

Session 2

Living in the Shadows: Threats to Effective Leadership

“If to be is to be like—then to be is to be like the oppressor”

Paolo Friere Brazilian educator,
Pedagogy of the Oppressed

The Leadership Vacuum in Mark 10:35-45

- *We replicate what we observe unless an alternative is offered*
- *The pragmatism of results oriented ministry*

Nadab and Abihu in Leviticus 10

- *Success is an addiction.*
- *The searing evaluation of uncritiqued organization/cultural priorities*

Matthew 7:21-22

- *Success is self-authenticating*
- *The temptation to offer our resources to the service of God believing that they are an adequate substitute for God’s eternal resources*

Charismatic Leadership Theory as a Lens through which to Consider a Pentecostal Corrective

According to Robert Greenleaf, we live in a time when “holders of power are suspect and actions that stem from authority are questioned. Legitimate power has become an ethical imperative.”¹ Greenleaf’s way toward the ethical imperative is enlisting “serving leaders” who participate in and create serving institutions—all institution—including government, business, education and religious. The best test, but most difficult to administer in evaluating one’s own servant-leadership, is in responding to two questions: Do “those being served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect [of one’s leadership] on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived.”²

A clue to understanding contemporary church leaders, including those in the Pentecostal/charismatic tradition, is found in charismatic leadership theory, usually connected to German sociologist, Max Weber and contemporary leadership theorists. *Charisma* used in two letters of the Apostle Paul—Romans 12 and I Corinthians 12—is a “gift of grace” used to describe the participation of people in the body of Christ. Such gifts were determined as from God; they were not prescribed roles determined by other humans. Max Weber expanded this

¹Robert Greenleaf, *Servant Leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (New York: Paulist Press, 1977), 5.

² *Ibid.*, 13-14.

theological term into a leadership concept that described its authority not from rules, traditions or position, but from the extraordinary characteristics of an individual person. In 1947, Weber defined charisma as follows:

...a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader. ... What alone is important is how the individual is actually regarded by those subject to charismatic authority, by his 'followers' or 'disciples.'³

Central to Weber's view of charismatic leadership was his contrast of charisma with other types of authority, such as rational authority (impersonal, formalized body of rules found primarily in bureaucratic organizations), or traditional authority (legitimized leadership through established customs found primarily in feudal and pre-industrial traditions). Charismatic authority included the dynamic trust induced in followers by a leader because of the leader's exceptional giftedness.⁴

The legitimacy of charismatic leadership was based on two major conditions: 1) there would be a need, aspiration or goal among followers that remained unfulfilled by an existing social order; and 2) there would be a leader to whom followers would submit based on their belief in his or her possession of charisma—qualities that fulfilled their expectations. Simply stated, leadership occurs when people *want* a leader.⁵

Some theorists have taken charismatic leadership beyond the natural scope of human giftedness to include a supernatural purpose and destiny of the "supernaturally gifted" charismatic leader. This supernatural characteristic of the leader is matched in a relationship

³Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* trans. by Talcott Parsons (New York: The Free Press, 1947), 358-259.

⁴See Max Weber, *On Charisma and Institutional Building: Selected Papers*. ed. by S. N. Eisenstadt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952).

⁵ Martin Luther was not the first to speak out for Roman Catholic Church reform. Before him were Peter Waldo, John Wycliffe, Jan Huss—earlier reformers who appeared on the scene and were silenced. Why did Luther succeed while others failed? What changed because of the leader or the result of the right timing in space and time? Richard Luecke points out support for the latter when he describes the context of Luther's life: "Rising German nationalism, economic change, and general disgust with the Catholic Church leadership and practices provided a receptive atmosphere for Luther's ideas of reform...Every stratum of society had one or more reasons to support Luther and his reform movement." See Richard Luecke, *Scuttle Managers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 62-63.

with followers who may idolize them and who are highly motivated to achieve the ambitious vision promoted by such leaders.⁶

How do people know if they are a charismatic leader or not? House developed the following indicators that determine the extent of charismatic leadership:

1. Followers' trust in the correctness of the leader's beliefs
2. Similarity of followers' beliefs to those of the leader
3. Unquestioning acceptance of the leader by followers
4. Followers' affection for the leader
5. Willing obedience to the leader by followers
6. Emotional involvement of followers in the mission of the organization
7. Heightened performance goals of followers
8. Belief by followers that they are able to contribute to the success of the group's mission.⁷

A Dark Side of Charismatic Leadership?

Historians have kept records of leaders in all sectors of society who, with committed followers at the fitting time, accomplished extraordinary feats. They communicated a compelling image of the future that tapped into rising hopes and dreams of followers in an existing social order, took risks at a severe cost of personal sacrifice and together with followers, pulled it off.⁸ But what happens when such influence for mutual benefit goes bad—when the leader's power goes uncontrolled and values become skewed? The triumph of successful charismatic leaders is heady stuff, and the dangers and temptations that daily confront leaders are insidious and powerful. There is a potentially dark side to leaders who employ leadership charisma. Thomas Oden insightfully points out that "The leader whose mission and task is to care for others...must not be a slave to one's own unexamined passions. Otherwise the souls entrusted to one's care may be subject to manipulation by the supposed care-giver, whose passions are projected on to the relationship."⁹

The religious leader, falling prey to the traps for success in public roles, is alluring, and the neglect of nurturing the interior life without accountable covenant communities has dangerous consequences.

⁶Bernard M. Bass, *Leadership and Performance Beyond Expectations* (New York: Free Press, 1989), 205. See also my development of "Charisma" in *Encyclopedia of Religion, Communication, and Media: A Religion and Society Encyclopedia*, ed. Daniel A. Stout (New York: Routledge, 2006), 71-74.

⁷See Gary A. Yukl, *Leadership In Organizations* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1989), 205.

⁸Some have questioned the legitimacy of emphasis placed upon leadership to the neglect of followers' role in significant change and accomplishments. For an insightful challenge to the exaggerated importance of leadership, see Robert Kelley, *The Power of Followership* (New York: Doubleday Currency, 1992). See also, Byron Klaus and Roger Heuser, "Charismatic Leadership: A Shadow-side Revealed" in *PNUEMA*, vol. 20, no. 2 (Fall 1998).

⁹Thomas Oden, *Becoming a Minister* (New York: Crossroad, 1987) 12.

One of the greatest ironies of the history of Christianity is that its leaders constantly gave in to the temptation of power—political power, military power, economic power, or moral and spiritual power—even though they continued to speak in the name of Jesus, who did not cling to his power but emptied himself and became as we are. We keep hearing from others, as well as saying to ourselves, that having power—provided it is used in the service of God—is a good thing. With this rationalization, crusades took place; inquisitions were organized; Indians were enslaved; positions of great influence were desired; episcopal palaces, splendid cathedrals, and opulent seminaries were built; and much moral manipulation of conscience was engaged in.¹⁰

Regardless of the context, an ideology that powerfully connects a liberating belief system and its practice for a people of destiny will be attractive to those who perceive themselves as trapped. However liberating such an ideology might be, it also yields a potential opportunity for abusive leaders to thrive.

In other words, charismatic leadership is very likely to emerge as the model of choice in the context where a supernaturalistic religious ideology is present. That reality offers the powerful presence of a self-sacrificing, pioneering leadership that forges new frontiers under the “fire and cloud” of an eschatological identity. Simultaneously, it yields the possibility of non-accountable dynamic leaders who fashion a following with the “sound-bites” of God-like utterances in the context of manipulative phenomenology, thus creating an image of powerful ministry leadership. This scenario becomes increasingly possible globally with the increased reliance upon mass media to further the cause of Christ evangelistically.

Charismatic leadership rises naturally in incipient stages of a revivalist movement, but it is soon immersed in the inevitability of the ensuing process of maturation. Institutional authority and its accompanying leadership replace charismatic leadership. Efficiency and pragmatism supplant charisma’s illusive spirit. Routine and pragmatism stem the free flow of charisma.¹¹

¹⁰Henri J. M. Nouwen, *In the Name of Jesus: Reflections on Christian Leadership* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 58-59.

¹¹Margaret Poloma, *The Assemblies of God at the Crossroads*, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1989), 233-235.