

The King and His Subjects: Insights from the Biblical Vision

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Abstract

This article explores key verses from the Old and New Testaments to formulate a Biblical view of leadership focused on service, justice, and the common good. Drawing upon texts from Genesis, Deuteronomy, the Books of Samuel, Psalms, the Books of the Maccabees, and several New Testament texts (including Matthew, Luke, Mark, and 1 Peter), the study contrasts positive models of servant leadership (such as Moses, David, Solomon, and St. Joseph) with negative models (such as Antiochus IV Epiphanes). The article argues that the Bible consistently describes legitimate authority as being characterized by accountability to God, humility, care for the vulnerable, and the promotion of communal flourishing. It further connects this Biblical ideal to the concept of the common good within Catholic Social Teaching (citing, for example, the papal encyclical *Laudato si'*), suggesting that the leader's primary role is to create social conditions that enable the integrated growth of

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individuals and communities. The implications of this vision for contemporary political and ecclesiastical leadership include prioritizing justice, protecting distinct communal identities, and fostering participatory structures for public prosperity.

Keywords

Servant Leadership, Biblical Vision, Common Good, Political Theology, Identity.



Introduction

This article is an expanded version of a paper presented online on December 16, 2024, during a conference hosted by the Research Center of Islamic Philosophy and Theology in cooperation with the Center for Deepening Faith and Religious Beliefs in Qom, Iran. I am delighted and honored to have been invited to participate in this conference and to publish this article. I extend my gratitude to Dr. Mohammad Sahhaf Kashani (Director of the International Conference on Comparative Studies of Ethics in Islam and Christianity) and Dr. Jafar Hosseinejad (Secretary, Ambassador of Iran to the Vatican) for the invitation to present and publish this work.

I would like to begin with a comment on a recent book published by His Excellency Mohammad Hossein Mokhtari, Iran's Ambassador to the Vatican, titled *Prayer in Islam and Christianity: A Comparative Study* (Avellino, 2024).

In this book, the author states that sincere prayer to God deepens an individual's sense of dependence on God and fosters an attitude of servitude. This sense of dependence develops as one becomes increasingly aware of owing everything to God. This idea is also strongly present in the Bible. For example, Moses is often referred to as the servant of God (Deuteronomy 34:5, Psalm 105:26, etc.). Moses, acting in God's name, led the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt to the promised land of freedom. Here, we see a man who, while serving God and obeying His commands, leads God's entrusted people. In short, as God's servant, he leads the community entrusted to him.

We may recall that Jesus calls his disciples friends, not servants (John 15:15). Nevertheless, the concept of service to God is not foreign to the Bible and Christian tradition and is expressed in various

ways (see, for example, Mark 10:45, Matthew 25:21, Romans 6:22, 1 Peter 2:16, etc.). This Christian servitude is linked to their complete readiness to serve others according to God's will, and at this level, the Ambassador's book attests that he has grasped this tradition in both Islam and Christianity.

Numerous Biblical verses paint a clear picture of the role of a leader and their relationship with their subjects. The Biblical concept of this role and relationship is constant. "Service" is the key word that emerges from these verses. We will cite a few of them as examples to describe that role and relationship. Then, based on those verses, we will provide a reflection to highlight the essential points contained within them. We will use various terms such as "king," "ruler," "leader," and so on to refer to the leader figure, even though each carries slightly different nuances of meaning.

1. Biblical Verses

As mentioned above, in this section we list a few verses from the Bible that can give us a Biblical insight into the role of the leader.

1-1. Genesis 2:19-20. Adam Naming the Non-Human Creatures

We will see how Adam foreshadows kingship in this verse.

Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

In the Genesis narrative of the creation of humanity, we can find a very clear picture of a good leader. God asks Adam to name all the creatures, and in that call, we can see an invitation to exercise a

measure of authority. That is, he is invited to identify the creatures' identity. This is an important role of a leader. He must recognize the identity of his subjects. Here we have an idea of Biblical leadership: the leader's responsibility includes recognizing the identity of his followers and helping them to find and grow deeper and stronger in that identity. The sense of identity is fundamental for human beings. An individual's behavior, attitude, thoughts, outlook, and relationships depend largely on their sense of identity. In its absence, a person cannot know himself or understand his human nature and may behave like an irrational being. Therefore, a leader has a great role in helping their subjects establish a sense of identity which is fundamental to social life.

2. Identity and Leadership in the Bible

Within this framework, we must discuss individual identity and social identity. Every person has their own specific identity, and every community (ethnic, religious, social, political, etc.) also possesses its own specific identity. When Genesis 1:27 states that God created man in His own image, this refers to the core of human identity. However, every individual must grow and realize that identity, meaning each person should develop the divine element within them by becoming more fully human.

We can draw an analogy between this growth process and the growth of an apple seed. One could say a good apple seed *is* already an apple tree, because if placed in the right conditions, it can become one. Therefore, it is appropriate to envision a fully grown apple tree in its seed. Similarly, a human, created in the image of God, must realize that image by fully growing into their true being. They need the right conditions for this growth. In this growth process, a leader plays a key

role in nurturing and fulfilling this identity, particularly by promoting conditions where every individual can flourish.

2-1. Deuteronomy 17:14-20. God's Commands to the King

In the Book of Deuteronomy, we have an excellent section that reveals God's perspective on the King of Israel. The text is self-explanatory:

When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you and have taken possession of it and settled in it, and you say, 'Let us set a king over us, like all the nations around us,' be sure to appoint over you a king the Lord your God chooses. He must be from among your own people. Do not place a foreigner over you, one who is not of your own people. The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the Lord has told you, 'You are not to go back that way again.' He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray. He must not accumulate large amounts of silver and gold. When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the Levitical priests. It is to remain with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and so that he may not consider himself better than his fellow Israelites and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel.

This passage provides a very concrete and penetrating image of the kind of kingship God desires to rule over Israel. First of all, the king must remember that he has been chosen by God. Second, he must remain dependent on God and rule over his subjects as God's

agent. He must constantly remind himself of God's Law and not deviate from it.

2-2. Deuteronomy 30: 11-20. Choice between life and Death

Moses, addressing the Israelites on behalf of God during their journey towards the promised land, tells them: “See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live” (Deuteronomy 30: 15, 19). This story provides a beautiful image of the role of a leader present in the bible. This says that a leader is the one who helps his subjects choose life and avoid death. Life is the result of the following of the way of the Lord and death follows deviation from that way. A king is to choose life and help his subjects choose the same.

2-3. Maccabees 1:41-50 and 2 Maccabees 6: 1 and 6. Kings Disrespecting Their Subjects

These passages from the first and second books of the Maccabees provide a negative model of a king. That is to say, how a king should not behave. It is important to know that a king can show disrespect towards his people and, in doing so, hinder their growth. But by doing so he is going against his divine-given mission. We are considering what is narrated in the book of Maccabees about some policies of their king Antiochus IV Epiphanes. One of his policies was to impose Hellenistic practices on all his subjects (Jews and Gentiles alike) to bring cultural uniformity in the kingdom.

Then the king [Antiochus IV Epiphanes] wrote to his whole kingdom that all should be one people, and that all should give up their particular customs. All the Gentiles accepted the command of

the king. Many even from Israel gladly adopted his religion; they sacrificed to idols and profaned the sabbath. And the king sent letters by messengers to Jerusalem and the towns of Judah; he directed them to follow customs strange to the land ... He added, 'And whoever does not obey the command of the king shall die' (1 Maccabees 1:41-50). ... On the same policy of the king, the narration adds: "Not long after this, the king sent an Athenian senator to compel the Jews to forsake the laws of their ancestors and no longer to live by the laws of God. ... People could neither keep the sabbath, nor observe the festivals of their ancestors, nor so much as confess themselves to be Jews (2 Maccabees 6:1).

The Jews considered it their duty to observe the divine-commanded customs such as the observance of Sabbath, circumcision, etc. Those were part of their essential law. As such, those customs were part of their identity. To be forcefully deprived of the possibility of the observance of those laws was for them the privation of a constituent part of their identity. Thus, they were very unhappy with the rule of the king. The success of a king would depend to a great extent on respecting the legitimate customs of different communities within his kingdom and promoting them without becoming a threat to the national unity. If he can do it, each community within his kingdom feels that its identity is respected. That is a way of making the subjects experience security. The failure of a king in respecting the legitimate customs of his people is a failure in his governance.

From this passage we understand that the bible held it an important duty of the king do respect the identity of all the communities within his kingdom and promote them without making them a threat to the national unity. One of the responsibilities of a king is to make provision for all communities (including minorities) within

his kingdom to observe their legitimate customs so that they can feel secure that their identity is respected.

2-4. Samuel 8: 10-18. Israel Asks Prophet Samuel for a King

The Israelites, having settled in the Promised Land, recognized God as their true King, who governed them through prophets like Samuel. However, over time, they grew dissatisfied with this system and approached Prophet Samuel, requesting a king like the other nations around them. To their request, Prophet Samuel replied:

The king will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plough his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. He will take one-tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and his courtiers. He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys and put them to his work. He will take one-tenth of your flocks and you shall be his slaves. And in that day, you will cry out because of your king whom you have chosen for yourselves; but the Lord will not answer you in that day.

From this passage, we can discern the type of king that God desires for His people. Implicitly, God rejects a king who would exploit or use his subjects for personal gain. Viewed from another perspective, the text reveals that God envisions a king who respects his people — a leader who does not reduce them to servants or conscript them into service as horsemen, soldiers, or laborers for his own benefit. He does not want a king who would take their daughters

to serve his pleasures or who would seize the fruits of their labour to sustain a life of luxury. In essence, God desires His people to be free to work, live, and enjoy the fruits of their efforts without being enslaved by any human authority. The king's role, therefore, is to foster this freedom and create the conditions in which his people can thrive and grow. God respects human freedom, allowing His people to attain their full potential through that freedom. This process of growth can be understood as self-realisation. The role of authority, as God conceives it, is to establish the conditions that enable each person to achieve that full growth.

Of course, freedom does not mean letting people do all what they like or as they like. A leader has a great responsibility to discern, with the subjects, what is most suitable to create the condition in which all can grow and reach the fulfilment of their potentialities or the self-realisation. Anybody making a hurdle to the creation of this condition may be instructed and if continues, may be punished for his own good and that of others in the society.

2-5. Samuel 16. David Chosen by God as King to Rule God's People in God's Name

God asked Prophet Samuel to anoint David as the King of Israel. David was chosen by God to that position. He was to rule his subjects in the name of God; that is to say, it was God who decided that David would be the king (1 Samuel 16: 1). The real ruler would be God and David would be only an agent of God. We shall see what the bible says about the choice of David. This is important because it reveals the mind of God about a king. As God commanded, Samuel anointed David and God's spirit came powerfully on him (1 Sam. 16: 13). The people of Israel visited David in Hebron and reminded him that "The Lord said to you: 'It is you who shall be shepherd of my people

of Israel, you who shall be ruler over Israel'" (2 Sam. 5: 2). On the choice of David as the king, the book of Psalms says:

He chose his servant David, and took him from the sheepfolds; from tending the nursing ewes he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel, his inheritance. With upright heart he tended them, and guided them with skilful hand (Psalm 78: 70-72).

From these narrations, we get a very good picture of the role of a king. First of all, he should be a choice of God, the choice cannot be a human work. In other words, it was not the merit of David which made him king, but was the choice of God. Accordingly, God gave David all the graces which he needed to rule over Israel (2 Sam. 7: 8-9). That is the only reason for which the king can work in the name of God. The most important element here is that the king rules his subjects according to the will of God, and it is God's decisions that the king executes. Obviously, the first duty of the king is to be constantly united to God and seek His will for the people whom the king rules. This is a very serious responsibility. The success of the king rests on his union with God and in executing God's will in ruling his subjects. This quality of constant union with God and ruling His people in accordance with His will is the requirement demanded of a king according to the bible.

2-6. Kings 3: 5, 9. Solomon Asks God the Wisdom to Govern His People

A story recounted in the bible gives us insight into a quality which a king should have. In a dream, God, pleased with King Solomon's offering, tells the King "Ask what I should give you". Solomon did not ask more richness or power or destruction of his enemies, but he asked "Give your servant therefore an understanding mind (wisdom) to govern your people, able to discern between good

and evil". This shows another biblical image of a leader, one who prays constantly for wisdom to guide his people, not one who accumulates richness and power. This image has found deep roots in Christian theology regarding the role of leaders and their responsibility towards their subjects. Such leadership sets as priority the good of the subjects and it is the desire for that good that those leaders live, pray and work.

2-7. Psalm 72: 1-4. Prayer for a Good King

Looking at the image of the king in the bible, we can get a view from the prayer Israel is addressing to God. Here it is:

Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son. May he judge your people with righteousness and your poor with justice. May the mountains yield prosperity for the people, and the hills, in righteousness. May he defend the cause of the poor of the people, give deliverance to the needy, and crush the oppressor.

The image of a king presented in the prayer is that he should be one guided by divine virtues such as justice and righteousness. He is to be a defender of the poor, a deliverer of the needy, and an opponent of the oppressor. This prayer reflects the ideal of a king that a community wishes and prays for, and the prayer reflects that such a ruler is a gift of God.

2-8. Matthew 7: 9-11, Luke 11: 11-13 and 18: 1-8. God: a Good Father and Judge

Going through a few passages from the New Testament, we shall find that the image of a leader emerging from this section of the bible is consistent with what we have seen above in the Old Testament. In the passages referred to here (Matthew 7: 9-11, Luke 11: 11-

13 18: 1-8), God is presented as a good father and a dutiful judge and those who govern are representatives of that good father and judge. Inviting his listeners to a reasoning process, Jesus exposes his idea. “Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake? If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him” (Mt 7: 9-11). In the parallel text from Luke (Lk 11: 11-13), it is said that God will give the Holy Spirit (the greatest gift of God) to those who ask him. God, who is good, will immediately do justice and will not make His children wait (Lk 18: 1-8). God who is a good father and a dutiful judge will do good to his children or subjects. Through vivid imageries, the parables in these passages present God as a governor who is keen on helping his subjects who are considered his children. Additionally, this imagery evokes also the father-children relationship between leaders and subjects.

2-9. Matthew 20: 25-28. Jesus’ Concept of leadership is Service: the leader Is a Servant of the people

This passage reveals the mind of Jesus on a ruler.

But Jesus called them [disciples] to him and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave; just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.’

Jesus sets very clearly the point of reference and criteria for leaders. They are to develop a deep awareness of their role as servants of the people whom they govern. The model of this kind of leadership

is Jesus himself who came to serve and not to be served. To be a servant does not mean one who acts always according to the wishes of others, but it refers to one who spends himself (including his resources and time) for the good of others: the *good* is the criterion here. This is the way that a leader can serve his people. It is for the servant-leader to study well the context and the ways in which he can help the growth of his subjects. This role requires a continuous study, reflection and prayer. This servant model requires the leader to be deeply humble, because only that can make a leader a servant. Only great people can become humble. Humility makes one other-centred rather than self-centred. Only such a mentality can empower others. (For the same idea see also Luke 22: 24-30 and Mark 10:42-45).

2-10. Peter 5:1-3. Peter Advises Church Elders to Be Docile and Gentle leaders

Apostle Peter, in his first letter, gives a clear idea of a good leader. "I exhort the elders among you to tend the flock of God that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it – not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge but be examples to the flock." In Peter's time, elders were leaders of local communities of the Church. This passage highlights a leader's role as a shepherd, caring and leading by example rather than by force. The Church considers Jesus to be the Chief Shepherd and all his followers are sheep. The Chief Shepherd has committed his life for the good of the flock. The leaders of the Church are shepherds under the Chief Shepherd, and they are supposed to follow the same method of commitment (of the Chief Shepherd to the sheep) to their subjects. The most effective way of leading a community is to set good examples in the deeds of a leader. Their honest and just deeds are

more effective sources of inspiration rather than what their words can do.

3. Reflections Based on the Biblical Passages

In this section, we undertake a deeper reflection of the same passages which we have listed above, relating them to the role of a leader in the Christian vision.

In Adam we have the first man of the world according to the bible. Having accomplished the creation, God calls Adam to name the subhuman creatures (Genesis 2: 19-20). God's call of Adam is an invitation to participate in the creation work of God, and is a manifestation of Adam's God-given authority to care for the creatures and enrich further the creation. In the name-giving process, Adam is identifying them and recognising the uniqueness of each of them, and he respects that uniqueness and at the same time assumes responsibility for their care and growth. In fact, he is not the giver of identity to creatures, but he is only taking note of their identity as they are created, and the name (the identification mark) what he gave them remains for ever. He is respecting the identity which God gave them and helping them to maintain that identity. He is their custodian and helps them to multiply. His role is to help them develop and reach their fulfilment. It is there that we can find an important role of a king. A king is called by God to do the work of Adam in his naming function, that is, to identify their uniqueness which God gave them, and to care for them and to help them to grow and reach their fulfilment. In doing so, he is collaborating with God in the creation process. His rule over them should serve these purposes. The king's role consists in guiding his subjects to reach the perfection of creation.

In the book of Deuteronomy (17: 14-20), we have a set of basic guidelines given by God to the king. First of all, the Israelites will be

permitted to have their king, but he will have to rule them according to the will of God. The king should be one from the community of Israel, and not a foreigner. Israel considered it a blessing to have one from among themselves as their king, and not to be submitted to a foreign ruler. As the method of knowing the will of God, the king must keep a copy of the law of God given through Moses, he should read it regularly, and live according to it. This is a call to the king to remain in total submission to God, and to promote the values contained in the law such as justice and mutual respect. The king was not to acquire large military power and wealth and lead his subjects to idolatry. It is prohibited for the king to be tyrant, but a servant of God and His people and to keep before his eyes the common good. In short, the king's authority comes from God, and that is why he has to follow the will of God in governing his subjects.

Moses' words in Deuteronomy 30:11-20, before Israel enters the Promised Land, are a powerful testimony of the image of a king as one who indicates to the subjects the way leading to life and helping them to avoid the way leading to death. He acts as an agent of God, who is fully life. The way leading to life is fidelity to God and total obedience to His law. Before pronouncing these words, Moses had already communicated to Israel the law given by God. Now he says that observing those laws is the only way leading to life, although that observance may seem difficult in the beginning. It is important to see that finally the decision is left to the people and at that level they are responsible for their choice of life or death. Life means living according to the will of God, and death means breaking away totally from the communion with God. A king does all that he can to help people see the advantages of choosing life and the dangers of choosing death.

In the book of Maccabees, we have seen how King Antiochus

imposed the Greek culture and religion upon the Jews (1 Maccabees 1:41-50 -2 Maccabees 6: 1-6). This passage has something to say about the quality of a king, namely, it explains who a king should not be or a model which a king should not follow. Seeking cultural uniformity in his kingdom, Antiochus suppressed all the legitimate particular customs of the Jewish people and permitted many Hellenic customs such as sacrifice of pigs which animal was considered unclean by Jews. He thought that by imposing this uniformity, he could make all of them into one people. In fact, what made Israel one people was their faith in God and observance of the law which God gave. These two facts distinguished them from other people. Thus, the king, by imposing uniformity, was denying their distinct identity. Imposition of a foreign culture on Israel, cancelling their legitimate customs, was not a help for them to grow in their identity. In fact, a king's most important duty is to help, by creating suitable conditions, his subjects to grow and reach their fulfilment.

Samuel (8: 10-18) shows how Israel's desire to be like other nations around them leads them to ask God a king like those others. But for God, Israel was his chosen people and should not be like other nations. God Himself was their king. When they insisted, He communicates to Samuel a warning about how a human king will exploit them and give priority to his interests at the cost of their interests. He will demand heavy works from his subjects like military service, will seize their resources and fruits of their work, and they will not have the freedom which they have when they are directly under God's rule. This passage also attests to the temptations of a king, or gives a negative model of a king. A king's duty rests mainly in ruling his subjects in accordance with the will of God by respecting them and helping their full growth and self-realisation.

Another passage from the same book speaks about the choice

of David as the king of Israel (1 Samuel chapter 16). It shows clearly that according to the bible it is God who chooses the king to rule His people. Thus, anyone who tries to gain this position by manipulation is not acting in accordance with the will of God. Only if the king is chosen by God, can he penetrate the mind of God and rule his subjects according to that mind. As mentioned already, bible perceives the king as God's agent and thus only according to the will of God should he govern his subjects.

A passage of a slightly different message is found in 1 Kings 3: 5 and 9 which narrates the prayer of Solomon. God appears to Solomon, who has recently become the king of Israel, and promises him to give what he asks for. He did not ask for material riches or more power or destruction of his enemy, but for wisdom and the ability to discern between good and evil to govern his subjects. This is a very important episode for a king. He should constantly pray for wisdom and the ability to discern between good and evil to govern his subjects. Only then can he govern his subjects in the right path. In addition, it shows Solomon's humility and sense of total dependence on God for the capacity to govern his subjects. This is also a quality needed for a king. Above all, It is important to note that Solomon put the wellbeing of his subjects before all other riches and that is why he asked for wisdom and ability to discern between good and evil: all other richness and qualities were means which may help govern well his subjects, that is, for their wellbeing. This fact reminds us that a king is to constantly and before anything else seek the wellbeing of his subjects and it is for them that he has become the king.

The prayer in Psalm 72: 1-4 contains the vision of an ideal king: a just and a righteous one. While it appears only as a prayer, it is equally a vision of an ideal king of Israel. The people are praying for this kind of king so that he can guide his subjects with justice and

righteousness. This prayer also visualises the king as the judge of his subjects who carries out this mission with righteousness and justice especially towards the poor. This prayer reminds the king of his duty to be always just and righteous in governing and judging his subjects and that he may also pray for these graces.

Coming to the New Testament, in Matthew 7: 9-11, Jesus presents another image of leadership: one in whom his subjects can have absolute trust – that is to say, a leader should be absolutely trustworthy. Through a parable, Jesus reassures God’s goodness towards those who seek him. If human parents, who are imperfect, know how to be good towards their children, how much more the heavenly Father (God) will know how to be good towards His children! A king is a father of all his subjects and should know to deal with them as a loving father would do towards his children.

We have a passage very relevant to the theme that we are treating in Matthew 20: 25-28. Here, Jesus teaches about true leadership, that is, a leader should be first of all a servant of his subjects. Jesus teaches this as a response to the petition of the mother of James and John that her sons may get high positions (right and left of Jesus) in the kingdom which Jesus would establish. The vision of true leadership, according to Jesus, does not go along with the request of the mother of those disciples; for Jesus, that was the normal world’s concept of leadership. Jesus emphasises servant model of leadership. For him, a true leader is not to seek gains for himself (like positions) and not to impose his will or likes and dislikes over his subjects. They are really self-serving people and abuse their authority to “lord it over” their subjects to make them servants of the leaders. But Jesus wants true leaders to be the servants of their subjects, that is to say, giving priority to the needs or good of others over the likes and dislikes of oneself. This means that true leadership involves radical

humility, self-sacrifice, and total dedication to the service of others.

Peter 5: 1-3 offers Apostle Peter's concept of leadership; he outlines certain principles which are to be followed by Church leaders. He is exhorting the leaders as one who has partaken in the suffering of Christ and who is confident to share Christ's future glory, that is, as one who has known deeply the message of Christ and deeply moved by faith in Him. His words worth citing here: "tend the flock of God ... exercising oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as God would have you do it – not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge but be examples to the flock". First of all, the expression "flock of God" captures our attention. According to this vision, the subjects of a king belong to God, and they are not the property of the king. That implies that the king has to rule them according to the will of God: "as God would have you do it". This requires accountability to God for the work of governance. He is not to be motivated by any worldly gain, and rule them by giving good examples without being tyrants to impose on them the king's wishes. But as shepherds, the leaders are to care for their subjects, protect them, guide them even by giving up the shepherd's life. Here also a leader is asked to be a servant.

From these passages, we understand that the biblical image of a king is that of a servant. Service to God is rendered through obedience to God, and, in that obedience, as God's agent, the king rules his subjects according to the will of God and in keeping with the values which God has taught in different ways and through different people. This image is very much present in the bible and is often repeated in different ways. In addition, we understand that God loves His people, and the provision for a king is part of the expression of that love. That is why, God asks the king to rule His people with respect for them and to help them to reach their full growth. God's

love for His people is expressed through His self-giving and He asks the same from kings, that is to say, the kings are to govern by giving themselves for the good of their subjects spending their energy and time for the wellbeing of their subjects. This self-giving for the good of others is the most evident sign of love, and kings are duty bound to love their subjects in this way.

4. The Principle of the Common Good

Before we conclude this article, we would like to have a short section relating the king's role to the principle of the common good. According to the teachings of the Church, the common good is "the sum total of the conditions of social life enabling groups and individuals to realise their perfection more fully and readily".¹ Following the same line, the encyclical *Laudato si* of Pope Francis defines the common good as "the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfilment" (Francis, 24 May 2015, *Laudato si* 156). In essence, the principle of the common good is understood as the conditions in a society which help its members to attain the full growth and development of their capacities. A believer may say that the fulfilment of a person is reached when he becomes that for which God has created him. If every person in a society has the circumstances suitable for their full flourishing in every sense in keeping with their human dignity, we can say that in that society the

1. The document of the Second Vatican Council *Gaudium et spes* n. 26, promulgated by Pope Paul VI on 7 December 1965. The translation is from Norman P. Tanner, ed. & tr., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, London-Washington DC, 1990. See also the commentary on this document by Otto Semmelroth in Herbert Vorgrimler, ed., *Commentary on the Documents of Vatican II*, vol. V, London, 1969, 170-172.

common good exists. This growth is not limited to the material welfare, but is the integral development of all persons. This also has to do with mutual respects of rights and obligations of each individual in the society. The common good is a mutual commitment of all in a society to creating the conditions in which every individual can reach his full growth in harmony with others for which the state, guided by just and efficient leaders create suitable structures and law.

In the explanation of the biblical passages given above, often we can find that the king's role in a society is tightly tied to the creation and promotion of the principle of the common good. It is he who should create and promote the law and other structures which can be at the service of the common good. Part of his responsibility in this field is to give exemplary punishment to those who deliberately create obstacles to the common good. Of course, in the pursuit of the common good, we cannot deny the role of the society and each individual in the creation of the conditions in which all can realise their perfection more fully and readily. Individuals and smaller groups are not merely passive recipients; they are both beneficiaries and benefactors. In other words, they have a contributory role as well or they actively participate in the social life by offering whatever positive they can to the wellbeing of the society, which often contributes to the common good or shared goals. In the realisation of the common good, the king is a means and the society is not meant for him, but he is meant for the society.

The biblical image of leadership is intrinsically connected to the principle of common good. As briefly mentioned above, common good is the condition in which all in a society can reach their full growth. All members of a community have a part in creating such a condition. The role of the leader of a community is particularly significant in this case. He has to see that such a condition is created

through suitable laws and their correct application and honest administration of justice. If somebody seriously creates obstacles to the existence of such a condition, it is up to the leader to make suitable provision to punish him in order to reintegrate him into the society. If we understand common good in this sense, I think that the biblical image of a leader can be summarised as one who gives himself to creating and sustaining common good, namely, the condition in which all people can reach their full growth in every aspect such as physical, mental, spiritual, intellectual and social. For this, it is necessary that the leader deeply study all the necessary elements, reflect on various aspects, and pray constantly, purifying himself to understand and follow the will of God. A leader may be guided by the vision that all what he does directly or indirectly should promote the common good.

Conclusion

The leadership according to the bible can be conceived only in relation to the wellbeing of the subjects. Any concept of leadership of tyranny and self-centred rule is alien to the biblical image of leadership. In other words, leadership is not meant for the material growth of the leader.

God wished that the kings of Israel should have deep knowledge of God's law, meditate on the scripture, obey God's law, and be humble before God considering himself as a servant of God and His people. An ideal king is conceived as a man of justice, righteousness, incorrupt, compassionate to the people especially those who suffer, striving to obtain freedom to his subjects, morally integral, servant-hearted, accountable to God and possessor of other such virtues.

Obedience to God implies leading a life observing the values taught by God. Servant leadership is a key value which a leader is to

assume, because the leader's role is that of service to his subjects. Bible speaks of the need of wisdom and understanding and ability to discern between good and evil for a leader. In the absence of these virtues, a man cannot be a good leader. These are God's gifts for which a king has to constantly desire and pray. A true king sets as his priority the wellbeing of his subjects. He cannot put his wellbeing before that of his subjects; rather, he works constantly for his subjects even, at times, at the cost of his own wellbeing. Freedom is conceived as the space which is required for each individual and group for responsible growth. It gives the opportunity to use the conditions in which all in a society can fully develop their personality and capacities. The promised land for Israel represents the state of freedom. Each individual in groups is marching towards the promised land where all will have the conditions in which they can fully develop. The exercise of freedom is to be guided by the principle of the common good, and a leader has to set guidelines for its correct exercise. King has a fundamental role in the creation and promotion of those conditions.

As a conclusion, we can find that a good image of a leader is available in the figure of St Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus Christ. We can see that he helped Jesus grow in wisdom and age and in the favour of God and man as the evangelist says: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and in years [age], and in divine and human favour" (Luke 2: 52). This is a very insightful verse. If Jesus grew in that way, Joseph had a key role in that growth. A king's role is to help his subjects in wisdom and age and in the favour of God and man.

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