THE URBAN LEGEND VERSION OF THE MOSES MODEL

Over the last few years, many who believe they have been wronged or could not find the support they felt they deserved (or the position they wanted) while attending a Calvary Chapel (often thousands of miles from Costa Mesa California) blame it on an imaginary Moses Model of pastoral and spiritual leadership that supposedly characterizes the leadership style of Calvary Chapel senior pastors. I cannot tell you how many times I have read about the Moses Model (usually from very angry and bitter Christians) who have defined and described the Moses Model so that it supports their victim status. On trash and bash websites, the urban legend version of the Moses Model has become a kind of “catch all” explanation to explain every kind of abuse imaginable.

Many would be emotional martyrs claim to have been deeply wounded victims of the Moses Model as it was promoted and practiced by Pastor Chuck Smith. Often, when I read something that has been written by someone with what they believe to be (or want others to believe) is a righteous axe to grind against Pastor Chuck, it does not seem to matter that they have never been to Costa Mesa or that they have not read much of what Chuck has written or listened to much of what he has said. It is, they say, still the fault of the awful Moses Model that all CC pastors supposedly swear allegiance to as a distinctive of being a senior Calvary Chapel pastor. The more hateful or bitter those on a blog seemed to be, the more likely it is that they will invoke the “explain anything and everything” Moses Model for their bitterness and or anger.

I have personally known Pastor Chuck since 1968. I met him even before I was a Christian. He witnessed to me in the summer of 1968, just prior to the time I came to Christ. I spent nearly a decade with (and was a leader of) a youth ministry that was an outreach of CC Costa Mesa. I was the senior pastor of one of the early Calvary Chapels (from 1977-1986). My talk show was heard on KWAVE, a CC Costa Mesa owned Christian radio station. Since 1988 I have been travelling back and forth to Russia, serving as the director of Calvary Chapel Church Planting Mission. I have been from Genesis to Revelation, chapter by chapter, verse by verse with Pastor Chuck several times.

I think I have read every book Chuck has ever published. I have heard Chuck
speak about Moses and in very positive terms. With most Bible students, Chuck is impressed with the “man of God” that Moses was as well the kind of spiritual leader that God’s word reveals him to have been. I have heard Chuck speak about many other Bible characters as he is teaching through the Bible from beginning to end. I have heard Pastor Chuck preach about the importance being a good and godly spiritual leader if you are good to lead God’s people in accordance with God’s word. I have read what he has written and heard what he has said about the kind of servant-leader a Calvary Chapel pastor (and all pastors) should model. I have not seen or heard Chuck teach anything even close to what his detractors are calling the Moses Model (which I refer to as the urban legend of the Moses Model) or that they say is evidenced in the message and ministry of Pastor Chuck.

In fact, what Pastor Chuck has taught and modeled concerning pastoral and spiritual leadership is in stark contrast to what is found and promoted in the Urban Legend of the Moses Model and in the accusations made by those who claimed to have been victimized by the Moses Model as it is preached and practiced by Pastor Chuck and other Calvary Chapel pastors. Now that I have heard from former acquaintances of Chuck’s accusers I now realize that they are accusing Chuck of what they are guilty. In addition only those who seem upset with life and the Lord, or those who are bitter about one thing or another, seem to be experts on the Moses Model as it is supposedly reflected in the leadership style and teaching of Pastor Chuck.

Seriously, is the Moses Model, however you want to define or describe it, the cause of their misery and unhappiness, as they seem to want those in the blogosphere or on a counselor’s couch believe? Or could it be that there is growing “bitter class” that have imagined, invented or manufactured something they call the Moses Model so they have an excuse for their anger, bitterness, sense of failure or jealousy? On trash and bash sites anything can be said about any one, the more outrageous the better. If you can sell others in the blogosphere that you are the victim of the Moses Model you need to proof of your accusations. The accusers apparently have no shame or decency, no restraint in how harsh and hard when they talk about people that they may not even know. If they pull out their “I am the victim of the Moses Model card”, is it is enough on trash and bash sites to give you a pass. Why? Because your preaching to the choir of The First Church of the Victims of the Moses Model.
From the definitions and descriptions of the Moses Model that I keep hearing and reading about, it is always about a leadership style that is authoritarian, dictatorial and abusive. How could a leadership style defined and described this way be anything but abusive? How could a pastor who believes in or preaches and teaches pastors to be authoritarian, dictatorial be anything but abusive. Now here is the really important question. Is Chuck Smith an authoritarian, dictatorial, and abusive leader? Does He teach Pastors (and others in leadership of a Calvary) to be authoritarian, dictatorial, and abusive? Is that found in the messages He preaches or in the studies he teaches? Can it be discerned in the books he writes? Is it evidenced in his ministry style and manner?

If Chuck is that way and teaches others to be that way, it must be by stealth. Honestly, I have not seen or heard anything that lends support to such a view of pastor Chuck Smith and his message, ministry, manner or methods. As a matter of fact, what I have seen and heard is quite the opposite. Over many decades of very public ministry, Pastor Chuck Smith has championed and demonstrated (i.e., modeled) a servant-leadership style for pastors (inside and outside of the Calvary Chapel movement) that is anything but authoritarian, dictatorial, and abusive. Members of the First Church of Victims of the Moses Model are not impressed with facts, or moved by the evidence. Still I would offer some.

1. Back in 1980, while I was still a relatively young Calvary Chapel pastor, I wrote an article titled *Excuse For Abuse-An Examination of Heavy Handed Authority Doctrine*. The reason I wrote this article is that I wanted to speak out against a popular teaching that did in fact lead to spiritual abuse by certain so-called spiritual leaders. Paul Smith, the brother of Chuck, read the article, passed on to Chuck. As a result they hen decided to publish it. It was published by The Word For Today, the first publishing arm of Calvary Chapel of Costa Mesa. I already know that Pastor Chuck was very much opposed to anything that would excuse pastoral or spiritual abuse. At the time I was unaware that a year earlier Pastor Chuck had already written and published a more thorough, doctrinally sound, and more pastoral article on the same topic. Chuck’s article was titled Shepherding or Dictatorship?

In view of the urban legend about Chuck Smith and what his detractors call the Moses Model, I think Chuck’s article and the concerns he wrote about should be revisited. In *Answers For Today* with something then called the “Shepherding”
movement in mind, Pastor Chuck warned that:
The words of spiritual teachers...must never supersede the Word of God.
Chuck then explained that:
The doctrine of submission, covering, apostleship, or shepherding (or any of the numerous terms by which it is known) basically teaches that you must submit yourself to an elder or a group of elders within the Body of Christ, oftentimes called "shepherds."
Chuck warned that if you come under the influence of these so-called Shepherd’s:
You cannot make any major decision without their prior approval. If you want to buy or sell your house, it's imperative that you first consult your elder. He will tell you whether or not you can buy or sell. The same is true if you want to buy or sell a car or TV, or if you want to change your job. If you want to go on a trip, these shepherds will tell you where you can go, how long you can stay, and when to be back.
Chuck went on to say that:
They seek to exercise complete authority and control over your life. If you desire to move to another locality, they'll tell you whether or not you may have their blessings and permission. You must submit to the shepherds in all the areas of your life that they deem important and necessary. To refuse to do so is to be marked as a rebel.
Chuck explained that:
The Shepherding] elders have set up an apostleship. The apostle has absolute and complete authority over those under his apostleship. Though he may have "elders" under his apostleship, he has the power to overrule any decision that they make individually or collectively. On many occasions these shepherds have told a person exactly whom he or she was to marry, how much and when to give, what books to read, and which tapes to listen to. Your elder or shepherd becomes spiritually responsible for your life.
He said:
They teach that it is absolutely imperative to obey your elder - even if he is wrong. If you'll submit to and obey him, you'll be all right. What you do will be right, because you've done it in obedience to your elder. He is your covering: responsible
to God for you and your actions.

Chuck noted that:

In some areas this doctrine teaches that when you have led someone to Jesus Christ, you automatically become this person's shepherd. Therefore, you're not to witness or lead anybody to Christ until you're spiritually mature enough to shepherd them. Your shepherd will inform you when you have achieved that spiritual maturity. In the meantime, they emphasize that you should wait and get your act together – become perfected yourself. Once you're perfected, then you'll be able to witness.

Chuck went on to charge that:

As a result of this teaching, these elders have sterilized some who were formerly dynamic in their witness for Jesus Christ. Men who had a powerful ministry and were being used of God have been placed on the shelf. Their shepherds told them that they weren't mature enough to minister yet. They ought to stop and get their own marriages together, or get their own lives together, before seeking to serve the Lord in any capacity. I personally know of many who have been neutralized in their effectiveness for Christ as the result of this doctrine.

Chuck also warned that:

This shepherding doctrine also teaches that all your tithes belong to your shepherd. He, in turn, pays his tithes to his shepherd, who pays his tithes to his shepherd. It's a neat chain-letter -if you're sitting on top of the pile! Someone asked, "Where did this doctrine originate?" I'm sure it originated in hell, but it came out of Florida...

With the ‘Elder’s’ position in mind, Pastor Chuck says:

Let's see what God's Word has to say concerning "shepherding" or lordship within the Church. First of all, in his epistle to Philemon, Paul wrote:

*Wherefore, though I might be very bold in Christ to order thee into that which is fitting, yet for love's sake, I rather beseech thee"* (v. 8,9).

Philemon was Paul's own convert. He owed much to Paul. Yet, Paul didn't seek to exercise his authority over him (concerning the runaway slave Onesimus). Instead, Paul beseeches Philemon through the love of Jesus Christ. In speaking to the Corinthian church, Paul said:

*Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith...*
Paul is declaring that he doesn't have and doesn't seek dominion over the faith of the believers.

There is one mediator between God and men - Jesus Christ. For any other person to take that position or role is scripturally wrong.

Peter said:

"I exhort"- not "I order." “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint (that is, not by forcing them), but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; neither as being lords over God's heritage[the flock of God], but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fades not away. Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves to the elder (I Peter 5:1-5).

You say, "There's scriptural support for the doctrine right there!" But notice what Peter says in the rest of the verse:

"Yes, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility."

Peter is declaring that the elders aren't to lord over God's heritage. That particular Greek word for "lord" is used elsewhere in the New Testament. It means "to rule over, to bring into subjection or submission."

Don't try to bring the flock into submission or subjection to the shepherd ...Establishing shepherds or elders who lord over the flock of God and make you responsible to them - who seek to take the spiritual responsibility for your actions by telling you what you can and can't do, when you can or can't do it, and have you come to them for guidance and direction -...In essence, these shepherds are saying:

‘You can't go to God for directions. You're not mature enough. You come to me, and I'll tell you what God says.’ And that is inserting someone between man and God. Jesus Christ paid a tremendous price to open the door to God for every man.

"Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy" (Hebrews 4:16).

Jesus, as our great High Priest, has entered into heaven for us, making the door open to each of us to have direct entrance to God.
‘There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus’ (I Timothy 2:5).

The true shepherd of God is one who gives himself for the flock, not one who is demanding that the flock give themselves to him. For any other person to take that position or role is scripturally wrong. [To] put a man between you and God... is always wrong. God will deal with you directly, personally, and individually - and wants to deal with you directly, personally, and individually. God will listen to you just as rapidly as He'll listen to me. God loves you just as much as He loves Billy Graham. He's just as concerned about you as He is anybody else. You have, through Jesus Christ, this glorious access to come directly to God. God will guide you, and God will show you His path and His way. What Did Jesus Say? Jesus... said:

"Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them (that same Greek word as in I Peter 5:3, "to bring into submission, to exercise authority over"); and their great ones exercise authority upon them."

Notice what Jesus said in Mark 10:43:

"But so shall it not be among you."

Whosoever will be great among you, shall be your servant: whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many (Mark 10:43-45).

Jesus didn't come to be ministered to but, rather, to minister and to give Himself. Thus, He is the True Shepherd:

"I am the true shepherd and I give my life for my sheep."

The true shepherd is one who gives himself for the flock, not one who is demanding that the flock give themselves to him. He is more interested in feeding the flock than fleecing the flock. I think the most familiar passage in the Bible, outside of John 3:16, has the answer. David said:

The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures: he leads me beside the still waters. He restores my soul: he leads me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake (Psalm 23:1-3).

If you can have the Lord as your Shepherd, I don't know why you would want to
settle for anything less. If David, under the old economy, could have the Lord as his Shepherd, how much more under the new and Christian relationship through Jesus Christ can we know and submit ourselves to the authority of God within our lives. I would urge you to submit yourself to the authority of Jesus Christ. Submit yourself to the authority of God's Word. Realize that you're responsible to God. Every man must give an account of himself unto God (Romans14:12).

In concluding this article, Pastor Chuck said:

Learn to go to God for all your needs, for all your decisions, and for the guidance for your life. God is faithful. He will lead you and guide you.

The Urban Legend version of the Moses Model attributed to Pastor Chuck by his detractors, is not only intended to be a personal attack on Pastor Chuck and other Calvary Chapel pastors, but it is also an attack on Moses, even if unwittingly. The real Moses Model was not about a man hoarding power from other leaders or over others in his care but about a man sharing the work load and responsibility of leading and caring for God’s people. The Chuck Smith- Calvary Chapel Model of leadership-with regard to New Testament pastoral leadership and responsibility in the local church, includes “the buck stops” with the senior pastor. At least that is how Pastor Chuck and those who agree with him see it.

Some churches and church groups believe a group of elders or pastors are supposed to equally share the pastoral leadership and responsibility of the local church. If that is what they believe the Bible teaches, that is OK with Pastor Chuck. In Calvary Chapel, leadership and responsibility is shared by the senior pastor with other servant-leaders, but it cannot be surrendered to a group of elders or pastors. Someone defined ‘a camel as a horse made by committee’. That is how we view the team of spiritual leaders concept when it comes to the primary pastoral leadership of a local church. That is, the buck stops with one man and not a group of men, although a group of men should be involved with the spiritual leadership and spiritual care of God’s peoples. Others view a team of equal (with equal authority and equal responsibility) spiritual leaders of a local church as the best or only biblical way for a church to function. We respectfully disagree.

If a non-Calvary congregation chooses to be led by a committee of pastors or elders or with no single pastor as the primary spiritual leader of the local church that is OK with Pastor Chuck Smith and the other pastors of the independent
and self-governed churches that make up the Calvary Chapel movement. Pastor Chuck has never tried to impose the senior pastor model of spiritual leadership on churches unrelated to the Calvary Chapel family of churches. Churches who are primarily led by a senior pastor and those who are led by a group of “equal in authority and responsibility” pastors or elders can respectfully and agreeably disagree with one another on this issue. It is a Calvary Chapel distinctive just like dispensationalism is. We do not consider it to be a Christian Essential in doctrine and practice. Unfortunately, what is frequently lost in discussions about the leadership style modeled by Moses Model is:

...The man Moses was very humble, more than all the men that were on the face of the earth (Num. 12: 3)?

We believe that a leadership style that is devoid of humility, it is not a Moses Model at all. When you look at what Pastor Chuck says about the way leaders ought to lead (as spelled out in the Calvary Distinctives) you see that:

“To have the right attitude in our service we need to remember the words of Jesus. He said:

...The Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all (Mark 10:42-44).

In the Calvary Chapel distinctives Chuck also teaches the Calvary Pastor that:

“It is essential to recognize that the ministry is not a place of being served, of people waiting on you, honoring you, and respecting you because you're the minister. It's actually a place of serving people, even if that means going out of your way to do it.”

If a pastor is spiritually abusing or exploiting the people entrusted to his spiritual care, then the people of God should remove themselves from that environment. We call this “voting with your feet”. There is also a biblically acceptable and prescribed way to have a truly abusive pastor removed. A pastor can disqualify himself from spiritual leadership and be called to account by other leaders in the church or the church itself. However, efforts to have a pastor removed (which are sometimes necessary) should be guided by God’s Word and not by petty jealousies
as is sometimes the case. In some cases the motivation for removing someone from pastoral leadership is that some misguided saints believes it is OK to build on another man’s foundation. They may be too lazy to do the hard work of building a church or ministry from the foundation up.

In an independent or self-governed church, removing an abusive senior pastor is the responsibility of other recognized and trusted leaders of that local church or even of the church itself. Respected men from outside that local church may be consulted and provide biblical guidance and counsel, but they cannot be responsible for determining who must be removed as the senior pastor of a church of which they do not belong. A fellowship of churches which have joined together for fellowship, mutual cooperation, to encourage one another based on an agreed set of doctrinal, spiritual, moral, ethical and practical standards must be free to distance themselves from a senior pastor who does not share their doctrines and standards or who is clearly abusive. But Scripture provides clear guidelines in such matters that provide safeguards against an abusive senior pastor or as is sometimes the case, other leaders or members of the church who are abusing the senior pastor or others in the local church because are not and cannot get what they want or think they deserve.

It is the theology and the practice of a pastor or leader that determines the kind of leadership and care that the local church will receive and experience. There are spiritual leaders guilty of spiritual abuse. A senior pastor with the primary responsibility of leading a local church could be abusive. A group of pastors or elders could also be abusive. There are spiritual and biblically acceptable remedies for spiritual abuse. Unfortunately, some are on a crusade to rid the local church or a fellowship of churches from what they see as rampant and unchecked abuse when they are themselves the abusers. Today’s Internet environment has given a platform to what are called “pathological antagonists” who go from church to church, or rise up within a church, nit-picking and imagining abuse because they do not have the following they believe they deserve or the prominence they expected.

Some “pathological antagonists” count it a badge of distinction they have successfully forced many pastors to resign from a particular church or quit the ministry all together, often over the most petty of issues. Some boast that they
were able to take a church of thousands and turn it into a church of twenty-five to save the people of that church. Some simply cannot live with the fact others are successful where they have failed. They can be brutal and ruthless in their attacks, often hiding behind pseudonyms, leading many good and godly people to simply quit the ministry.

The people of God should attend and commit to a gathering of any size that they agree with, can support and feel comfortable with. But do not let the size of the gathering fool you. Spiritual abusers can be found in gatherings of all sizes. The spiritual leader of ten or ten thousand should be guided and governed by the same Word of God and moved by the same Spirit of God, period! The people following that leader or leaders should also be governed and guided by the same word of God and moved by the same Spirit of God. Unfortunately, just as some people in positions of spiritual leadership abuse that role and responsibility, some wanna-be spiritual leaders are guilty of abusing good and godly leaders, because they want the recognition but not the work that goes with being a true pastor and godly spiritual leader. Jealousy and envy can be a powerful, intoxicating, and destructive force. Before you begin following someone or a group dedicated to the destruction of someone in spiritual leadership, make sure you are not being led by their jealousy, envy, bitterness and sense of failure.

So how did this particular urban legend of the authoritarian, dictatorial, and abusive Moses Model get started and what sustains it. Again, many people seem to need someone or something to blame for their sense of failure and misery. Often that is the case with the “pathological antagonist”. Often those who are numerically successful in ministry make a convenient scape-goat or dumping ground for the angry and bitter believer. To me, it is more than interesting that many (if not most) of those most upset and angry with Pastor Chuck (and other CC pastors) became upset and angry, accusing Chuck of heavy-handed leadership only after converting to Calvinism. Many Calvinists disagree with Pastor Chuck because they disagree with his theology and that is understandable. However, rather than make a case against the theological distinctives of Pastor Chuck and Calvary Chapel, some unscrupulous Calvinists find it easier to accuse Pastor Chuck of a leadership style that is exactly opposite of what he believes, teaches, promotes, and practices.

Moses was indeed a strong leader. The strength of his leadership should not be divorced from the character of his leadership. He was also a godly leader.
The pastor can and should learn from him. Moses shared the work-load and the responsibility of leadership for the nation of Israel. But he did not surrender his responsibility as the “buck stops with me” kind of leader he was to a group or counsel. Again, the model of leadership suggested to Moses by his father-in law (Jethro) and that Moses adopted we should emulate, was about sharing the work load so as not wear out Moses or the people he was called to lead and serve. It was not about giving Moses more power, prominence or a greater position.

Our Lord Jesus, the Apostle Paul and the Apostle Peter all promote a model of servant-leadership for the New Testament Pastor. While leading a nation is very different than leading a church (of any size) the pastor and leadership team of a church can and should learn from Moses, who was called to lead a nation. Pastors also need to share the work-load and the responsibility of spiritual leadership as Moses was encouraged to do by his Father-in-law. Otherwise they may be overcome with the work-load and the spiritual needs of the people of God will not be met. That is what Moses learned from Jethro and put into practice. Those who have been a Calvary pastor for a while should have learned the same thing from Pastor Chuck and the real Moses Model. The New Testament role and responsibilities that go with servant-leadership promote certain behaviors and prohibit certain behaviors. It prohibits abuse and exploitation of any kind. It promotes sacrifice and service of all kinds. It is what Jesus, Paul and Peter modeled and taught about pastoral leadership that should guide and govern the Calvary Chapel pastor and all pastors. In Calvary Chapel, the senior pastors of local Calvary Chapels all learned (if we were paying attention) from Pastor Chuck that if you want to be great in God’s kingdom you need to be the servant all.

If anyone has twisted what he has learned about spiritual leadership from Pastor Chuck so that it became an excuse to abuse the people of God-shame on him! Those who choose to distort what Pastor Chuck teaches about how leaders should lead or who choose to blame Chuck (or other pastors) for their own failures, bitterness etc., should also be ashamed. Perpetuating the misrepresentation (intended or otherwise) that accompanies the Urban Legend version of The Moses Model and Pastor Chuck Smith is to promote the divisive and destructive agenda of the enemy of our Lord. It serves no good and godly goal. It is one thing to say that you do not like or agree with the senior pastor leadership model or style promoted and practiced by Pastor Chuck Smith. It is quite another thing to distort
what Pastor Chuck says about spiritual leadership so that you have an excuse for your sense of failure, bitterness or envy. If we were to say that all churches led by a plurality of elders were being abused it would be wrong. But that is not to say that a group of men could not abuse those under their spiritual care. It is just as wrong to say that a senior pastor model of leadership is especially prone to abuse. It is simply not true, but is often the charge of those who have failed to gain a following for whatever kind of leadership they tried to impose on others.

In conclusion, ask yourself these questions. Are those accusing Pastor Chuck of heavy handed, dictatorial, and abusive leadership (i.e., the Urban Legend version of the Moses Model) angry and bitter because they were abused by Chuck or are they angry and bitter because they have failed to convince many people to follow their version of spiritual leadership? Are they setting a better example of spiritual leadership than Pastor Chuck or do they feel called to a mission focused on accusations and slander? Some who spend their life trashing and bashing good and godly men may be mentally and emotionally unhinged. Some are spiritually and morally bankrupt. Others are easily duped and gullible and are just following the lead of wanna be leaders who are hoping to take you to place that is not good and godly. One thing that is certain, the Urban Legend version of the Moses Model stands in stark contrast to the real Moses Model and the real Chuck Smith.