



The Crisis of Leadership **Implications for Congregational Leadership** *A Travel Free Learning Article*

By

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James MacGregor Burns in the book **Leadership (1978)**, addresses several elements of leadership, providing specific definition around the distinctive but often confused constructs of power, authority, leadership [both transactional and transformational], moral leadership, and the relationship between all of these.

In context, these are discussed in terms of their relationship to each other and in relationship to the term "leadership". For purposes of clarification, they are treated as separate but related elements. Supporting the need for a treatment of the subject in general, the claim around a crisis of leadership is based on mediocrity, irresponsibility, and a gap with regard to meeting the urgent need for authentic leadership.

Serious enquiry into the subject has failed in that the literature on leadership often deals with historical figures—called leaders—and the related assumption that fame or position is equal to importance. Further, literature around followership reflects anti-elitist or populist ideology, also lacking a comprehensive construct. This article attempts to bridge the two entities by looking at leaders as well as followers. The implications for congregational leadership are significant.

Power

While it is clear that power and leadership are related, power is distinguished, particularly brute power and its cousin tyranny, as that which is only concerned with the needs, goals and motives of the power wielder. While we fear power, we are mesmerized by it, whether our perspective is one from a position of power or a position of powerlessness.

With regard to political power, and unfortunately in many cases church leadership power, a focus on power alone has degraded, if not eliminated, the need for moral leadership. Defining power as that which is concerned only with the needs of the powerful, the continuum exists from absolute brute power such as exhibited by Hitler to something softer, yet still missing a focus on the needs of the followers. There is no exchange when power is in control. This is clarified by considering the ideas of motive and resources, both required for power to exist and each existing for the purposes of the power-wielder.

According to Max Weber power is the probability that one participant within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, and regardless of the basis on which this probability rests. In other words, the power-wielder has the motives and the resources. Related, and equally important, the power-wielder also has purpose and intent. From the view of the power recipient, the powerless, there may or may not be awareness of need, goal, etc.

Regardless, the recipient's capacity to resist is nonexistent for all practical purposes. Interestingly, power wielders are themselves slaves. The power has them; they do not have the power. The church, in its broadest context, unfortunately, is not void of power wielders. Pastors from many denominations use and abuse power with minimal, if any, concerns for followers' growth and needs. Laypersons are equally as guilty. These power wielders defame the name and character of Jesus.

What are the implications for congregational leadership?

Leadership

Leadership as defined here, is a form of power, but is not power. Depending on the leader's view and use of power, he or she may be deemed a leader. The type of leader is yet to be discussed, but if the leader's view and use of power incorporates the needs and goals of followers, then the focus has moved from self to others. All leaders are actual or potential power holders, but not all power holders are leaders. In fact, leadership over human beings is exercised when persons with certain motives and purposes mobilize, in competition or in conflict with others, institutional, political, psychological or other resources so as to arouse, engage, and satisfy the motives of followers.

In this case, mutual goals and purposes are addressed. That's the difference: mutuality. It implies, by definition, the followers' needs and goals. Within this general category of leadership are at least two sub-categories: transactional and transformational. Transactional leadership involves the exchange of valued things, with valued things being as concrete as property or as abstract as feeling warm and fuzzy. Each person in the bargain is conscious of and able to exercise power and resources to exact the transaction. Transformational leadership, on the other hand, occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality.

In terms of measuring leadership, if indeed it can be measured, it is suggested that a key measurement for leadership (and also power for that matter) is the degree of production of intended results, whatever that might be.

What are the implications for congregational leadership?

Authority

Also closely related is the concept of authority. A brief definition is that authority is legitimate power, at least legitimized through succession, religion, tradition, procedures, etc. One is given a position of authority through which power can be exercised. This historical view of authority was eventually diluted to the point that it had little meaning for emerging societies. As such, an intellectual gap surfaced where leadership lost both power and authority, especially as America emerged.

The ambivalence over the doctrines of power and authority created the need for ambivalent contracts such as the Mayflower compact—an effort to both promote and control authority, leadership and the like. Hence, the efforts toward checks and balances. These efforts could have been precluded if such qualities of integrity, authenticity, initiative and moral resolve had been present. The need for protection against absolute power, ungrounded leadership and illegitimate authority produces a need to protect us from ourselves.

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Moral Leadership

This brings us to the discussion around morality and leadership. A fundamental basic regarding morality is the reality of human wants and needs and how people meet these needs and wants. Regardless of hierarchy philosophies, (meaning which needs/wants supersede others), and regardless of universality or generality across cultures, the morality questions involve the how, not the what. If, in fact, leadership (and its use of power) is the merging of leaders' and followers' multiple motivations and purposes, i.e., the

methods around getting needs and wants met, then we are forced back to the how question when morality is added to the equation.

To address the how, then, it is necessary to look at values. Values interact with needs and wants (as in purposes/motivations) to predict and explain behavior. Numerous examples of these interactions are reflected in history, some of which include the Soviet Lake Sevan water level project, the NYC tree cutting, the Joseph Kennedy/FDR relationship dynamics, plus many other incidents written in the annals of politics and war. In many cases, leadership is exerted in both action and inaction.

The essence of moral leadership is intensely personal and individual, even if its dynamics and outcomes are quite public. And underneath it all rests the individual leader's value system. The moral dilemma and challenge for such a leader lies in his ability to overcome some of the most basic needs (such as affection and affirmation) in order to live into and out of a personal-value system. A willingness to make enemies, indeed to choose enemies is at the core.

Regarding the morality issue, it is essential for the leaders and followers to share motives, goals, and values, and that the true needs and wants of the followers are attended to by the leader. The followers must have permission to and a will to exercise their own choice mechanisms (authority) when defining their true needs and values. Such a concept of morality then leads to the ideas that surround the power of choice.

What are the implications for congregational leadership?

A Personal Perspective

From my personal viewpoint, the power and exercise of personal choice is the one key element to spiritual, social, psychological, political, emotional and personal health, with health loosely defined as a sense of well-being, fulfillment, or self-actualization. Granted, this is the very thing that brute power undermines. Individuals and society must fight to retain the power of choice. Ultimately, the moral legitimacy of transformational leadership, and to a lesser degree, transactional leadership, is grounded in conscious choice among real alternatives. Hence leadership assumes competition and conflict, and brute power dismisses it.

From a Biblical perspective, it is my conviction that the principle of choice, indeed free choice, as established by God Himself, is the core and central representation of His desire that humankind enjoy spiritual, emotional, and psychological health. God's creation of humankind was never to become victimized, subject to someone else's choices, even His. A victim, by definition, does not know he or she has options, nor is there an ability to exercise same.

As such, conflict is the most powerful contributor to transformational leadership since the transformational leader must allow for the natural conflict that will emerge from personal choice. Doing away with personal choice means we do away with conflict. Then there is no room for the followers' perspective and its accommodation within the transformational leadership exchange. Harmony and hostility, seen as the end points of a continuum actually represent the same thing at their extremes and point of connection which are lack of health, aversion to choice, and under achievement.

Transformational leaders and followers can never shun conflict, but must shape, express and mediate to the benefit of the mutual purposes and motivations, all of which are couched in values. At its source, all conflict is a value-conflict and the reality thereof is a cause for appreciation, applause and acceptance.

In summary, the moral and value-based transformational leadership is leadership whereby the leader:

- Operates at the need and value levels higher than those of the potential follower.
- Exploits conflict and tension within persons' value structures (values to lift everyone to a higher level of morality, especially as embodied in equality and justice).

While the first idea above is almost a given for congregational leadership, the second is less understood in congregational settings. It is incumbent on church leaders: pastors, staff, deacons/elders, and other congregational leaders to understand the benefits of conflict exploitation. An environment which welcomes creative conflict is an environment where transformational and moral leadership can thrive.

[This article is an adaptation from a leadership paper written as part of my doctoral studies at Georgia State University. It is based on research included in the published article. James MacGregor Burns, *Prologue: The Crisis of Leadership, The Power of Leadership, and The Structure of Moral Leadership, chapters. 1-2 in Leadership, Harper & Row, 1978, pp. 1-46.*]

Important Things to Know



Suzanne Goebel is a Ministry Colleague with The Columbia Partnership focusing on Coaching Leaders. Her leadership coaching approach combines the art and science of coaching in such a way individuals and their organizations recognize tangible benefits along with consistent personal development.

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