**Authoritarian leadership** dkm April 2022  
When God made the world, he made everything very good. But our first parents, Adam and Eve, disobeyed God and sin entered the world. What was the effect of sin? I could say just look around you, and look into your own heart! But in the Bible we read that God threw Adam and Eve out of the beautiful and fruitful garden he made for them into a wilderness of weeds. By the sweat of his brow man would eat.

Even more tragic was a murder within this first family. Sin brought pride and jealousy into the human heart. In the sixth generation from Adam was a man called Lamech, who boasted to his two wives, ‘I have killed a man for wounding me, even a young man for hurting me’ (Gen 4:23). Pride in this man’s heart made him a bully, a brutal bully. Do you have a better explanation for the brutality of the Pharaoh towards the Hebrews, the brutality of Hitler towards the same group of people and others, or the brutally of Putin towards the people of Ukraine?

Bullies do not like people who are different to themselves in looks or in beliefs. They do not like people who are more successful, who are richer, or more educated. They certainly do not like people who have more power. Men or women who threaten their proud view of themselves must be removed, be it by lies and slander, or by force. Remember poor Naboth and King Ahab (1Kings 21).

When God formed a nation for himself, he was their king, a powerful king but a compassionate and caring king; a benevolent king. But the people saw other nations ruled by kings and wanted to be like them; the situation was not helped by Samuel’s own sons taking bribes and perverting justice (1Sam 8). The Lord told Samuel to let the people have their way, but warned that a king would take their sons, take their daughters, take their fields, take from their crops and take from their flocks. Kings are takers. They take to build an empire for themselves, complete with palaces and a personal army. The Lord made no mention of the king giving anything to anyone. He will of course, give privileges to those who please him. He will rule by partiality rather than justice, partiality towards those who sing his praises and do his bidding. Despite the dangers outlined, the people still wanted Samuel to give them a king.

Some autocratic rulers or dictators come to power by military might, but many are initially chosen by the people. It is through lies and corruption that they cement their position, and then refuse to relinquish power. It is said that, ‘Power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely’. Absolute power belongs to God alone, of course, and wise men will remember this; most dictators do not acknowledge God, although amazingly some do. Some think they rule by divine decree; some Roman emperors thought of themselves as divine.

The rule of human kings in Israel came to an end, a disastrous end. After the destruction of Jerusalem, and captivity in Babylon, the people returned, but God had set the stage for another kingdom, the kingdom of heaven inaugurated by his own Son, Jesus Christ (Mat 4:17). Earthly kingdoms continue, but the focus of the NT is on the kingdom of God. Yet the warning about the behaviour of a king remains in the Bible. It seems wise that any human king be held accountable by other human beings where accountability to God is not acknowledged. We call this democracy, rule of the people, by the people, for the people. When the Protestant Reformation reached England, people saw the need for a parliament elected by the people. The king or queen became accountable to the parliament. While some kings and queens, like our present queen, professed faith in Christ, there is no requirement that they do so- even though they automatically become head of the Church of England.

A final note about autocracy in the church. The church represents the kingdom of God on earth. The head of the church is Christ. Jesus appointed, not one, but twelve apostles as leaders in the church. There is no biblical mandate for any one man to be given such a position or to assume such a position. When the church elected deacons or when elders were appointed, there is no mention of them being given different ranks. The apostles were not perfect by means but Jesus trusted them and appointed them to go and make disciples of all nations.