

SERVANT-LEADERSHIP IS GOD'S OWN LIKENESS: A TRINITARIAN EXPLORATION FROM SCRIPTURE

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Abstract

After a preliminary gospelic elucidation of the main feature of servant-leadership as being 'love for the other that engenders self-denial', the explorations from Scripture uncover the Trinitarian wonder of God's image and the transformative power of his likeness whose core feature is servant-leadership. Reviewing Jesus' example from a Trinitarian perspective, establishes human co-equality and the essential need to serve one another with love, shedding all forms of discrimination which are perilous delusions. Strategic initiatives for social transformation through becoming, being and bringing forth servant-leaders, is proposed as the focus for future research.

Introduction

The phrase 'servant-leader' was coined in 1970 by Robert K. Greenleaf, who describes a servant-leader as one who is first of all a servant, with the natural feeling of wanting to serve first and subsequently aspires to lead by conscious choice, in sharp contrast with one who is a leader first out of the desire for power and material possessions.¹

The Book of Acts clearly reveals that servanthood was the hallmark of early Christians. The fact that this tradition was sustained by the hierarchy who led by example even as early as the fifth century, can be inferred in the below excerpt from sermon no. 340 of St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, delivered by him on the anniversary of his ordination:

*“So I hope the fact that I have been bought together with you gives me more pleasure than my having been placed at your head; then, as the Lord has commanded, I will be more effectively your servant, and be preserved from ingratitude for the price by which I was bought to be, not too unworthily, your fellow servant”.*²

While Pope Francis continues the tradition,³ we have also had shining contemporary examples of servant-leaders like Don Bosco, Florence Nightingale, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mother Teresa of Kolkata, who were extraordinarily exalted in history as promised in Scripture (see Proverbs 29:23) and emphatically reaffirmed by Jesus (see Matthew 23:12).

God exalts servant-leaders with a purpose, and this is what he tells them:

¹ Robert K. Greenleaf, “The Servant as Leader,” (Cambridge, MA.: Center for Applied Studies, 1970), 6.

² John E. Rotelle, (ed.), “The Works of St. Augustine: Sermons, III/9 (306 – 340A),” trans. Edmund Hill (New York: New City, 1994), 292–293.

³ Andrea Torielli, “The gesture of the Servant of the Servants of God.” *Vatican News* April 12, 2019, <[bit.ly/32ltfD7](https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-news/news/2019/04/the-gesture-of-the-servant-of-the-servants-of-god.html)>.

You are the light of the world. A city built on a hilltop cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp to put it under a tub; they put it on the lampstand where it shines for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine in the sight of men, so that, seeing your good works, they may give the praise to your Father in heaven.
(Matthew 5:14–16 JB)⁴

In this biblical research that is supplemented sporadically with experiential learning, the motive is to plainly portray for everyone's comprehension, a Trinitarian perspective of servant-leadership based on Scripture and establish clearly how it emerges as the core feature of God's likeness. After a preliminary gospelic elucidation of servant-leadership, the need for each and everyone of us to be transformed into servant-leaders and the compelling warrant for a Trinitarian understanding of servant-leadership deciphered from Scripture, are proffered. The portrayal of the Trinitarian wonder of God's image and the overwhelming beauty of his likeness, is then followed up with a detailed expounding of the divinely wrought human transformation process of crossing over 'from Death to Life', and the grace-aided perseverance that sustains the firm choice made by a freely exercised will. Last but not least, is this essential complement— a comprehensive exposé of worldliness, the most seductive of evils that lures humans away from seeking God's likeness which is servant-leadership.

Some teachings of Jesus and the big picture

Consider the parabolic Samaritan described by Jesus— as soon as he noticed a traveller lying on the ground half-dead from severe injuries inflicted by robbers, in an act of impeccably selfless love he denied his own interest to attend on the hapless victim (see Luke 10:30–35).

⁴ Scripture quotation taken from The Jerusalem Bible, copyright © 1966 by Darton, Longman & Todd, Ltd. and Doubleday, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc. Reprinted by permission.

He rose to the occasion by promptly 'taking the lead' when the situation demanded urgent loving service. This is an apt gospelic example of servant-leadership, which is simply the virtue that inspires a person to take the lead to selflessly serve another in dire need. It emerges rather clearly that the main feature of servant-leadership is, 'love for the other that engenders self-denial' in which voluntary condescension and serving are aspects of self-denial.

Jesus' teaching and example of servant-leadership is most revolutionary and path-breaking for all times. For Jesus, leadership is about 'taking the lead in serving', unlike worldliness in which leadership is about being known as benefactor and lording over others. In one instance among many that is so profound, he begins with disapproving the leadership style of worldly kings to profess servant-leadership most emphatically as the norm in God's kingdom (see Matthew 20:25–28 or Luke 22:25–27). Elsewhere too, Jesus would assert the same teaching (see Matthew 23:11 or Mark 9:35).

Jesus' final and powerful prophetic action of assuming the role of a slave and washing the feet of his disciples (see John 13), is an indication of the value he accorded to this particular teaching. The ultimate in servant-leadership that was taught and lived by Jesus—accepting death on the cross for saving humanity. When we consider Jesus' emphasis on servant-leadership in the light of his exhortation to firstly seek God's kingdom and righteousness and receive all earthly needs as added blessings (see Matthew 6:33), we can deduce that servant-leadership is the narrow way to true and sustainable joy.

It is worth mentioning here that Denmark is one of the happiest countries in the world.⁵ This 'happiness index' (used by United Nations) is a composite of several objective

⁵ John F. Helliwell, Richard Layard and Jeffrey D. Sachs (eds.), *World Happiness Report 2019*, (New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 20th March 2019), 23, 24, 27, 29, 36, 41, 59, 78, 114.

indicators that include prosocial behaviour especially devoting resources like time and money for helping the needy.⁶

When Jamie Lucas probed what makes Denmark such a happy nation, he found that it's the 'Danish servant-leader culture'.⁷ Interestingly, the 'agent of change' for this social transformation of Denmark, is the 19th century visionary— Bishop Grundtvig, who gave the Folk High School movement this prophetic vision: “*they should do something that they knew how to do*”, and mentored the idea for over 50 years of his long life.⁸

Denmark's transformation suggests that, servant-leadership is a divine attribute which should come naturally to all humans as they bear God's own image and we can also infer that it is the highest virtue that is offered to all by God, if only they would earnestly seek it. On the contrary, worldly-leadership is a diabolic delusion (as will be seen later) meant to blind us and prevent us from seeking the divine capacity of spontaneously humbling ourselves to serve with love.

Jesus' treatment of servant-leadership as something to be expounded repeatedly through powerful examples, both implicit and explicit and to be further reinforced with a final prophetic action and also permanently etched on our hearts by his embracing the extreme— death on the cross, establishes beyond doubt that servant-leadership is indeed the most admirable, selfless, sacrificial and unconditional love of God (or *agape*).

6 Lara B. Aknin et al., “Chapter 4, Happiness and Prosocial Behaviour: An Evaluation of the Evidence.” In World Happiness Report 2019, (New York: Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 20th March 2019), 69–77, 81.

7 Jamie Lucas, “Danish Servant Leader Culture” [blog], 27th July 2016, retrieved from <bit.ly/2GbvFUh>

8 R. K. Greenleaf, “Servant: Prospect and Retrospect,” in The Power of Servant Leadership, ed. Larry C. Spears, (San Francisco: Berrett Koehler. 1998), 24–25.

If the Kingdom of God is within us, then it is truly the image of God that we bear, that makes us eligible to seek and assimilate servant-leadership which is Godliness. While we sincerely pray daily to our Father in Heaven for the coming of His Kingdom just as Jesus taught us, do we know that the precursor to the ultimate coming of God's Kingdom is the thousand-years' foretaste called Messianic Age⁹ that must come on all the earth (see Isaiah 11:5–8 and Revelation 20:4)?

In this regard, can we afford to ignore the most scary reality that confronts us today—'climate change' that threatens to destroy the earth? True, that hundreds of dedicated servant-leaders like Greta Thunberg are striving selflessly to protect our planet from imminent destruction, offering themselves as living sacrifices holy and pleasing to God (see Romans 12:1).

However, we also know from Scripture that righteous servants like Noah and Abraham could not prevent natural disasters that resulted from social degeneration.

Is there a way out other than a transformation of all humanity into 'Jesus-like servant-leaders'? Can there be a Messianic precursor or God's Kingdom without such a transformation?

Compelling warrant for a fully biblical understanding

As part of his repeated emphasis on servant-leadership, Jesus declared plainly that he came to serve and not to be served and to give his life for our salvation (see Matthew 20:28 or Mark 10:45). He gladly condescended to become a slave to serve us humans despite being equal to God the Father (see Philippians 2:5–8) and admitted candidly that his food was doing the Father's Will (see John 4:34). It is baffling to see these amazing truths already revealed in

⁹ <newadvent.org/cathen/10212c.htm>.

Scripture— *my ears hast thou pierced* (Psalm 40:6b OJB)¹⁰, whose interpretation is available elsewhere (see Exodus 21:6) that the Hebrew phrase 'piercing the ears' denotes the symbolic ritual of enrolling a slave who is to always obey the master thereafter.¹¹ Again, we read in the same Scripture that the Son of God is glad to voluntarily do the Father's Will (read Psalm 40:8 together with 2:7).

By inference, this is a very old revelation that becomes plainly evident to us through Jesus Christ whose function as the second person in the Trinitarian Godhead is 'executing the Father's Will'. We may also infer very clearly, that Jesus' servant-leadership which comes out most powerfully in his condescension to become a slave for saving humanity, is an integral part of his above function.

The clarity in the New Testament of obscure revelations in the Old Testament suggests that there's far more to be uncovered. This is truly a most compelling warrant for a holistic understanding of servant-leadership based on the function of each person of the Holy Trinity that is bound to be there and needs to be deciphered from Scripture.

A scripture-based Trinitarian exploration of servant-leadership

Searching the literature with the closely constrained purpose in mind yielded very little because, such works that did not draw much from Scripture had to be kept out of purview.

A lone piece by William P. Atkinson concludes that the Trinity contains servant-leadership in the true form which is insulated from authoritarianism by the innate self-

¹⁰ This Scripture verse is taken from the Orthodox Jewish Bible Copyright © 2002, 2003, 2008, 2010, 2011 by Artists for Israel International. It is quoted verbatim from this version which translates rather than interpret the original Hebrew word for “pierce”.

¹¹ Charles H. Spurgeon, “The Treasury of David.” In *The Sword and the Trowel* (1865–85). Accessed on 20th January 2020 from: <archive.spurgeon.org/treasury/ps040.php>

emptying or kenosis, adding that servant-leadership liberates subjects who also achieve their collective goal.¹²

Secular author Timothy R. Puls, makes a slight reference to the Holy Trinity while writing about the 'impact of faith' as part of an elaborate treatise on servant-leadership. Puls observes that the substantial conviction of Christians who believe in the Holy Trinity— God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, directly and implicitly impacts the way of living expected of people especially leaders. According to Puls, the Christian worldview that God's purpose is accomplished when humans genuinely serve and love one another, could greatly aid servant leaders by being the reason why leaders must serve and respect all people including followers, very highly.¹³

The function of each person of the Holy Trinity as deciphered from Scripture, is presented in the writings of Pitcharan.¹⁴ His works^{15&16} include a systematic analysis of Trinitarian dynamics to clearly demonstrate how exactly we humans bear God's image and a convincing argument that the defilement wrought by original sin is the cause of contrary human behaviour. Though he provides a clear outline of the three Divine functions, finer

12 William P. Atkinson, "The Trinity and Servant-Leadership." *Evangelical Review of Theology* 38 (2) (April 2014): 138.

13 Timothy R. Puls, "The Impact of Faith on Servant Leadership and Leadership Behaviour," in *Servant Leadership: Research and Practice*, eds. Raj Selladurai and Shawn Carraher, (Hershey PA: Business Science Reference (IGI Global), 2014), 167–68.

14 <www.goodreads.com/author/show/7858755.Pitcharan>

15 Pitcharan, "Towards Perfection," in *Agape: The Divinizing Love* (Partridge India, 2014), 79–84.

16 Pitcharan, "The Perfect Way of Our Triune God," in *The Narrow Way: A Common Man's Roadmap to Divinity* (Partridge India, 2015), 75–82.

aspects like 'the Father drawing us through Christ', 'spiritual rebirth and mediation through Christ' and 'intercession by the Holy Spirit' are not brought out.

Taking a cue from Pitcharan's approach, both broad and fine details of the function of each person of the Holy Trinity are extracted from Scripture through a similar exercise. The outcome of this 'knowledge mining' from Scripture and the Trinitarian view of servant-leadership that emerged, are discussed in the following sections.

The exercise began by firstly looking for and studying the verses that reveal the functioning of God the Son who prods us saying, “*search, and you will find,*” (Matthew 7:7b JB)¹⁷.

In a broad sense, the function of God the Son is 'executing the Father's Will' and this is explicitly revealed in these verses:

- (i) Psalm 40:8 and 147:15–17,
- (ii) Isaiah 55:11, and
- (iii) John 3:35, 4:34, and 5:30b.

'Executing the Father's Will' encompasses multiple roles with related tasks:

- (i) creator (John 1:1–3),
 - (ii) provider (Psalm 103:5 and 147:15–17),
 - (iii) healer (Psalm 103:3b and 107:20, Matthew 8:16, 12:15, 14:14, 14:36, 15:30 and 21:14),
 - (iv) Messianic ruler (Psalm 96:13, Isaiah 9, 11 and 16:5, Jeremiah 23:5, Revelation 20:4),
- and
- (v) implementer of judgment (Isaiah 11:3–4, John 5:22 and 5:30a).

¹⁷ Scripture quotation taken from The Jerusalem Bible, copyright © 1966 by Darton, Longman & Todd, Ltd. and Doubleday, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc. Reprinted by permission.

Helplessly trapped in sinful habits, we mainly see God the Son as our Redeemer and this role entails giving spiritual rebirth (John 1:12–13) to fallen humans and offering God's likeness to them by showing the Way to God (John 5:24), by teaching and living as a 'suffering servant' (see Psalm 40:6, Isaiah 53, Mark 10:45, and Luke 24:7), and mediating between God and fallen humans (see John 6:40, 6:44 and 14:6; 1Tim 2:5, and Hebrews 8:6, 9:15 and 12:24). Again, nested in mediation is 'forgiving the sins we commit' (see Psalm 103:3a, Isaiah 53:12, Matt 9:2 and 26:28, Mark 2:5, Luke 7:47, John 1:29 and 1John 1:9) and also 'freeing us from our sinful habits' (John 8:36, Acts 13:39, Romans 6:6–7 and Galatians 5:1).

Thus, it becomes reasonably clear from the above findings that, the function of God the Son in the Holy Trinity is executing the Father's Will which could be creation, redemption, Messianic kingship or judgment, of which the task of redemption involves:

- (i) revealing Divine self to fallen humans and giving spiritual rebirth to those who believe,
- (ii) showing the Way to God through life and teachings and humbling self to serve fallen humans with love without minding what is in store— worst humiliation, brutal persecution and death on the cross at the hands of wicked and ungrateful people, and
- (iii) mediating between God the Father and fallen humans, which involves both forgiving the sins we commit and liberating us from our habitual sinfulness.

The elaboration brings out the special importance of the role of Redeemer from the human view point. The undeniable fact that without redemption other roles of God the Son would mean nothing to humans, further raises the value of redemption to humans, for whom it is not merely redemption of humanity but also practically the redemption of other roles of the Son which have meaning for humans only because of redemption. This understanding renders the popular titles of the Son of God as Redeemer and Saviour, perfectly apt and right.

After a similar search of Scripture on the Holy Spirit, it is contended that God the Holy Spirit is the reservoir of God's power and knowledge, discerning and conveying it to God the Father and God the Son and to us as per God's Will, whenever needed.

These verses suggest that the all knowing power of God, rests in God's own Spirit:

- (i) Wisdom 1:7,
- (ii) Psalm 139: 4, 6, 7 & 23,
- (iii) Mark 2:8, and
- (iv) Luke 4:14

The Holy Spirit guides and empowers us with knowledge, as per God's Will:

- (i) Psalm 143:10b,
- (ii) Mark 13:11,
- (iii) Luke 1:35,
- (iv) Luke 24:49, and
- (v) John 16:13

The empowering knowledge includes, spiritual gifts (see Isaiah 11:1–2) as well as charisms (see 1 Corinthians 12:4–11) for the common good, to bear witness to Christ (see 1 Corinthians 12:3) and to encourage, strengthen, console and build each other (see 1 Corinthians 14:3, 12).

God the Holy Spirit is our counselor, who operates as the guiding inner voice and this is how we are led in the way of truth:

- (i) When we heed the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we bear good fruits (see Galatians 5:22) by God's grace and have a foretaste of God's Kingdom (see Romans 14:17); but
- (ii) when we fail to heed God's guidance out of human frailty but not deceit, our guilty conscience convicts us due to withdrawal of the Holy Spirit as per God's Will (see Psalm 32:2 and 51:11); and then

(iii) the Holy Spirit carries our cries and petitions to God and even if we are clueless on what to pray he knows our plight and intercedes by himself with God on our behalf (see Romans 8:26–27), and

(iv) the only irreparable situation of no more hope would occur in the extreme case when someone incorrigibly commits blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, either by deliberate malicious slander out of envy of another who is displaying active divine power from the Holy Spirit (see Matthew 12:31) or by decisive rejection of truthful guidance of the Holy Spirit to embrace deceit by firm choice (see Acts 5:3–5).

After those two patient and meticulous searches, it became much easier when it came to the third search. God the Father decides everything for good and ensures that his decisions (referred to as God's Will) prevail in the end. These verses make it most evident:

(i) Genesis 1:3, 6, 9, 10c, 11, 12d, 14, 18c, 20, 24 & 25d and

(ii) Matthew 10:29

Thus, God the Father decides (wills) what is good and ensures that righteousness prevails finally.

We may now consolidate the distinct functions of the Trinitarian persons, for a holistic view of God's image as revealed by God Himself and extracted from Scripture: The Will (decision) of God the Father is based on truth discerned and supplied by the Holy Spirit and God the Son obediently does (executes) the Father's Will by availing all necessary power from the Holy Spirit. Or in short, God the Father decides, God the Son does and God the Holy Spirit counsels. Without operating in tandem, the individual functions do not constitute a whole; therefore the three persons are but one being. All what is accomplished by God is necessarily comprised of the three equally essential dimensions of deciding, doing and counseling. This is the basic feature of the eternal Image of God.

Freewill is another essential feature of God's image. It is the freedom of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, to respectively desire whether and what to, decide, do and counsel. This too is revealed, as we read that the Son delights in doing the Father's Will (see Psalm 40:8 and John 4:34) and that the Spirit (wind) blows freely (see John 3:8); again we read that the three voluntarily harmonize their freedom (see Mark 14:36 or Luke 22:42 and 1 John 5:8).

It unambiguously emerges that, while roles may be functionally great or less they are essentially equal dimensions of the same accomplishment. The functional difference has no bearing on the equality of the divine persons performing the roles. This most decisively demolishes the heresy of Arianism¹⁸ and its offspring, Subordinationism¹⁹.

Paul's 'body metaphor', illustrating the co-equality of different spiritual gifts in the service of God is very relevant to this context. (see 1 Corinthians 12)

The basic trinitarian feature of the image of God may be easily verified to be true of humans too— how do we perform our tasks? Don't all of us decide by reasoning with what we know and then do what we decide to? Even an extremely small and simple task like 'closing a window' is performed by knowing the need and more, then deciding after reasoning and finally doing it.

In the patristic tradition which is observed till today in the Eastern, Oriental and Latin Churches, the sign of the Trinity is made by first touching the forehead saying, “in the name of the Father”, then touching the region of the heart saying, “in the name of the Son” and thirdly by touching both shoulders saying, “in the name of the Holy Spirit” ending with

18 William Barry, “Arianism.” *The Catholic Encyclopedia* Vol. 1. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1907. <www.newadvent.org/cathen/01707c.htm>.

19 Jules Leberton, “St. Justin Martyr.” *The Catholic Encyclopedia* Vol. 8. New York: Robert Appleton Company, 1910.

Amen. The touched body regions clearly represent the faculties of the soul— mind, heart (or body) and strength (or spirit),²⁰ which are also somewhat identified in Scripture (see Deuteronomy 6:5 and Luke 10:27).

Human 'freewill', is the freedom of the respective faculties of the soul to make a choice, about deciding, doing and counseling, after fully knowing the pros and cons of all possible options. Creatures without freewill are like 'programmable puppets' who exist today and perish tomorrow and have nothing called afterlife.

A re-look at what was discovered of the function of God the Son in the Trinitarian Godhead, leads to our most relevant truth about God's Way: Servant-leadership is not a role in itself but a means for performing the role of Redeemer. And then, it is the chosen way followed by our Lord, who also asserts that he only does as he sees his Father doing (see John 5:19).

This only goes to prove that servant-leadership is indeed the Father's way too, which is revealed to humans in the incarnate God the Son for our emulating by free choice (see John 8:12).

From Scripture we already know this much about God's likeness: knowing good and evil and yet remaining incorruptible by choice and everliving as well as being the source of everlasting life (see Genesis 3:22); the only means adopted by God is servant-leadership as deciphered above. Thus, it becomes absolutely clear that God's image is the Trinitarian dynamics of distinct functions operating in tandem to accomplish all good together by the harmony of freewill and God's likeness is his eternal incorruptibility and immortality by choice through the means called servant-leadership which endures any amount of pain that is in store for every free choice.

²⁰ The penchant to confuse by interchangeable use of these terms is rather common: spirit – soul, spirit – mind, spirit – strength, heart – body, heart – flesh, and more.

Through a fresh interpretation of Jesus' prophetic action of assuming the role of a slave in the light of our Trinitarian understanding, that both greater and lesser functions are essentially equal as they accomplish every good together, working in tandem, the following insight on servant-leadership in the human context, emerges:

We are morally bound to regularly use loving gestures that powerfully remind us as well as the ones who have functionally lesser roles, that we are equals as persons and our roles too are essentially equal and do not confer either superior or inferior status on any of us. It is only through such a continual conscious reminder, that we may gain and grow the indispensable, divine attribute called servant-leadership which is God's own likeness that is offered for our appropriation by exercising our freewill, to follow Jesus as a matter of firm choice,²¹ that empowers us for performing any kind of meaningful role and sustainably keep at bay the lurking twin evils of superiority and inferiority complexes and all forms of schismatic tendencies. Only then, will we prove worthy when a need comes unawares, as in the Parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10. Without such proving there is no way that one can think of entering the Father's Kingdom (see Matthew 25:41–46).

It is only imperative that we gained this Trinitarian insight, that brings out the heavenly joy and divine beauty of humbling self to serve others with love, while exposing and rubbishing Subordinationism. It must also be noted that Judas too was among them, whose feet were washed by Jesus and not to miss knowing who all constitute others: those who are servant-leaders to us (the definition of neighbour given by Jesus himself in Luke 10:36–37), those who perform lesser roles than ours (see John 13:4–5), the oppressed (see Matthew 25:40), and finally the oppressor who persecutes us (see Matthew 5:43–45).

²¹ St. Athanasius, “8: Refutation of the Gentiles – *continued*,” in *On the Incarnation (De Incarnatione Verbi Dei)* (NJ: St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church, 1999), 85 [para 54, verse 3].

Now, coming back to what we just uncovered on servant-leadership through meticulous exploration of Scripture, a logical extension of the God-ordained human co-equality will naturally apply in the following cases too: sinful state, primitive state, race, ethnicity, gender, colour and sexual orientation. Again, this is also precisely corroborated in Scripture (see Galatians 3:28).

If that was not enough, then let us turn to Scripture again; by exhorting us not to be judgmental (see Matthew 7:1) and by pleading with the Father for sparing those who were brutally killing him (see Luke 23:24), Jesus is reiterating that patience and tolerance are fundamental requirements (see Leviticus 19:17–18), if we aspire to live forever with God.

Without the above understanding seeping deeply into our hearts, can we really love our enemies (fourth category of 'others' seen earlier)? But for God's likeness transforming humans to grow in values that confer fitness to be called 'children of our Heavenly Father' (see Matthew 5:44–45 in conjunction with Exodus 23:5), could we have advanced in values far higher than those of our ancestors?

How is it that in our present times, it is not uncommon for a soldier in the battlefield to treat the “other” injured or dying enemy soldier, as a respectable fellow-human and show some love and compassion? How could something like the Geneva convention on treating prisoners-of-war, have ever come into existence? Again, how is civil society unanimous about extending need based health care to all, irrespective of whether someone is a Nobel laureate or a convicted criminal?

God's likeness is undoubtedly the transforming power that divinises us to grow in values, that we may indwell forever with our Father in Heaven. Servant-leadership is God's own likeness; it is offered for our imbibing by a firm choice using our freewill after knowing the pains to be endured and the final reward.

Thus, from a Trinitarian perspective, servant-leadership is serving God the Father, by emulating God the Son, by the power of God the Holy Spirit.

From Death to Life

Though all humans bear God's image, few are able to walk in God's way. The cause of our helplessness and fallen state is explored here with the expectation that a clear understanding will facilitate preferring pain over pleasure in making a firm choice of servant-leadership by free exercise of our will after fully knowing what is in store, and avail God's offer of redemption in Jesus Christ which is his free gift of selfless, unconditional love to fallen humanity.

The greatest commandment (see Deuteronomy 6:5 and Luke 10:27) is in fact an exhortation to seek God's likeness to be able to fulfil God's Law with the inherent additional message that our love for God and neighbour is actually gratitude. Jesus' brilliant clarification of 'who is our neighbour' through the Parable of the Good Samaritan (see Luke 10:29–37), is a divine expounding of the Love command. The whole thing is about making us realise that, when someone denies their own concerns to come to our aid in a helpless moment, the best response is to gratefully remember the act of selfless love and unhesitatingly do likewise, whenever we see another person in dire need of our loving service.

Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all others.

— Marcus Tullius Cicero (106 – 43 BC)²²

Now, the consequence of ingratitude: while it is true that Adam and Eve stumbled because of Satan's deceit, it is also true that they could not have been deceived if only they had grace which is the privilege of the grateful. The vicious downward spiral that leads to

22 <www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/13755.Marcus_Tullius_Cicero>

Hell, is the consequence of ungratefully choosing Satan's deceitful lie and seductive evil in preference to the truth of God's selfless and unconditional love (see Romans 1:21–25).

Ingratitude is the most abominable of sins and as such it is the cause, beginning, and origin of all sins and misfortunes. — Ignatius of Loyola²³

This is our miserable fallen state: a willing spirit saddled with a helpless mind and a weak heart (see Matthew 26:41). Unlike the persons of the Trinity who never disagree (see Luke 22:42 and 1John 5:8), the faculties of the human soul are hardly in harmony. Each faculty seeks to assert its individual freewill, proving that our inherited image is defiled (see Romans 7:14–18).

“To become a master at any skill, it takes the total effort of your: heart, mind, and soul working together in tandem.” — Maurice Young²⁴

Having God's image is of no value without God's likeness which is knowing both but always choosing good over evil to remain incorruptible by choice²⁵ (also see Genesis 3:22). Without God's likeness we are vulnerable and helpless and become easily defiled by succumbing to Satanic lures and traps.

While God's image is conferred unconditionally (see Genesis 1:27), its defilement or distortion is restored through spiritual rebirth in Jesus Christ (see John 1:12–13). Rebirth is not just an event as it sounds like, but a long drawn process in which human freewill is freed from Satanic delusion (see John 8:32); how else could a reborn human become like the wind

²³ Excerpt from a letter of Ignatius of Loyola to Father Simão Rodrigues, 18 Mar 1542. <library.georgetown.edu/woodstock/ignatius-letters/letter2>

²⁴ <www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/1784959.Maurice_Young>.

²⁵ St. Athanasius, “1: Creation and the Fall,” in *On the Incarnation (De Incarnatione Verbi Dei)* (Jersey City, NJ: St. Mark Coptic Orthodox Church, 1999), 9 [para 4, verses 8–9].

(see John 3:8)? It is for earnestly seeking God's likeness that we are endowed with freewill,²⁶ that we may cross over from death to life by exercising our freewill to follow Jesus Christ (see John 5:24) and cooperate in the tortuous transformation process by God's grace that is offered to all his servants (see 2 Corinthians 12:9a).

What triggers change of heart? We can infer clearly from the Parable of the Prodigal (Lost) Son in Luke 15, that the imminent consequence of worldliness is indeed a foretaste of hell that offers the best opportunity for coming to one's senses (see Luke 15:17a) and gladly and surely embracing servant-leadership (see Luke 15:17b, 19b). God ordained suffering as a blessing and not as a curse (see Jeremiah 29:11). Freewill makes sense only if it's possible to have a foretaste of hellish misery as well as heavenly rapture. That's how we may know the truth, that bearing the pains of servant-leadership leads to everlasting joy and seeking the pleasures of worldliness leads to unending misery? (see John 8:32) Without freewill we can only be like 'programmable puppets' who exist today and perish tomorrow with no afterlife.

It is to draw humanity out of the mire called 'spiritual blindness' that God sent his only Son as a suffering-servant to redeem us through his suffering by going through the most painful humiliation and brutal death, that would move our hearts and restore our lost 'spiritual vision' that we may freely seek God with full knowledge without minding tribulations that are inescapable (see Matthew 16:24 or Luke 9:23).

How do we learn to forgive brutality and heinous crimes? Despite a clear Law against revenge (see Leviticus 19:18) we see very few instances of individuals forgiving each other in olden times (see Genesis 50:15–21, 1 Samuel 24 and Hosea 3). Before Jesus enlightened us, there was probably a limit on the number of times one could be forgiven for a repeat offence (see Matthew 18:21). Do we understand the magnitude of the difficulty in shedding a

²⁶ Christopher Alexander Scott Heren, "*Imago Dei: The Doctrine of the Image of God with regard to Human Origins*" (Term paper, Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota, 2011), 7.

sinful habit because of human frailty (see Psalm 78:17, 32)? Jesus proscribes limiting the number of times we forgive someone who repents (see Matthew 18:22 or Luke 17:4).

Though it is not unusual to promptly see David as a scandalous man who misused his authority to commit the heinous crimes of rape and murder in a premeditated manner, this is also an invitation to explore a little more and also notice David's child-like and fervent repentance in prayer (see Psalms 27:4, 51:1–17 and 119:97).

How can we avoid another fall after having crossed over from death to life? Our fitness to live with God forever would be ultimately judged, not on the basis of our human frailty or imperfections in doing God's Will, but on the basis of our being found to be after God's own heart, loving God's Will and earnestly battling our weaknesses always for becoming worthy children.

When we show a little love and passion in serving others, God responds by enabling the most difficult choice, which once made, amounts to surrendering our defiled image and manipulable freewill to God. Such a surrender of intellect alone can invite extraordinary divine intervention and discipline (see Revelation 3:19a) as in the case of prophet Jonah (see Jonah 1–2) and David (see 1 Chronicles 21:1–17).

The frequent mention made in the Bible, of God being so pleased with David that he chose his lineage to be with us as the incarnate Messiah (see Jeremiah 30:9, 33:14–15), after seeing his own heart in David's (see 1 Samuel 13:14 and Acts 13:22), was most baffling and caused much pondering and wonder. What was it that God found to be so beautiful in David?

The meditation intensified to trigger a motivated search that first led to 1 Samuel 13:14 and then to 1 Samuel 16:7 and finally zeroed in on this precise thing that pleased God: David was a rare and amazing servant who performed his job with utmost seriousness, working with such love and passion, going as far as risking his life to rescue a sheep from a lion's mouth with his bare hands (see 1 Samuel 17:34–35).

That's not all; after considering the manner in which Jesse responded to Samuel in describing David's occupation of 'tending the sheep' (see Samuel 16:11), and then by comparing it with the local “cowherd metaphor”, it became so plain and clear that both were similar and derogatory metaphors used to describe someone as “good for nothing” and hence not to be assigned any important task save such as this one.

How pleased God must have been, seeing David's passion in serving, that he chose to not only to exalt David in an unparalleled and unimaginable way, but went beyond that to completely reverse the original “shepherd metaphor” to make it the new metaphor for the noblest and most valued occupation which is God's own role as the incarnate God with us, who continues to be with us and shepherds us with impeccably selfless and sacrificial love, just as he asserted in truth, that he is the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep (see John 10:11).

This most inspiring finding is a stunning example of divine reversal of the dehumanising old “shepherd metaphor” and is probably the greatest ever Divine snub and an everlasting reminder and enjoinder against discrimination of human roles and functions and related social evils. God has clearly chosen to preserve the new “shepherd metaphor” for so many millennia till this day. The ultimate servant-leader is the Good Shepherd.

While Satan never rests, but ever seeks to devour (see 1 Peter 5:8), worldly tensions and lures choke the word of truth (see Matthew 13:22). But, we learn in Psalm 23:2–3, that our Lord, shepherds us to restful waters to revive our drooping spirit. How is this made possible? What we need is a temporary getaway, some sort of a sacred space that offers the same safety as the spiritual realm. God revealed such a space to Moses that is sanctified by God's presence and we may confidently remove our 'sandals of insecurity' that were worn out of fear in the desert (see Exodus 3:5) known for its burning sand (see Isaiah 35:7) as well as snakes and scorpions (see Deuteronomy 8:15). Moses made his own getaway to be alone

with God (see Exodus 33:7–11). Jesus prescribed solitary prayer (see Matthew 6:6) and made do with any solitary place to pray (see Matthew 14:23 or Mark 1:35 or Luke 5:16).

*He who learns to live the interior life and to take little account of outward things, does not seek special places or times to perform devout exercises.*²⁷

True meditation is not just thinking; it is being alone with God in his presence, to talk, listen and assimilate his likeness by saying yes after knowing what (see Luke 14:29–33), and how in spite of our frailty (see 2 Corinthians 12:9a).

Just like Moses (see Exodus 34:34–35), Mother Teresa's face was known to glow after praying alone, and we may learn from her about praying in solitude.²⁸

Serpent-leadership exposed

Worldly-leadership that our Lord firmly disapproves (see Matthew 20:25–28 or Luke 22:25–27), stands in total contrast to servant-leadership. Worldliness is the result of humanity forfeiting its God given dominion over creation to Satan, after The Fall.

The Serpent described in the book of Genesis, is Satan's temptation personified and this 'alluring concupiscence' which is worldliness, may aptly be renamed serpent-leadership. To unmask it and expose the deceit of worldliness, it is contrasted here in stages with servant-leadership.

The delusive way of serpent-leadership

The divine way of servant-leadership

Deludes and enslaves to some worldly attraction like money, power, vain glory and carnal pleasure, engendering love for self	Reveals truth to liberate from worldly attractions and silly fears; enlightens with divine values, engendering love for the
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²⁷ Thomas A. Kempis, *The Imitation of Christ*, trans. Aloysius Croft and Harold Bolton (Milwaukee: The Bruce, 1940), ePub, 29.

²⁸ Mother Teresa's letter to her spiritual family, 25th March 1993. <bit.ly/3a3jrAj>.

above all and fear to let go cravings.

Deceitful misguidance from Satan to act against our own will, wrought by interior defilement. (see Romans 7:14–18)

Satan rose against Israel and incited David to take a census of the Israelites. David said to Joab and to the senior army officers, “Go, and take a census of Israel, from Beersheba to Dan,”

(1 Chronicles 21:1–2 JB)²⁹

An abnormal impulse to act most foolishly to impress the world only to feel ashamed of it and regret later.

(see Matthew 26:51, 69–75)

Worldly gratitude is all about returning a favour. (see Luke 14:12)

An allurements with deceitful assurance, to consider the wealth at stake and forget the other's pain while betraying.

(see John 12:4–6)

A penchant to find fault and condemn, that breeds and grows self-righteousness,

other and courage to gladly deny self.

Truthful guidance from the Holy Spirit who is our seal and deposit of divine assurance.

(see 2 Corinthians 1:21–22)

Joab said, “May Yahweh multiply the people a hundred times. My lord king, are they not all servants of my lord? Why should my lord make this inquiry? Why should guilt be brought on Israel?”

(1 Chronicles 21:3–4 JB)²⁹

A gentle prompting to forget self and take the lead and act without delay, as there's a pressing need but none to serve.

(see Luke 10:30–34)

True gratitude is in emulating a good example. (read Luke 14:14 with 10:37)

A moving persuasion with truthful assurance, to consider the final joy in store and endure the horrible pain with love.

(see Romans 8:18)

A positive eye for goodness that forgives wrongs while rendering sin unattractive by

²⁹ Scripture quotations taken from The Jerusalem Bible, copyright © 1966 by Darton, Longman & Todd, Ltd. and Doubleday, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc. Reprinted by permission.

negativity, bitterness, hatred and hypocrisy.

(see Revelation 12:10c)

When the fallen state deteriorates and misery grows from bad to worse, sadly, there will be no one to help.

(see Luke 15:16)

Persistently spurning God's love, paralyses capacity to repent despite remorse, ending in a horrible death. (see Matthew 27:1–5)

Delusion can break under its own weight of hellish misery and when it happens a victim comes back to senses. It's a God ordained golden opportunity for a change of heart and repentance; if availed it will reverse downslide amazingly and restore lost blessings. (see Luke 15:17–23)

appreciatively encouraging goodness.

(see Luke 7:36–50)

No one is tested beyond the ability to bear; if the pain becomes really unbearable, providential strength is ever forthcoming.

(see 1 Corinthians 10:13b & Luke 22:42–43)

Persevering against all odds consummates in the final glory when there will be no more suffering or sorrow. (see Job 42:10–17)

In spiritual warfare it is always too early to 'lower the guard' even after a foretaste of victory. Avoiding prayer or Godsend crosses makes one gullible to Satanic suggestions leading to spurning Holy Spirit's counsel to end in an irreversibly disastrous fall. (see Matthew 26:41; Luke 21:34 and Acts 5:3–5)

Final thoughts and bottom lines

We must get it clearly that delusion must be understood only to not let Satan exploit our fear for death, bodily torments and worldly tensions. Both Life and Death are entirely in God's hands and he alone is to be feared. Satan has no power over our soul and cannot send anyone to Hell (see Matthew 10:28). Sin is imperfection and there is no denial that it leads to Death, but on God's terms not Satan's. Though the wage of sin is Death, we have God's gift of Life in Jesus Christ (see Romans 6:23).

Spiritual death is the consequence of repeatedly spurning God's loving overtures or perversely messing with the Holy Spirit. People who continue on earth after spiritually dying, are like incarnate devils who tempt the innocent (see Matthew 18: 6–7 or Luke 17:1–2). Such sins are satanic and beyond pardon (see 1 John 5:16).

Satan the father of lies, masquerades by flaunting his illusory authority over Death and this illusion is spiritual blindness. We are living in the end times and it's 'endgame for Satan' (see Luke 10:18) who is being driven out (see John 12:31), all because of the loving and selfless sacrifice of the incarnate Son of God, the ultimate servant-leader. Darkness can never resist light (see John 1:5) and Death the last enemy is being destroyed in Christ (see 1 Corinthians 15:26).

With the destruction of the last enemy, the power of sin to torment (see 2 Corinthians 12:7–8), is transformed by God into a chastising power provided we seek and avail grace that gives freedom from frailties of the flesh (see 2 Corinthians 12:9 and 1 Corinthians 5:5).

Servant-leaders are bound to be tested very severely (see Job, Zechariah 13:9b and Malachi 3:3a). Many prophets of old were murdered, even God the Son was not spared and many saints were burnt alive. (see Matthew 10:22–24)

But then, accepting servanthood without being put-off with the thought of severe trials and tribulations, empowers people to accomplish great things and draw many others to God, unlike false prophets who draw crowds for themselves.

“Start by doing what is necessary, then what is possible, and suddenly you are doing the impossible.” – Francis of Assisi³⁰

30 <[goodreads.com/author/quotes/149151.Francis_of_Assisi](https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/149151.Francis_of_Assisi)>

The Jesuits were once the most suppressed;³¹ but now by divine exaltation of their perseverance and steadfastness, they are probably the biggest religious order and the most sanctified, with an amazingly huge worldwide presence in education.³²

Why did God choose to reveal himself most profoundly as the incarnate Word (Son) and not as 'incarnate Father' or 'incarnate Holy Spirit'. It's the greatest attestation that we are indeed called to be 'doers of God's Will' and coheirs with Jesus Christ (see Romans 8:17) who redeems us as children of God (see Ephesians 1:5, 7). To remain children of the Most High (see Luke 6:35), the only means given is servant-leadership which is God's own likeness revealed in Jesus (see John 8:12). It begins with gratitude to God when he reveals himself in a loving servant-leader (neighbour in Luke 10:36–37a) and responding with love.

How exactly? By doing likewise (see Luke 10:37b) when we see the 'other' in dire need and no one to serve (see Exodus 23:5 and also Matthew 25:35–36). This is the true worship that the Father expects of us (see John 4:23), which is expounded further by Paul, as offering ourselves as holy and pleasing, 'living sacrifices' (see Romans 12:1).

Thus, servant-leadership encompasses true worship too, and God's likeness is the convergence and source of all virtues. What about religion? Being a virtue, it is innate to servant-leadership. Scripture reveals most beautifully, how: servant-leaders draw people to God (see Matthew 5:16) and like Moses and Paul, even if they are far ahead of others in the journey to God, they travel together and set an example, by taking a lead in serving with love. Journeying together spiritually, is made practically feasible by the virtue called religion.

Conclusion

It is hoped that this Trinitarian perspective based on Scripture, will appeal to all and prove useful in terms of knowledge on this little researched subject and contribute in rendering

31 <newadvent.org/cathen/14096a.htm>

32 <kl.snsj.in/a-brief-history-of-the-jesuits>

servant-leadership the preferred choice over worldliness. It is further hoped that readers who learn to love the former and shun the latter, will spread the awareness that will serve the cause of restoring the equality, dignity and nobility of every essential human role.

Strategic initiatives for social transformation through becoming, being and bringing forth servant-leaders must be respectively modelled on, Lord Jesus for individuals and the Most Holy Trinity for communities. Future research should cover trend setters like Augustine of Hippo, Francis of Assisi, Ignatius of Loyola, Don Bosco and Mother Teresa of Kolkata and their collective communities as well as other contemporary servant-leaders and the 'anti-slavery movement of the Quakers'³³.

No amount of human distortion can obscure the virtuous character of religion, and it is hoped that the clarity presented will unify the people of God, who may now know very well that there is but one religion (see Ephesians 4:5) and one Scripture (see 2 Timothy 3:16).

Let us ask ourselves, 'what' is the basic duty of the people of God and 'how' is this duty to be discharged? Where can we find this in Scripture? The 'what', is revealed by Qoheleth (see Ecclesiastes 12:13) the prefigured Teacher and son of David, and the 'how', is revealed by Christ (see Luke 17:7–10) the ultimate Teacher (see Matthew 23:10–11) and descendant of David.

Both these teachings are precisely on servant-leadership; therefore let us the people of God say together to our Lord: “*Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord!*” (Psalm 118:26 NRSV)³³ Because you do it, we also do it,” and hear him say: “*Because I live, you also will live*” (John 14:19c NRSV)³⁴. Amen.

³³ Adam Hochschild, “The Unsung Heroes of Abolition: The Quakers.” From BBC Factual: History, last updated 17 Feb. 2011. <bbc.in/2Uv41QY>

³⁴ Scripture quotations taken from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.