

## AN ANALYSIS OF THE THEOLOGY OF MODELING

This paper will develop a philosophy of church and ministry based on the sociological phenomena of identification, observation, and reduplication. In a broad sense, these three processes define what is called "modeling." The model is "a standard for imitation or comparison; a pattern."<sup>1</sup> In the Christian experience, this standard to be imitated is God, and especially God as revealed in the incarnate Christ. The church in essence is a recreated community that reflects the *imago dei* and glorifies God through Christ-like behavior. In order to accomplish this task of reflecting the "likeness" of the creator (and re-creator) in its own actions, behaviors, and thoughts, the church must: (1) identify with God and Christ; (2) focus attention on the observable reality of God's nature that is found in the revealed, incarnate Christ; and (3) multiply models by reduplication.

When Jesus said, "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48, NIV), he enunciated for the covenant community the principle of modeling. Jesus is saying: identify with the Father, observe what the Father does, and reduplicate what the Father does. The model to be imitated is God, and perfection is the goal. Such a grand aim demands living in a way that is different (e.g., holy) and distinct (e.g., separate). So Peter encourages believers, "But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written, 'Be holy, because I am holy'" (1 Peter 1:15-16, NIV). God is distinct and different from all creation, and God's people are called to be *holy* and *set apart*. Herman Bavinck observes, "Whatever is

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<sup>1</sup>*The American College Dictionary* (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1948), 781.

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holy lives a peculiar life, bears a peculiar character, [and] has been separated from the common sphere and from the common law."<sup>2</sup> This was true for ancient Israel whom God called to be separate from the surrounding nations (see Leviticus 11:45; 19:2), and it is true for the church whom God has called to live apart from the world (see 1 John 3:3), a call based on *identification* (e.g., "he who called you"), *observation* (e.g., "he . . . is holy"), and *reduplication* (e.g., "so be holy").

Identification. The context of the call to holiness portrays various aspects and characteristics of the modeling process. Modeling, first of all, is related to identification and socialization. "Identification is a process in which a person believes himself to be like another person in some respects."<sup>3</sup> The Christian identifies with God, because the believer bears "the image and glory of God" (1 Corinthians 11:7, NASV). The new believer is like a newborn baby (see John 3:3, 5; 1 Peter 2:2) who is growing up in Christ (see Ephesians 4:15). And the father-child relationship is very important for identification. As any child looks to their earthly father for identity, purpose, and direction, so Christians look to their heavenly Father for identity (e.g., who am I), purpose (e.g., why am I here), and direction (e.g., where am I going). An intimate relationship like this necessitates identification. This is found in the Christian's experience,

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<sup>2</sup>*The Doctrine of God*, trans. William Hendriksen (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1977), 212.

<sup>3</sup>Lawrence O. Richards, *A Theology of Christian Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), 83, citing DeNike and Tiber, "Neurotic Behavior," *Foundations of Abnormal Psychology* (New York, NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), 355.

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because the believer is a *partaker* (from the Greek word *koinonos*) of the divine nature (see 2 Peter 1:4; cf. 1 Peter 5:1).

Compliance and Internalization. Based on compliance, identification results in internalization. Compliance is the effect "produced when the influencing source has some means of control over an individual."<sup>4</sup> As created beings, we are compelled to respond to the call of the God who made us, who provides for us, and who one day will judge us (see Acts 17:24-31). We as Christians respond to God for the same reason (see 1 Peter 1:17) but also because of the gift of redemption by grace in Christ. This is compliance that is compelled by the love of Christ, since "the love of Christ *constraineth* (from the Greek word *sunecho*) us" (2 Corinthians 5:14, KJV).

Internalization results "when the content of the induced behavior is adapted as intrinsically rewarding."<sup>5</sup> Neither arbitrary nor unprofitable, compliance to the call of God for holiness promises to human beings blessings in this life and in the life to come. Individually, the Christian, who has adopted the induced behavior (e.g., holiness) of the model (e.g., God), finds redemption from an empty way of life (see 1 Peter 1:18) and hope for an eternal inheritance in Christ (see 1 Peter 1:4, 13, 18). Collectively, the church is "the body of Christ," "God's new creation," "the people of God," "the bride of Christ," and "the temple of God."<sup>6</sup> This redeemed and recreated community has a deep and abiding relationship with the One who called it into

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<sup>4</sup>Richards, *Theology of Christian Education*, 83.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>See Paul S. Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1960).

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being and the One who infuses it with life-sustaining power. Such an intimate relationship hinges on a strong identification factor.

Identification and Socialization. Identification provides the impulse for socialization. Socialization is how a child grows up. It is "the way a child learns a culture and a language." When a person is socialized, he or she goes through a "process of orientation" to a "particular environment." To be socialized is to be "oriented" to the world of people who are close and influential.<sup>7</sup> This process as it relates to faith and spiritual life can be seen in several scriptures.

In the context of the opening scripture, the reason given by Jesus for modeling the perfection of the heavenly Father is "that you may be sons of your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:45, NIV). The Greek word translated "be" comes from *ginomai* and can mean either the entering of a new condition (e.g., "become something") or the showing or proving of a condition already attained (so the NASV margin, "show yourselves to be"). Perhaps the latter alternative is to be preferred in this passage, since Jesus was addressing himself to his disciples (see Matthew 5:1). If this is the case,<sup>8</sup> Jesus is establishing love of enemies as a necessary fruit for being a child of God. Thus, identification as a child of God would be a compelling reason to adapt one's behavior accordingly (e.g., socialization).

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<sup>7</sup>See Richards, *Theology of Christian Education*, 81.

<sup>8</sup>The strength of this alternative is lessened by the fact that the parallel passage in the gospel of Luke tends to support the first possibility, "love your enemies . . . you *will be* sons of the Most High" (Luke 6:35, NASV).

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Paul frequently compares the Christian life to a "walk." In three places, though, he qualifies the metaphor by the adverb *axios* (Ephesians 4:1, "walk in a manner *worthy* of the calling with which you have been called"; Colossians 1:10, "walk in a manner *worthy* of the Lord"; and 1 Thessalonians 2:12, "walk in a manner *worthy* of the God who calls you into his own kingdom and glory"; NASV). The Greek word *axios* properly denotes "bringing up the other beam of the scales" and conveys the idea that one thing (of lesser value) becomes of like value, of as much worth, or equivalent in value with another thing (of greater value).<sup>9</sup> The thought is that Christians should try to live in a way that is equal in worth to the calling of God in Jesus, a calling that is the foundation for holiness and purity of life. This worthy walk is the outgrowth or consequence of identity with God (e.g., children of God because of his calling), and Paul uses this as the basis for exhorting believers to model God via a socialization process.

This conclusion is further substantiated by other scriptures. In Romans 6:4, Christians are told to walk in newness of life because of their close identification with Jesus in baptism. Because Christians are God's workmanship and belong to him by virtue of creation in Christ (see 2 Corinthians 5:17), they are to walk in good works (see Ephesians 2:10). Identification with the Spirit of God demands walking by the Spirit (see Galatians 5:25). Being partakers of the light that is found in the Lord necessitates walking as children of light (see Ephesians 5:8). In other

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<sup>9</sup>Werner Foerster, "Axios, etc.," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 379; compare Joseph Henry Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1962), 52-53.

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words, God's people can be and do what God wants us to be and do only if we closely identify with God, with Christ, and with the Holy Spirit.

This identification that effects socialization or reduplication is itself dependent on observation. When Paul writes, "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you, and gave himself up for us" (Ephesians 5:1-2, NASV), he calls on the covenant community, that he identifies as "children of God," to reduplicate (e.g., "imitate") among ourselves the love of Christ that has been revealed to us and witnessed by us.

Observation and Revelation. Observation is another important aspect of the modeling process. But human beings can only model what God has revealed of himself to us.<sup>10</sup> Since "no man has seen God at any time" (John 1:18, NASV), revelation is all the more necessary to provide us with a picture or portrayal of what to imitate or reduplicate. Revelation functions primarily to give humans illumination of the "area of reality that we do not have direct access to."<sup>11</sup> Revelation pictures God in roles that humans can observe and understand (e.g., a model). These roles are both an articulate and an adequate "interpretation of reality"<sup>12</sup> and exhibit

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<sup>10</sup>This applies only to the communicable attributes of God (e.g., goodness, holiness, righteousness). The incommunicable attributes of God (e.g., independence, immutability, infinity), by their very nature of belonging to an uncreated being, cannot be modeled by humans. See Bavinck, *Doctrine of God*, 113-251.

<sup>11</sup>Ruth Ann Hauntz, "Development of Some Models of God and Suggested Relationships to James Fowler's Stages of Faith Development," *Religious Education* 73 (November-December 1978): 642.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 641, citing Gloria Durka and Joanmarie Smith, *Modeling God* (New York, NY: Paulist, 1976), 3.

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attitudes and behaviors to be copied by humans. These roles include: (1) personal relationships such as loving father (see John 3:16), compassionate mother (see Isaiah 49:14-15), and helping friend (see Jeremiah 3:4); (2) works, crafts, and professions such as the shepherd (see Psalm 23; cf. Ezekiel 34:31), the builder (see Hebrews 3:4; 1 Peter 2:6), the teacher and scribe (see Jeremiah 31:31-34), and the metal worker (see Malachi 3:2-3); and (3) governmental officials such as king (see Jeremiah 10:7), judge (Isaiah 11:1-5), and lawgiver (see Isaiah 33:22).<sup>13</sup> We can relate to God through these "role-models," because they are observable in our experiences of life.

Jesus, the Revealing of God. The greatest act of God's revelation to his covenant community was "the Christ-event in which humanity had a living example of God's glory in Jesus."<sup>14</sup> Christ is the image of God (see 2 Corinthians 4:4; cf. Colossians 1:15). Through Christ God "made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Corinthians 4:6, NIV). This illumination was direct and empirical. Apostolic tradition codified in the New Testament preserves for the church this very necessary revelation of Christ. As John notes, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life" (1 John 1:1, NIV).

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 643-644.

<sup>14</sup>Gerhard H. Bussmann, "A Three-Fold Model of Religious Education Based on the Nature of Revelation," *Religious Education* 72 (July-August 1977): 402.

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The covenant community can observe God by looking at Christ, because it is Christ who models or imitates God for us. "The Son can do nothing of himself, unless it is something he sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner" (John 5:19, NASV). What is stressed in the passage by the Greek word *homoios*, that means "in like manner" or "in the same way," is identity of action based on identity of nature. The Son *is* one with the Father. He *sees* the Father. He *does* as the Father does. Identification and observation find expression in reduplication.

Reduplication and Discipling: "Follow". The pattern described above calls for reduplication by the people of God's covenant community. Jesus said, "Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:27, NIV). A disciple is one who learns, a pupil. This methodology is necessary, because the one who ceases to follow ceases to be a disciple. Jesus established imitative response (e.g., of the follower) to exemplary behavior (e.g., of the leader) as the pattern for discipling. The disciples of Jesus must imitate the exemplary behavior they see in their Master and Lord. And the exemplary behavior to be imitated involves the totality of life's experiences.

Jesus both *did* and *taught* (see Acts 1:1), and he expected the same of his followers. The school of Jesus was the school of life. In the case of Jesus' training of the twelve,

this was no typical "school" where those being trained appeared to listen to the teacher for an hour, then went back out into life without him. Jesus and the disciples lived together; they shared the experiences and traumas of life. They were constantly interacting, constantly initiating and reacting to each other.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Richards, *Theology of Christian Education*, 31.

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In a list of sample transactions between Jesus and the disciples, Lawrence Richards points out: Jesus instructed, the disciples listened and questioned; Jesus explained, the disciples questioned; Jesus questioned, the disciples responded; Jesus acted, the disciples observed, questioned, and acted (imitated).<sup>16</sup> By this methodology "all aspects of personality—abilities, knowledge, motivation, conscience, feelings"—were involved in the educational process.<sup>17</sup> Communication, therefore, was not limited to artificial or formal situations. Real circumstances provided the framework for total development of mind, body, and spirit for the early disciples. All aspects of their personalities were involved in the process. Like those early disciples, reduplication in the church today needs to be based on identification with and observation of the full range of life's experiences. Life itself is to be communicated and transmitted.

Reduplication and Communicating: "Example," "Imitate". Jesus represents the ultimate prototype for the socialization of spiritual life. As Peter suggests to his hearers, Jesus "suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:21, RSV). When Jesus washed the disciples' feet to teach them the importance of service in the kingdom of God, he told them, "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done" (John 13:15, NIV). The Greek word *hupodeigma* signifies an example or a model to follow but much more. It also

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid. This is true socialization through which both cognitive and affective modes of learning, a necessary combination for true socialization, takes place. See Bussmann on the Cheyenne's socialization of their children, "Three-Fold Model of Religious Education," 406; and Gerald A. Teller, "A New Model for Jewish Education," *Religious Education* 72 (May-June 1977): 296-301.

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points to a life-transmitting prototype. Heinrich Schlier notes, "In John 13:15 Jesus says that in washing the feet of the disciples he had given them a *hupodeigma* of mutual service. This is more than an example. It is a definite prototype. In a typical act they experience the love of Jesus and are to cause others to have the same experience."<sup>18</sup> Through his action of humility, the disciples experience the love of Jesus. Through their humility, they then are to cause others to have the same experience. The reduplication process thereby involves imitating both the behavior of the model and the typical nature of that behavior. And the follower himself is to become an example to be followed.

Paul depicts this latter idea when he says, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:1, RSV; cf. 1 Corinthians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 1:6; 2:14; Ephesians 5:1). In this passage, the model to be duplicated is Paul, who is imitating Christ, who is imitating God. Reduplication is strengthened by the multiplication of models. Notice the interactive and flowing aspect of the modeling process in the following chart:

<u>Example</u>	<u>Imitator</u>	<u>Scripture</u>
God	Christ	John 5:19
Christ	Paul	1 Corinthians 11:1
Paul	Corinthians	1 Corinthians 4:16
Paul	Thessalonians	1 Thessalonians 1:6
Lord	Thessalonians	1 Thessalonians 1:6
Thessalonians	Believers in Macedonia & Achaia	1 Thessalonians 1:7
Churches in Judea	Thessalonians	1 Thessalonians 2:14
Paul, Silas, Timothy	Thessalonians	2 Thessalonians 3:7, 9

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<sup>18</sup>"*Deiknumi, etc.*," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, eds. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964), 33.

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<u>Example (cont.)</u>	<u>Imitator (cont.)</u>	<u>Scripture (cont.)</u>
Christ	Paul	Philippians 3:10, 14
Paul	Philippians	Philippians 3:17
Those following Paul	Others	Philippians 3:17
Timothy	Others	1 Timothy 4:12
Titus	Others	Titus 2:7
Elders	Flock	1 Peter 5:3

Christ models God. Paul models Christ. Paul exhorts Christians to duplicate the pattern of his life. Believers in churches are to "look among themselves so as to single out men whose lives are worthy of imitation,"<sup>19</sup> worthy because they are following the pattern established by Paul, who is imitating Christ, who is presenting God. Churches are to be imitators of other churches, and they are to serve as good examples to other churches. Elders, teachers, and evangelists, by way of exemplary living, should present Christ to the flock and to the world. By this process, the process of interactive modeling or socialization, Christ will be lifted up by the covenant community for others to observe and follow. As a result, God and Christ will be honored and glorified. As Michael Armour concludes:

We tend, I fear, to look at such "model-centered learning" as a peripheral or secondary learning technique. But to do so is a mistake. It is not a matter of *whether* we will imitate someone; all the evidence supports the conclusion that we will definitely continue to learn by imitation, even as adults. No, the question is *whom* will we imitate? Will we pattern our lives after someone else—actually after some combination of "someone elses"—who will further our Christlikeness? Or will the model we choose to imitate discolor the image of Christ in our lives? Good choices of models will mean productive learning experiences.

Elders, teachers, ministers, and congregations must be more alert to the fact that the Christianity they "model" will be more influential than what they

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<sup>19</sup>Michael C. Armour, "Model-Centered Learning in the Church," *Firm Foundation* 95, no. 13 (March 28, 1978): 9.

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"teach." Long after we have forgotten the specific lessons a minister taught we can remember the sort of person he was.

When we become more conscientious of the example we set, all of our teaching efforts, both in the home and in the church, will prove more successful. We have joked about "doing as I say, not as I do." Unfortunately, this is not a joking matter. The world still needs to see a sermon more than it needs to hear one.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

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