31] John H. Elliott, "The Jesus Movement Was Not Egalitarian But Family-Oriented," *Biblical Interpretation* 11 no. 2 (2003):173-210.
[32] Ibid., 205.
[33] Ibid., 204.
[34] Ibid., 204-205.

communal identity, unity, intimacy, and loyalty of the believers in relation to God, Jesus Christ, and one another."[35]

Household as a Root Metaphor for Church

The letter to Timothy was written to describe "how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household" (1 Timothy 3:15). Verner argues that this is not just a minor metaphor but the central theme of the Pastorals. In setting forth "a coherent concept of the church as the household of God," the author understands "the household as the basic social unit in the church" and "the church as a social structure modeled on the household."[36] Verner is right about the centrality of the household metaphor for church in the Pastorals, even though he mistakenly denies Pauline authorship of the Pastorals and wrongly sees in the household concept a preference for authoritarian rigidity.

Some scholars contend that the household concept is less central than Verner claims. Luke Timothy Johnson says that Paul maintains clear boundaries between ejkklhsiva (assembly/church) and oijvkos (household). He adds, "In this reading I disagree sharply with the position of D.C. Verner"[37] In a similar vein, William Mounce insists, "The metaphor of the house is relatively minor in the PE [Pastoral Epistles] and cannot bear the weight placed on it by Verner and others… The metaphor is not a dominating force in the thought of the author and is not used to enforce a rigid structure in the Ephesian and Cretan church."[38]

Both Mounce and Johnson rightly affirm Pauline authorship of the Pastorals and rightly reject Verner's distortions of how the household metaphor was intended to function. The Pastorals do not erase proper distinctions between church and household, nor do they use the household metaphor to uphold an authoritarian status quo in opposition to more flexible and inclusive ways. Nevertheless, we need not deny or downplay the importance of the household metaphor, as Mounce and Johnson do. We can uphold proper distinctions and avoid improper distortions, even as we recognize household as a key metaphor for church.

In the years since Verner published *The Household of God*, evidence for the importance of household in the thought and practice of New Testament-era Christianity has not decreased but increased. This is widely recognized among social historians and New Testament scholars alike. "The home, the fundamental socio-economic unit of ancient societies, is of eminent importance both in the social context of early Christian communities and in New Testament linguistic usage."[39]

The implicit metaphor of church as household is more prominent in early NT writings than some scholars acknowledge. By the same token, the role of household

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[35] John H. Elliott, "The Jesus Movement Was Not Egalitarian But Family-Oriented," *Biblical Interpretation* 11 no. 2 (2003):204-205.

[36] David C. Verner, "The Household of God: The Social World of the Pastoral Epistles" in *Society of Biblical Literature* Series 71 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 1.

[37] Luke Timothy Johnson, *"Letters to Paul's Delegates: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus,"* in The New Testament in Context, ed. Howard Clark Kee and J. Andrew Overman (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 148.

[38] William D. Mounce, "Pastoral Epistles," *World Biblical Commentary* 46 ed. Ralph P. Martin (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 221.

[39] Ekkehard W. Stegemann and Wolfgang Steggemann, *The Jesus Movement: a Social History of Its First Century*, trans. O.C. Dean, Jr. (Minneappolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 277.

structures in later NT writings is less authoritarian and less like the surrounding society than some scholars suppose. NT authors are not at odds but hold a common view. While drawing on several models of group organization and varying in emphasis and expression, they consistently commend "the brotherhood-like nature of the Christian fellowship… embedded in household structures."[40] Examination of NT specifics bears this out.

A study of Luke's gospel finds that "Jesus looks at the social life of his time from the point of view of the households." This does not merely shape the Jesus movement into the household form of the surrounding world. Rather, "the model of discipleship tends to transform the model of the household."[41]

Jesus does not simply equate a community under God's reign with existing family loyalties; he insists that family ties must never impede following him in single-minded love and obedience (Luke 14:26). Yet Jesus does not undermine family; he renews and transforms it according to God's original intent. He insists that God created marriage to be a permanent union of one man and one woman (Mk 10:2-9). He stresses God's command to honor parents and condemns "religious" excuses for neglecting family (Mk 7:9-13).

As Jesus upholds family ties, he makes the household vital to his mission strategy and vision of transformed community. Jesus tells his disciples to find a friendly household to use as a mission base in each village (Lk 10:5-7). Jesus teaches his followers to view God as their Father (eg. ten times in Matt 6 alone). Jesus says to become like children in order to enter God's kingdom (Matt 18:3). Jesus depicts himself as head of a household and his disciples as household members (Mt 10:25). He compares church leadership to stewardship in a household (eg. Mt 24:45; Lk 12:42). Jesus teaches his followers not to pull rank nor to parade the power of patronage (Lk 22:25) but to regard one another as brothers (Matt 23:8). In God's household as portrayed by Jesus, the key is not privilege or rank but love and service. Clearly, then, it is not only later Christians but Jesus himself who stresses "the concept of the familial fellowship of believers."[42]

Jesus' apostles carry on his household-based mission strategy and his frequent use of household language. Ample NT evidence shows the household (not just the individual) as a unit of conversion. An angel told Cornelius to send for Peter and promised, "He will bring you a message through which you and all your household will be saved" (Acts 11:14). The female householder Lydia was baptized along with "the members of her household" (Acts 16:15). Paul and Silas preached a household-embracing gospel to a jailer:

> "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house… he and all his family were baptized … he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family" (Acts 16:31, 33).

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[40] Karl O. Sandnes, "Equality Within Patriarchal Structures: Some New Testament Perspectives on the Christian Fellowship as a Brother- or Sisterhood and a Family," in *Constructing Early Christian Families: Family as a Social Reality and Metaphor*, ed. H. Moxnes (London: Routledge, 1997), 151. cited in Clarke 2000, 204.

[41] Adriana Destro and Mauro Pesce, "Fathers and Householders in the Jesus Movement: the Perspective of the Gospel of Luke," *Biblical Interpretation* 11 no. 2 (2003): 33.

[42] Ekkehard W. Stegemann and Wolfgang Steggemann, *The Jesus Movement: a Social History of Its First Century*, trans. O.C. Dean, Jr. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999), 278.

In Corinth, "Crispus, the synagogue ruler, and his entire household believed in the Lord" (Acts 18:8). Paul baptized the household of Stephanas, which went on to play a key ministry role in the region (1 Cor 1:16; 16:15).

As households were a unit of conversion and a place of meeting (eg. Phile 2), so the household served as a root metaphor for the church. In one of Paul's earliest epistles, he describes Christians as "members of the household of faith" (*oijkeivouS thS pivstewS* Gal 6:10). In a similar vein, Paul's later epistles call Christians "members of God's household" (oijkeioi tou qeou Eph 2:19), "his family in heaven and on earth" (Eph 3:15), and "household of God" (oijkw qeou 1 Tim 3:15). Other NT epistles likewise refer to the church as "the household of God" (tou oijkou tou qeou Heb 10:21; 1 Pet 4:17).

Explicit references to church as God's household are just the tip of the iceberg. Household as an implicit root metaphor pervades apostolic language as it does the language of Jesus. God is Father; we are his children and heirs of all he possesses (eg. Rom 8:17; 1 Cor 3:21-23; 1 Jn 3:1-4). Even slaves with no legal rights of inheritance in a household can count on an eternal inheritance from the Lord (Col 3:24).

Specific calls for "brotherly love" (eg. Rom 12:10) or "brotherly kindness" (2 Pet 1:7) occur in a setting saturated with the language of brotherhood. NT epistles refer to believers as brothers and sisters about 180 times. While Paul usually speaks as a brother, he sometimes also presents himself as a parent (eg. 1 Cor 4:15; 1 Thess 2:7,11) addressing his children (2 Cor 6:13, Gal 4:19). John's epistles frequently address readers affectionately as "dear children." Apostles are stewards (1 Cor 4:1-2), as are local overseers (Tit 1:7) and every member of the church whom God has gifted (1 Pet 4:10). Leadership in varying forms is thus not an ego trip or an opportunity to dominate; each steward must answer to the Master of the household. And lest those entrusted with stewardly or parental authority in the church become wrongly paternalistic, the leading figures also see themselves as slaves in the household (Rom 1:1; James 1:1; 2 Pet 1:1; Jd 1:1), under orders to serve other members.

Household language pervades apostolic writings, and some epistles offer specific instructions to various members of households on how to live as Christians in their particular situation. These household instructions and the metaphor of church as household are viewed by some scholars as blanket endorsement of authoritarian, hierarchical leadership patterns which often characterized Roman households and patronage relationships. Verner charges that the Pastorals "directly and uncritically reflect the dominant social values of the larger society,"[43] while Horrell asserts that a household model entails that "the eccliastical hierarchy mirrors the domestic and social hierarchy."[44]

In contrast to such misunderstanding, Andrew Clarke offers a more discerning and nuanced view. He recognizes the unity of NT witness and the profound impact of faith on social relations. Far from merely legitimating the status quo, NT revelation transforms the nature of relationships—and does so without abruptly trashing all relationships and overthrowing the whole system. Clarke observes, "Of all the patterns of community organization which were available to the early church… the one which could be most easily

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[43] David C. Verner, "The Household of God: the Social World of the Pastoral Epistles," in *Society of Biblical Literature* Series 71 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 145.

[44] David Horrell, "Leadership Patterns and the Development of Ideology in Early Christianity," in *Sociology of Religion* 58 (1997): 323-341.

modified so as to be appropriate to the context of the Christian community was that of the family."[45] Christians could not simply mimic existing family patterns, however, or apply them, unchanged, to church. The pursuit of status and power had to give way to a desire to serve and love. This qualifies anything else that might be said about specific roles within a household or a congregation. Clarke notes that in Paul's exercise of leadership, he stresses Christ's supremacy, not his own. Paul recognizes the legitimacy of multiple apostolic leadership and multiple overseers in local congregations, not one householder with absolute authority over a congregation. Paul, far from advocating stratification or authoritarianism, prefers tender appeals to harsh bullying. Paul is boldly "countercultural" in correcting those who prefer worldly conceptions of power and control.[46]

In short, the New Testament uses household as a root metaphor for church, without indiscriminately copying all household attitudes and practices of the surrounding society. It is in this light that we must understand (1) NT codes on how each is to serve Christ in his or her own position within a household, and (2) the expectation that church leaders be skilled in household management and have model families. We now focus on these in turn: first the household codes, then the requirement for church leaders to have model families.

Household Codes

NT household codes (*Haustafeln*) address wives and husbands, children and parents, slaves and masters (Eph 5:21-6:9; Col 3:18-4:1; 1 Pet 2:18-3:12). Despite the charges of scholars cited above, these codes do not simply legitimate an existing structure where a superior dominates an inferior. All Christians, whatever their specific position, are told to submit *to one another* as an expression of being filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:18,21; ὑποτασσόμενοι ἀλλήλοις "submit to one another" is a participial phrase linked to the main verb πληροῦσθε "be filled.") All have God as their Father, Christ as their Master, the Spirit as their family inheritance, baptism as their mark of adoption, and reigning with Christ as their destiny (Gal 3:26-28; Eph 4:3-5; Col 3:11). Unity, equality, and mutual submission in Christ are the context within which any differentiation of household roles must be understood.

A wife's respect and a husband's loving leadership are not to be grounded in Greco-Roman honor codes but are to dramatize the bond between Christ and his church (Eph 5:22-33). Children are to obey parents "in the Lord" (Eph 6:1), not just for the sake of their parents' prestige. Fathers are to bring up their children not as extensions of their own ego or trophies of their importance but "in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Eph 6:4). Slaves are to work hard and show respect, not as inherent inferiors, but "like slaves of Christ… serving the Lord" and expecting him to reward a slave as much as a freeman (Eph 6:5-8; Col 3:21-24). Masters, in turn, are to "do the same things to them" (τὰ αὐτὰ ποιεῖτε πρὸς αὐτούς). That is, for Christ's sake masters are to serve and respect their slaves! Threats are forbidden. After all, both masters and slaves serve the same Master in heaven, who impartially cares as much about slaves as masters (Eph 6:7).

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[45] Andrew D. Clarke, "Serve the Community of the Church: Christians as Leaders and Ministers," *First-Century Christians in the Graeco-Roman World* ed. Andrew D. Clarke (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 247.

[46] Ibid., 246-251.

A male head of household is not to assert the absolute authority granted him under Roman law (*patria potestas*). He must not treat his wife harshly (Col 3:19) but must love her as he loves himself and care for her tenderly (Eph 5:28-29). Though she is weaker in terms of physical strength and social clout, he must consider her wishes and respect her as an equal heir of eternal life (1 Pet 3:7). He must not provoke his children to anger (parorgivzete Eph 6:4) or embitter them (ejreqivzete) lest they be disheartened (ajqumiwsin Col 3:21). Unlike many householders using slaves as sexual playthings (Osiek 2003) or overworking them without any pay, Christian householders are told, "Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair" (Col 4:1). Philemon is urged to take back Onesimus "no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother" (Philem 1:16). Post-biblical writings likewise warn householders not to command slaves in bitterness (*Didache* 4:11; *Barnabas* 19:7) nor to be haughty toward them (*Polycarp* 4:3).

Leaders are to be servants; conversely, subordinates are to be leaders. Even without a position of command, they can still exert influence. A Christian wife, by submitting to the authority even of an unbelieving, inconsiderate husband, puts herself in a leading position to win him over to her Lord by her purity, inner beauty, and freedom from fear (1 Pet 3:1-6). Moreover, "women who become wives and faithfully bear children are crucial evangelists and missionaries who bring new lives into being and nurture them," according to Gruenler's interpretation of 1 Tim 2:15. "Faithful childbearing wives manifest one of the highest callings for evangelism in God's creation design."[47] In fact, submissive wives could in some sense rule a household (oijkodespotein 1 Tim 5:14). "The household was women's space."[48] So too, in the household atmosphere of early Christian church gatherings, women's influence was unavoidable. "Therefore, to step into a Christian house church was to step into women's world."[49]

Even children can lead. A Christian child's humble trust can be a worthier example to follow than the unbelief of older and more learned persons (Matt 11:25; 18:2-4). Christians are to imitate God "as dearly loved children" (Eph 5:1). Thus "a remarkable emphasis is placed on childlikeness whereby it is not only the role of the child to be taught by the adult but that the adult may learn lessons of faith from the child."[50] "The notion that an adult could learn something substantial from a child would have been highly unusual in the Greco-Roman world… Cultural expectations concerning honor and prestige are reversed."[51] The complaints of Celsus, cited earlier, show the negative pagan reaction to any sense of child as leader. But his very complaints provide evidence that Christian children were indeed leaders in their own way. They were witnesses of Jesus to other children, who in turn became witnesses to unbelieving grownup in their own households.

As a wife or child can exert influence, a Christian slave can also be a leader with influence, exemplifying Christ to others. Confident of being "the Lord's freedman," he

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[47] Royce Gordon Gruenler, "The Mission-Lifestyle Setting of 1 Tim 2:8-15," *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41 no. 2 (1998): 218.
[48] Carolyn Osiek and Margaret MacDonald with Janet H. Tulloch, *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 152.
[49] Ibid., 163.
[50] James Francis, "Children and Childhood in the New Testament," in *The Family in Theological Perspective* ed. Stephen C. Barton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 84-85.
[51] Osiek, MacDonald and Tulloch, *A Woman's Place*, 83.

should gain freedom if possible; but if not, he still belongs to Christ, not to any man (1 Cor 7:20-24). Slaves are to show respect even for harsh masters, not from a groveling sense that masters have a license to abuse slaves as mere property, but because Christian slaves are freely choosing to suffer for doing good in imitation of their suffering Savior (1 Pet 2:18-25). They do not want to give unbelievers any reason to slander God's name or Christian teaching. Indeed, slaves who gain their master's trust exert a leading influence and "make the teaching about God our Savior attractive" (Tit 2:9).

Slaves lead, and leaders serve. This is the way of God's household. NT teaching regards service and suffering not as mere degradation at the hands of the world but as part of a mission to save the world. Jesus, though equal with God, took "the form of a slave" for our sake (Phil 2:7). Similarly, a prominent leader such as Paul can say, "Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible" (1 Cor 9:19).

The claim that NT household codes merely endorse prevailing patterns is far from true. To a deconstructionist revolutionary, any willingness to live within existing patterns is total capitulation. To a radical individualist, any intent to serve the interests of others is self-deceiving and self-degrading. But to a mission-conscious follower of Jesus, the mission-shaped NT writings show how to witness for Christ in a way that attracts people to faith and expresses the Christ-life in flesh-and-blood human contexts.

The household codes indicate that "living within accepted social structures was not only obligatory but also the Christian thing to do."[52] As we apply NT household codes to contemporary life, we may gain specific insights for honoring Christ in family and workplace, but that is not all. We may study specific instructions, but we must also breathe in the missionary atmosphere of these codes and live by the same Spirit who gave NT writers "the sensitivity to what was appropriate and practical and right and witness-bearing within the social constraints of the time—their 'healthy worldliness.'"[53] We must walk by the Spirit and live the gospel in our own context.

The household codes were not built from scratch. Strands of Jewish teaching, Stoic thought, and Hellenistic popular philosophy were already offering ethical instruction for household members,[54] opposing some abuses and, in Schnabel's words, taking "a mediating position between a rigorous patriarchalism and an extreme emancipation." NT writers echo some of the best of this advice, even as they present fresh guidance in Christ.[55]

By respecting existing institutions and making households healthier, Christians would show non-Christians that they cared about "society and its good order. This would have "an apologetic and evangelistic impact."[56] Living in "an inevitably flawed" society, the church "sought to live and witness within that society by combining the proven wisdom of that society with commitment to its own Lord and the transforming power of the

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[52] Raymond Collins, "1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: a Commentary," in *The New Testament Library* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 75.
[53] James D. G. Dunn, "The Household Rules in the New Testament," in *The Family in Theological Perspective* ed. Stephen C. Barton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 63.
[54] Ibid., 53.
[55] Eckhard J. Schnable, *Early Christian Mission,* vol. 2 *Paul and the Early Church* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2004), 1304-1305
[56] Dunn, "The Household Rules in the New Testament," 57.

love which he had embodied."[57] For Christians, life in family and household is inseparable from God's mission.

Model Households Mandatory for Key Leaders

A church overseer must be "the husband of but one wife" and "must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect." The same applies to deacons (1 Tim 3:2, 4,12). Those in such key positions must be people "whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient" (Tit 1:6). As Mounce summarizes it, "A person's ability to manage the church, which is God's household, will be evident in the managing of his own household."[58] [59]

This should come as no surprise. We have seen the importance of the household for various peoples in the Roman Empire, the fact that most church gatherings occurred in household settings, the pervasiveness of household as a NT root metaphor for church, and the ethical and missionary importance of NT household codes. Household is so closely related to church that someone failing in household leadership would seem unlikely to succeed in church leadership. "Inability in the former makes ability extremely doubtful in the latter."[60] As Paul asks rhetorically, "If anyone cannot manage his own household, how can he take care of God's church?" (1 Tim 3:5).

One key indicator of a person's qualities is the opinion of those closest to him. Someone aspiring to be a leader ought to be respected most by those who know him best. If his wife is flourishing ("worthy of respect… temperate and trustworthy" 1 Tim 3:11), he is more likely to be the kind of person who can help Christ's bride, the church, to flourish. If his children look up to him with respect and emulate his faith, he is more likely to be the kind of person whom others will look up to and who can win others to faith.

Leadership involves replication: of faith, of character, of family. A leader's faith is replicated in those he teaches; therefore, he "must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught" (Tit 1:9). A leader's character sets a pattern for others to imitate; therefore, a person should be designated as a leader only if his personal qualities (1 Tim 2:2-3; Tit 1:6-9) are worthy to be replicated. So too, a leader's family is a model for others; therefore, his family must be the kind the church wants more of. Christians and even "outsiders" (1 Tim 3:7) should be able to say of him, "We wish more people were like him, and we wish more families were like his."

Another reason a leader should have a model family is that effectiveness in a smaller sphere indicates fitness for wider responsibility.[61] This principle appears in NT

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[57] Ibid., 61.
[58] William D. Mounce, "Pastoral Epistles," in *Word Biblical Commentary* 46 ed. Ralph P. Martin (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 177.
[59] Mary R. D'Angelo, "Eusebeia: Roman Imperial Family Values and the Sexual Politics of 4 Maccabees and the Pastorals," *Biblical Interpretation* 11 no. 2 (2003): 159.
[60] George W. Knight, III, *The Pastoral Epistles: a Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 162.
[61] George W. Knight, III, *The Pastoral Epistles: a Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1992), 162.

teaching as well as in Greek and Roman thought. According to Plutarch, a man should "have his household well harmonized who is going to harmonize state, forum, and friends."[62]

A person's family is a crucial indicator of his suitability for leadership, both because it is tangible evidence of what the person is really like and because it correlates with others' perception of him. Leadership depends not only on someone's capacity to lead but also on others' willingness to follow him. Usually a person's character and leadership ability will be apparent in his family. In exceptional cases, someone with godly character and good leadership might nevertheless to have an ungodly, unruly household. Even then, however, this fine person would still lack credibility in the eyes of others, and would thus not be suitable to hold a position of church leadership.

Bakke suggests, "Mediterranean culture at this period was what cultural anthropologists call a 'shame/honor culture.'" A man honored by wife and children gains stature, whereas improper actions by wife or children "bring shame upon him… [and] weaken his authority as a community leader." Meeting in the intimate context of house churches and living in close proximity to non-Christian neighbors "made life transparent." Problems would seldom remain secret. If family members refused to follow the father's faith or lived disordered lives, it "would soon be known in the neighborhood" and he would "lose face." Church members would be less inclined to follow his lead, and non-Christians would pay him little heed. "If even his own children do not listen to him, this detracts from the plausibility of the religion and the worship of God for which he is supposed to be the leader."[63] Whether or not Bakke is correct to apply a shame/honor construct to the NT cultural setting, he is surely right to see an admirable family as a necessity, not an option, to be a credible leader in that context.

The NT assumes that most overseers and deacons have families, but this assumption is not a requirement.[64] To be unmarried or childless does not disqualify someone from consideration for leadership, as the cases of Paul and Jesus himself clearly indicate. Singles can serve as pastoral overseers, and it would be wrong to claim otherwise. By the same token, it is wrong to claim (with Roman Catholics) that *only* singles may serve in such positions. Most people are meant to marry and have children. Relating to a spouse and bringing up children, far from being a disqualification for church leadership, can enhance one's leadership capacities by providing experience of "ordinary life" and realistic awareness of how families work.[65]

A man must manage (prosthnai) his household well if he is to care for (ejpimelhsetai) God's church (1 Tim 3:5). prosthnai in NT usage may refer to authoritative direction or to helpful concern, and often blends both senses. According to Mounce, Paul's use of the word shows that a father "should not be dictatorial but caring and protecting." Only if he treats his family this way can he be counted on to "care for" God's household.

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[62] Carolyn Osiek and Margaret MacDonald with Janet H. Tulloch, *A Woman's Place: House Churches in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 133.
[63] O.M. Bakke, *When Children Became People: the Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity*, trans. Brain McNeil (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 154-157.
[64] William D. Mounce, "Pastoral Epistles," in *Word Biblical Commentary* 46 ed. Ralph P. Martin (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 177.
[65] John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon,* trans. William Pringle (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1948), 82.

ejpimelhsetai is a term often used for medical care. An overseer is to care for family and church with the kindness and skill of a physician caring for a sick friend. Leadership is thus to be marked "by a sensitive caring, not a dictatorial exercise of authority and power." This does not deny the office's authority but defines its nature.[66]

Paul's choice of words indicates that he does not simply embrace a Roman concept of a father's absolute control over children, and he is not saying that church leadership involves similar control. The power of godly leadership is not primarily in compelling but in attracting. "There is a fine line between demanding obedience and gaining it. The church leader, who must indeed exhort people to obedience, does not thereby 'rule' God's family. He **takes care of it** in such a way that its 'children' will be known for their obedience and good behavior."[67]

In all this, the missionary import of church leadership looms large. "Modeling Christ for those within the Church and for the uncoverted in the outer world is Paul's top priority."[68] The overseer is "in a position to improve or damage the church's standing in the eyes of the general public."[69] When leadership falls into disrepute, so does the Christian community, resulting in "an eschatological disaster."[70] The church, which is supposed to shine as an unveiling of divine mysteries and an outpost of God's reign, instead appears as a chaos of family disharmony and social disorder. If a leader is to be a paragon of what the church represents, he can ill afford to have a family that detracts from the church's attractiveness and the gospel's credibility.

Many qualities required of leaders in 1 Tim 3 are not just Christian virtues but "reflect the highest ideals of the culture as well."[71] Solid leaders with model families would help to allay non-Christian suspicions that Christians "were socially disruptive" and would instead show that Christ produces a kind of family life even better than the best of non-Christian ideals. This Spirit-given wisdom turned out to be excellent mission strategy. The family life of early Christians had such success in attracting non-believers and in reproducing new generations of Christian children that much of the growth of early Christianity can be attributed to its family attitudes and practices.[72]

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[66] William D. Mounce, "Pastoral Epistles," in *Word Biblical Commentary* 46 ed. Ralph P. Martin (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), 178-180.
[67] Gordon D. Fee, "1 and 2 Timothy, Titus," in *New International Bible Commentary* ed. W. Ward Gasque (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1988), 83. Emphasis his.
[68] Royce Gordon Gruenler, "The Mission-Lifestyle Setting of 1 Tim 2:8-15," *The Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 41 no. 2 (1998): 225.
[69] David C. Verner, "The Household of God: the Social World of the Pastoral Epistles," in *Society of Biblical Literature* Series 71 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1983), 150.
[70] Raymond F. Collins, "1& 2 Timothy and Titus: a Commentary," in *The New Testament Library* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 78.
[71] Gordon D. Fee, "1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, in *New International Bible Commentary* ed. W. Ward Gasque (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1988), 79.
[72] Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: a Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

Some Contemporary Implications and Limits of Leadership as "Caring for God's Household"

The bulk of this article has researched the metaphor of church as household, and the paradigm of leadership as caring for God's household, as expressed by NT writers in their particular socio-cultural setting. It is beyond the scope of this article and the competence of this writer to delineate precisely how this dimension of biblical revelation is to take shape in the lived realities of different places and peoples. Christians in various cultures today must think through how best to apply God's Word in their own setting. Still, I will suggest a few practical implications and limitations for readers to consider.

Most NT Christians gathered for worship in house churches. This does not mean that the "the most biblical" churches today are those that meet only in homes and not in church buildings. Description does not entail prescription. Fitts calls for *The church in the house: a return to simplicity*.[73] But a return to the simplicity of early Christian groups is not necessarily what God requires or what will be most effective in every setting.

In some areas of the world, house churches still play a key role, "particularly in the early stages of organizing a new congregation." But even in many of these places, "house churches tend to be transient" unless they grow into something larger or have ties to other house churches or to a broader-based church. Studies find that "families will not stay with the house church more than two years."[74] In the United States, house churches seldom work well for long.[75] The Christian home remains "probably the most important neutral territory for evangelism,"[76] but even where home-based evangelism and hospitality flourish, the church often does best where it is not limited to worship in homes.

While house and church need not be identical, the family remains vital for the identity and mission of the church. Christian self-understanding cannot dispense with knowing ourselves to be children of God, brothers and sisters in Christ, members of God's household. Christian mission cannot ignore the need for missionaries and indigenous church leaders to have model families, nor can mission neglect the importance of the gospel spreading from house to house and from generation to generation.

Problems can arise in seeing church as a family, and leadership as caring for God's household. In a British context, Selby suggests that seeing church as family does more harm than good. "Is the church a family? Obviously not," he insists. The church does better if it is not "assimilated to some of the more cloying features of the modern nuclear family." Selby objects to "the power of parents over children" resulting in "the psychological and emotional extension of the power of the clergy over the laity." Conversely, the distress of modern families and of "church as family" places undue pressure on "the actual families of

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[73] Robert Fitts, *The Church in the House: a Return to Simplicity* (Salem, OR: Preparing the Way Publishers, 2001).
[74] Paul G. Hiebert and Eloise Hiebert Meneses, *Incarnational Ministry: Planting Churches in Band, Tribal, Peasant, and Urban Societies* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1995), 351.
[75] Peter C. Wagner, *Church Planting for a Greater Harvest* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1990), 122.
[76] Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 182.

its pastors." Rather than using a root metaphor of church as family, Selby recommends viewing "church as public company."[77]

In an African context, Kiriswa contends that a family model of church "could easily give a negative image of the church if applied without modifications." On the upside, he notes "strong, positive elements in the African family" and "a sense of belonging and identity." On the downside, he recalls his own experience growing up in a family "where children and women are literally considered as property of the tribe, clan or men." In his opinion, most African societies make the man "the sole authority." Further, "our African image of leadership is dictatorial." To view church as a family, Kiriswa fears, will cause church leadership to replicate the faults of family leadership. With clergy as father and laity as children, the result is "paternalism and dependence, instead of participation, interdependence and collegial leadership." As an alternative, he suggests, "The African extended family model expresses better the kind of church we would like to see in Africa today… There is more flexibility, openness and inclusiveness than in the nuclear family which is more rigid, exclusive and authoritarian." In the extended family, "leadership does not revolve around one person. Every adult member of the society is a leader" with input into decision-making. Kiriswa recommends seeing church as extended family and leadership as stewardship, "authority without superiority."[78]

These examples from Britain and Africa show just a few of the problems and complications that can arise when flawed people in flawed family structures (as we all are to some degree) view leadership as caring for God's family. In some settings it may be necessary to deemphasize a family metaphor somewhat and highlight other metaphors for church. After all, even among New Testament Christians, other root metaphors operated besides the household metaphor.

But it is inadvisable—and indeed impossible—to discard the household metaphor altogether or to totally disconnect family leadership from church leadership. It is impossible because family is so close to our core human identity and so deeply embedded in biblical imagery for church. No other root metaphor can match or replace family. Attempting to do so is inadvisable, even when family patterns are misshapen by sin. If family life is at odds with biblical patterns, it would be wiser to renew and reform families than to dismiss household as a root metaphor for church. Many households in the first-century Roman Empire were as authoritarian and exclusive as the families Kiriswa criticizes in contemporary Africa. The apostles, rather than denying any connection between church and household, called for both to follow the leading of God's Word and Spirit, and for both church and household to strengthen each other. Dysfunctional families were as likely to mean dysfunctional churches in Paul's ancient Ephesus as in Selby's modern London. But rather than eliminate a family metaphor and see church as a public company, we must heed Paul's instruction to seek leaders with model families who will also be able to cultivate healthier relationships in church.

Trends in the West to make church less like a family and more like a company have coincided with trends for men and women to pour themselves more into the company

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[77] Peter Selby, "Is the Church a Family?" in *The Family in Theological Perspective* ed. Stephen C. Barton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 151-164.

[78] Benjamin Kiriswa, "African Model of Church as Family: Implications on Ministry and Leadership," *African Ecclesial Review* 43 no. 3 (2001): 99-105.

they work for than into their families (or churches). Sociologist Jon Davies calls for a "preferential option for the family," insisting on "the necessity of family life for children, for the poor and for society as a whole." Davies charges, "The post-modern world is almost entirely preoccupied with adults… the family is *not* a privileged institution in the world we live in."[79] To exalt the image of public company above that of family might make things worse.

As noted earlier, family is not the only legitimate metaphor for church. The New Testament uses various models and metaphors, and Christians today would be wise to draw on various images of church that can enrich each other and correct any one metaphor taken to excess. Still, even allowing for variety and richness in images of church and models for its structure, household is a central metaphor and must remain so, while honoring proper distinctions between church and family.

Churches sometimes choose leadership whose family life is far from exemplary. Their public persona may be impressive. They would seem to qualify as leaders in a church conceived mainly as "a public company." Churches may be so enamored of someone's speaking skills or organizational prowess or community clout that they are willing to overlook problems in the leader's "private life." But family and church cannot be so neatly separated, and the biblical call for leaders to have model families should not be ignored.

The leadership virtues required in 1 Timothy 3 "are not the virtues of excitement and dynamism, but of steadiness, sobriety, and sanity." These "may seem trivial virtues to those who identify authentic faith with momentary conversion or a single spasm of heroism." But to experienced people who have seen leaders and churches fail because of flaws in character and folly in relationships, finding a leader of strong family and solid character "can be downright exciting."[80] Of course, no leader is a perfect person with a perfect family. But churches must seek as leaders and models those whose faith, character, and family are most worthy of emulation.

Churches must recognize and strengthen the role of households in evangelism and edification. Weekly Sunday school cannot replace daily family devotions. Advertising campaigns and broadcasting cannot replace in-home hospitality. Specific practices may vary somewhat from place to place, but churches would be wise to evangelize households, not just individuals, and to equip parents to bring up the next generation in the Lord. In the American context, Eric Wallace speaks of *Uniting church and home*,[81] while rightly insisting that a church's identity be ecclesial and not just familial.

Some churches are dominated by a few influential families or webs of relatives. Physical kinship may overrule spiritual kinship. Some of us have experienced the problems of a church whose identity cannot transcend its own family clusters and ethnic exclusiveness. Such ingrown congregations tend to lack evangelistic effectiveness and desperately need clearer differentiation between church and household.

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[79] Jon Davies, "A Preferential Option for the Family," in *The Family in Theological Perspective* ed. Stephen Barton (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 220-221, 236.

[80] Luke Timothy Johnson, "Letters to Paul's Delegates: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus," in *The New Testament in Context*, ed. Howard Clark Kee and J. Andrew Overman (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1996), 148-149.

[81] Eric Wallace, *Uniting Church and Home: a Blueprint for Rebuilding Church and Community* (Lorton, VA: Solutions for Integrating Church and Home, 1999).

Households and Cross-Cultural Missionaries

Finding the proper relationship between church and household is important for Christian life and witness in any community, whether living in one's culture of origin or engaged in mission across cultural boundaries. Missionaries must be alert to the way a culture's implicit metaphors for leadership shape expectations of church leadership. They must also examine their own implicit metaphors, which in the case of Western missionaries may be more professionalized and less household-shaped. If such matters are ignored, Western missions in other cultures can be inappropriately bureaucratic rather than relational.[82]

Missionary wives in the past and still today have sometimes struggled with whether to give precedence to being "evangelist or homemaker." They have faced role expectations both from the sending culture and from "the character of the mission field itself." In the nineteenth century, some wives "gradually and corporately developed a mission theory of the Christian home that seemed to integrate their dual roles as missionary women and mothers, and at the same time justified their existence to critics back home."[83] The women's missionary movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century focused on ministry to women and children and made "exemplifying the Christian home" a key paradigm for their outreach.[84]

Women may rightly serve the Lord in many spheres beyond the home, but they should not underestimate the power of household-focused ministry. In the NT context and in the history of church expansion, women have often effectively targeted the home—others' as well as their own—as a sphere of effective mission.[85] Whatever other opportunities they pursue, seasoned Christian women should also "train the younger women to love their husbands and children" and advance God's mission in home life (Titus 2:4-5).

Much discussion of women's roles in the West has focused on helping women to move beyond domestic roles, notes David Martin, "whereas in the developing world today the main objective is to bring the man into the family in order to take up his responsibilities." Some in the West may perceive an emphasis on male leadership and involvement as domineering patriarchy, but in developing countries much of the call for male headship comes from women, and much research on this "gender paradox" comes "from women, especially female anthropologists. It is women who understand the difference between formal arrangements conceding headship to the male and informal realities conceding effective power to the female, and engendering mutuality rather than subjection." The most immediate threats to women and children are "desertion, violence, promiscuity, and alcoholism." So when a Christian movement such as Pentecostalism emphasizes household structure, it "is very much the trade union of the women aimed at a different and more

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[82] Paul G. Hiebert, *Anthropological Reflections on Missiological Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 161.

[83] Dana L. Robert, "Evangelist or Homemaker? The Mission Strategies of Early Nineteenth-Century Missionary Wives in Burma and Hawaii," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 17 no. 1 (1993): 4, 10.

[84] Dana L. Robert, *American Women in Mission: a Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1996), 65, 412.

[85] Patricia Hill, *The World Their Household: the American Woman's Foreign Mission Movement and Cultural Transformation, 1870-1920* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985).

beneficent regime within the home."[86] These women benefit more from a Christian vision of a man's place in the household than from a secularized individualism which claims to free women from household ties. While worthy men are honored, women get what they want: a positive male presence at home and in church. As in NT times, the household and the household-friendly church, though formally led by males, can provide a context that empowers women.

The connection between household and church is unavoidable for cross-cultural missionaries, especially those with families. As they seek to plant and nurture congregations, their mission affects their family, and their family affects the churches they work with. This requires prayerful attention in relating to spouse and children.

Missionary marriages face the usual challenges to marriage, plus the added challenges of living in a different culture under close scrutiny. Marjory Foyle, a psychiatrist with more than 35 years of mission experience in Asia, has written about "stress factors in missionary marriages."[87] Encouragingly, she notes, "The overall quality of missionary marriages is impressive. Exceptions do occur, but generally there is a high standard of sharing and caring." She observes that missionaries "feel that part of their ministry is to demonstrate the truth of what God has been teaching through their relationships." They are right about this, but if marital struggles arise, the couple may feel added pressure and guilt. Many go through "the 'goldfish bowl' experience. Many couples are scrutinized constantly by loving but curious national neighbors. Everything they do is noted and discussed."[88] Thus the couple has the opportunity to shine for Christ as a model couple, but may also be the object of gossip and misunderstanding. In some cultures, lack of privacy or taboos on walking together in public may interfere with the couple's accustomed patterns of intimacy which nurture their relationship. In some Muslim areas, married women are "expected to behave as Muslim wives, not coming out of their home to be seen in public, and restricting their social lives according to local views and customs."[89] I offer no easy solutions here. But Foyle's observations about marriage show that mission and household are as inextricably linked today as they were in the New Testament setting.

Missionaries face unique challenges in childrearing. Their "family life is subject to the pressures of intercultural living, limited resources of time and energy for mission duties and childrearing, family mobility, and nontraditional options for the children's education."[90] They must also consider the impact their practices may have on Christians in their host culture. Missionaries who bring up and educate their children to prepare them for life "back home" may provide a model of childrearing and education that would be impracticable or disruptive for Christians in their host culture to emulate. In another vein, missionaries may limit family size to very few children, and they may encourage others to do

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[86] David Martin, *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2005), 146.
[87] Marjory Foyle, "Stress Factors in Missionary Marriages," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (January 1987): 21-28.
[88] Ibid., 20.
[89] Marjory Foyle, "Stress Factors in Missionary Marriages," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (January 1987) 20-23.
[90] Joyce Kruckeberg and Anita Stafford, "The Missionary's Need of Family Life Training," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (July: 1981) 163-171.

likewise. Such "family planning" may reduce the size and influence of the future church, as new Christians pay more attention to the missionaries than to biblical passages about God's blessing of large families.[91] Again, the missionary's family choice may impact the mission church's future.

Family and mission can sometimes seem to be at odds. Jim Reapsome has asked, "Do families still fit in missions?" Mission leaders "have to acknowledge that the past record of world missions reveals some disgraceful treatment of wives, children, parents, and grandparents." But the pendulum may now have swung too far in the other direction, with "the family supremacy movement … eclipsing the missions movement." Overseas mission is hard and a challenge for families; this must be recognized. At the same time, mission recruiters "cannot go on giving the impression that if you take your family seriously, you really aren't dedicated to Christ and ready to be a missionary." "We must be honest enough to say that serving Jesus Christ overseas will make unusual, severe demands on the family's faith, strength, and resilience. However, we must also make absolutely clear that a missions career does not necessarily have to wreck the family… Isn't Jesus Christ strong enough to keep us on the missionary firing line, while at the same time giving us a wonderfully satisfying family life?"[92]

Informed by Scripture and the experience of others, and supported by the Lord and fellow believers, leaders can face these challenges in a way that benefits both household and church. As Frank Severn advises, "Build your family, don't idolize it." Severn points out, "God has established the family (household or house) as the basic unit of society. It's the training ground for children and the training ground for church leaders." Like Christians in New Testament times, we must view the household not just as an end in itself but as a setting for honoring the Lord and building his church. At the same time, we must view the church as God's household, intimately linked to the health of its constituent households. The supreme head of both family and church is the Lord Jesus. Sometimes "ministry takes precedence over family. Certainly there are times when family will take precedence over ministry. But the central issue is our obedience to Jesus Christ in all situations and a commitment to live by the principles of his kingdom, giving up our rights, serving, and loving deeply."[93] To care about one's children more than about Jesus not only weakens mission but harms the children and make them less likely to be wholehearted followers of Jesus. To focus on expanding a church organization while mismanaging one's household not only harms one's family but weakens the church and its witness in a watching world. For the person who seeks to follow Jesus and lead others, managing one's own household and caring for God's household are not opposites but belong together, both in Bible-based theory and in contemporary practice.

David Feddes, Ph.D., is Provost of Christian Leaders Institute and co-founder of Family of Faith Church, Monee, IL. He and his wife, Wendy, are the parents of eight children. This article was published in the November 2008 issue of Calvin Theological Journal.

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[91] David Feddes, "Reproducing Christians: a Missiological Look at Family Size," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 42, no. 3 (2007): 346-354.
[92] Reapsome, Jim, "Do Families Still Fit in Missions?" *Pulse* (n.d.).
[93] Frank Severn, "Build Your Family, Don't Idolize It," *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* 23 no. 4 (1987): 352-355.