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SPIRITUAL OR RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP: WHAT DO YOU PRACTICE? WHAT SHOULD YOU PRACTICE?

Spirituality is back in the scholarship of leadership in secular journals and books. Christians will find that they have some language in common with this scholarship. They will share the belief expressed about the importance of spirituality in work and leadership. They will also find new terms and new turns and twists on old phrases that will challenge them and even raise deep concerns. Roof (1994) noted that we have "creation spirituality, Eucharistic spirituality, Native American spirituality, Eastern spiritualities, Twelve-step spiritualities, feminist spirituality, earth-based spirituality, eco-feminist spirituality, Goddess spirituality, and men's spirituality, as well as what would be considered traditional Judeo-Christian spiritualities" (p. 243). Sorting through what is meant by spiritual leadership has become more complex in our increasingly pluralistic society.

What Are the Definitions of and Differences Between Spiritual and Religious?

Part of teasing out the difference between spiritual and religious leadership is clarifying the terms "spiritual" and "religious." Pielstick (2005) sees "spiritual" as a power, a "synchronicity" and "the energy and the influence derived from living in sync with a higher purpose, often based on a worldview of an ultimate transcendent (nonmaterial) reality" (p.

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157). It can be like an inner path that gives direction to the self, "a sense of meaning and wholeness . . . interconnectedness, self-transcendence, and/or a transcendent worldview" (p. 159). Using Wilber's (1984) categorization of spiritual development, Pielstick (2005) suggests that individuals and groups can have a progressive experience as they move to more complex spiritual experiences. The order is viewed as *Magical* (seeing spiritual phenomena as a result of the magical powers or beings) and *Mythical* (supernatural explanations held in stories of gods or goddesses who act on the human experience and give blessing or cursing and teachings) at the more primitive end, and *Logical* (spiritual ideas and experiences explained by reason and logic) and *Systemical* (where spirituality draws on networks of relationships and imagines interrelatedness and wholeness as its manifestations) in the more pragmatic levels of spiritual engagement. They seem to favor *Transpersonal* (where spirituality is crafted through transcendent and cosmic communication) or *Mystical* (a coming to the view of a unitary experience of all things).

Religion seems more associated with a belief in a deity and the resources, traditions, customs, and practices that come as a result of that belief. It is a "belief in and reverence for a supernatural power . . . especially when organized into a system of doctrine and practice" ("Religion," 2011). Religion typically is a socially shared experience where members of a group affiliate around similar spiritual experiences and beliefs. They also practice social control with each other, challenging and encouraging each other in those shared spiritual pursuits. Here the group's beliefs are important and reiterated, and a check on group faithfulness to those beliefs is part of the religious experience.

Given these definitions and understandings, "spiritual" is viewed as more personal and individual and the private right of one's own thinking and action toward a personal worldview. It may or may not have a god or gods and may or may not foster a desire to convert others to that spiritual view. However, "religion" and the "religious" have a stronger social manifestation of shared spiritual thinking. Religion exerts more social control, socializing new members to its orthodoxy—either in belief or in practice.

As was noted earlier, Wilber (1984) and Pielstick (2005) view spirituality and religion as overlapping but with an evolutionary view of belief in non-material (i.e., spiritual) processes. They perceive Christians as operating in a more primitive spirituality. Pielstick noted that "conservative and fundamentalist Christians sometimes balk at this [evolutionary] model as much of [their] theology best fits the mythical category" (p.

159). He understands Christians to be very committed to specific beliefs or "myths" of the Bible which we Christians view as truth. We understand the stories of Creation, the giving of the Law, Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, Christ's soon coming, and the New Testament prophetic focus on the end of the world as news of truth, not fiction or fake ideas.

While many secularist scholars accept the value of these myths to the Christian community as influential on practice, they see them more as having a control on the community because of the allegorical or figurative influence. Christians see these stories as truth, a reality not easily seen, but conveyed by God for humans to trust and respond to. The difference fosters a unique experience of what Christians believe are logical, systemic, transpersonal, and mystical experiences that foster higher-order spiritual experiences. Focus on doctrinal beliefs and acceptance of teachings closely tied to the sacred narrative (stories or myths of the Holy Bible) are fundamental to most Christian spiritual activity.

What Are the Differences Between Spiritual Leadership and Religious Leadership?

Given these understandings of "spiritual" and "religious," we can now look at the differences these two areas bring to leadership. Marinho (2013) has organized the differences well, as shown in Table 1. Using ideas from his book (Marinho & Oliveira, 2005, pp. 1-14), Wren (1995, pp. 481-508), and Bass and Bass (2008, pp. 353-365), Marinho's (2013) contrast focuses mostly on structural and authoritative differences between the two types of leadership. He discusses the power of the Roman Catholic Pope in the modern world as demonstrating religious leadership. He notes that religious leadership is important but different from spiritual leadership as the latter is more diffuse and less tied to an official capacity. While a religious leader can manifest spiritual leadership, a spiritual leader may not necessarily have religious leadership in any official capacity. This view is helpful. While Marinho (2013) does not present a negative view of religious leadership, he does acknowledge the following:

> There may be some overlap between those two different perspectives, but the very nature of those two approaches to leadership is clearly distinct from one another, and this concept may be applied to any leader of any religious institution. This reflection can take many different directions, but I hope this can bring some thought-provoking ideas. (Marinho, 2013)

Table 1. *Marinho's (2013) Contrast Between Religious and Spiritual Leadership*

Religious Leadership	Spiritual Leadership
Depends on the position	Regardless of any position
Imposed by laws and regulations	Accepted by free choice
Controlled by an institution	Controlled by principles
Granted by society	Granted by example
Focus on the duties	Focus on relationships
Priority to authority	Priority to service
Sustained by hierarchy	Sustained by inspiration

What may not be clearly emphasized in this model is the role of divine authority and scriptural authority or some community process in authenticating leaders. Leadership, by definition, is a role of influence. However, religious leadership may manifest that authenticity in leadership through faithfulness to a more official or organizational accepted process. Spiritual leadership, on the other hand, may receive authentication through more charismatic and visionary forms of leadership and followership. Spiritual leadership is authenticated more from followers.

Interestingly, both could be tested by yet a third way of authentication: their alignment to scriptural principles. "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1, NIV). The need to "test the leaders" is emphasized in this passage. It is a call to see if they are in keeping with God's character and purposes. Whether they are chosen by tradition or organizational process, or self-selected, or promoted by others, their actions and their beliefs should be tested by an authoritative reference. For Christians, that reference point has been the Bible.

What Would You Rather Be? A Spiritual Leader, a Religious Leader, or Both?

Given the rebirth of focus on the spiritual in secular research on leadership, it seems reasonable that many would want to be viewed as successful spiritual leaders—individuals who are authenticated by their followers to have influence on them. Matthew Guest's (2007) analysis of the spiritual helps to explain why this would be true. He noted that "the spiritual is associated with the personal, the intimate, the interior and the experiential," and it is understandable that a leader would want to have influence on these aspects. However, he contrasted this "with 'reli-

gion,' which is associated with the official, the external, and the institutional, often picking up negative connotations of the hierarchical and patriarchal along the way" (p. 181). Most of us would want to embrace the mantle of spiritual leader but not the negative leadership roles of "external" and "institutional" with its connotation of top-down control. We may be less interested in the challenge associated with religious leadership because of the growing ambivalence toward authority.

While we embrace the rebirth of focus on the need for spiritual leadership, we believe that the subtle negativity attributed to religious leadership is a manifestation of a detrimental move away from the value of authority, hierarchy, and social institutional expectations. Structure, hierarchy, and formal authority need not be associated with evil. In fact, some sociologists view the demise of religion and its authoritative structure, and the loss of family structure, as creating detrimental social impact on people and their social growth. This is especially true of children. In the insightful report published by The Commission on Children at Risk (2003), which is a jointly sponsored initiative of the YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) and the Institute for American Values, increased emotional, psychological, and even medical problems are associated with the lack of community structures that give authority directly to individuals. We believe that official, external, institutional, hierarchical and familiar authority can be a very important contribution from leadership to their communities.

Swidler (2002) argues that the growth of a strong individualistic approach to life and living, a "me-ism," has worked to erode social institutions commonly viewed as preserving the individuals participating in those social institutions. Two examples are marriage and family. We are concerned that the penchant of secular researchers who support focus on research about spiritual leadership may continue to distance their work and support for religious leadership and miss a major part of how spiritual leadership operates in religious societies and groups. Oddly, they may be unwittingly adding even more work to de-institutionalize the very structures that support human well-being in many spiritual and religious communities.

Beyond these scholarly arguments supporting religious leadership, three simple observations can be made concerning the characteristic qualities of religious leadership: it is official, institutional, and hierarchical.

Official

Being official is not a negative characteristic. For example, Apple or Samsung products are highly desired by many. Those individuals want official products, not "fake" ones.

Institutional

Institutional can be viewed negatively by some who don't appreciate how social institutional processes improve relationships. The simple handshake, for example, is one of the most pervasive social institutions. It is a shared experience that billions have been socialized to use as a wonderful shared way to greet each other. The same can be said of social institutions like marriage, family, and work environments.

Hierarchical

Hierarchy may have crippling influence in some environments. However, if hierarchy is guided by a desire to better serve those "under" one's care, hierarchy is really about responsibility and care for the other. In the spirit of service, the "greater" serves and blesses in the order of God's creation. It is the shepherd who is pained by the loss of the sheep—often more than the hireling—such that those with greater responsibility and higher in the hierarchy may share the greater challenge and joy of sacrificial care and responsiveness.

It is precisely the twist given by those who promote spirituality in such a way as to cast darkness on religion or show its negative function, that most disturbs us with the current focus on spiritual leadership. We believe both forms of leadership are essential. Institutions can become oppressive to human wellbeing. They need continual examination and revival. However, to believe that individualistic spiritual leadership is automatically good and would create safe environments for others neglects the truth that the self is often worse than the institution it's trying to correct. Why not see both spiritual and religious leadership as essential to the wellbeing of groups?

How Do We Embrace Both Spiritual and Religious Leadership?

Our appreciation of religious leadership is balanced by a caution against the tendencies of religious leaders to control and even oppress those with varying views. Christians have a long history of both resisting and welcoming pluralistic views of spirituality. The strong church-state monopolies that dominated Christian medieval Europe show us that

religion can do harm. So can religious leadership. We don't want to go back to that oppressive time. However, we also don't want the "me-ism" of an individualistic spirituality that is devoid of social institutional practices that neglect the community. We don't need spiritual hegemony. We also don't want to see spirituality devoid of its social mooring in religious sacred text and practices.

To find a balanced approach, we find useful practices in the history of religious liberty championed in the American experience. This liberty supports civil rights for individuals who want to practice their own spirituality while allowing religions to promote and even proselytize individuals. As Miller (2012) has convincingly shown, the deep roots of the scriptural beliefs of early American Christians like Roger Williams and William Penn supported allowing individuals to have a private right of judgment in issues of spirituality. This means that individuals have the freedom to create the spiritual beliefs and practices they believe keep them faithful to their god or religion or ultimate worldview.

The same constitutional support for this also brought freedom for religious expression and activity. Herein lies the deep challenge of fostering both forms of leadership, and of finding our own spiritual voice and giving others space and time to find theirs (Covey, 2006). Religious liberty not only allows conflicting judgments but actually encourages them. The successful spiritual leader can tap into his or her spirituality and encourage others to grow their own spiritual experiences. A leader's spirituality and understandings can also be challenged by passages and interpretations gathered from Scripture or from other authoritative references valued by the group or community in which the leader leads.

Where Do We Go From Here: Religiosity or Spirituality?

In this dialogue we have defined, contrasted, and explored the relationship between spiritual and religious leadership. We embrace this new focus on the spirituality in leadership when it is grounded on scriptural principles. We raised concerns about the practice of some to suggest a wholesale rejection of religious leadership. We believe some characteristics in religious leadership, when aligned with Scripture, provide helpful beliefs, practices, and traditions that support and nurture the well-being of individuals and groups. Spirituality in leadership is a crucial focus for scholars and practitioners of leadership.

We conclude with a look at two secular academic authorities: Ann Swidler (2002) and Jonathan Haidt (2012). They both have helped us

most in understanding the need for balance. Ann Swidler may be most known as co-author of the seminal work *Habits of the Heart,* which was a book documenting and commenting on the rise and fall and the need for and erosion of social bonds in the United States. In addition, another co-authored book, *Good Society,* helped to show the importance of shared social structure. In her book chapter "Saving the Self: Endowment vs. Depletion in American Institutions" (2002), Swidler reminds us to support those institutions that support individuals. Religion has done much to keep social obligation strong in modern times. Family and church have been authoritative communities that have restrained the rabid individualism of the last 50 years. We believe the current movement of spirituality in leadership could do more to focus on that.

Swidler (2002) concludes her sociological analysis and caution about individualism by issuing a call for reform to institutions and individuals. She quotes from Isaiah 58:5-12, "which is the Haftorah portion on Yom Kippur, the Jewish Day of Atonement" (p. 54), and provides a challenge for the religious community to keep connected to human needs. Yom Kippur is still considered the holiest day in the Jewish calendar, a Sabbath unto itself regardless of what day it fell on. On this day, people were called to fast and pray for forgiveness of their sins and seek to be right with God. Oddly, that "being right" was connected to helping others. In discussing the social role of religion, Swidler said that it "is particularly appropriate" to bring individuals back to the centrality of otherness that religion tried to underscore:

> It argues that there are more and less worthy sacrifices, and that those that create a more just society are the sacrifices God requires. But what is fascinating about the passage is the link it draws between justice, nurture, and the rebuilding of common structures on which our lives depend. (2002, pp. 54-55)

She uses this passage to argue that only the social engagement this passage encourages, which is present in many religions and religious material, ultimately brings about the personal healing we seek in our own lives individually. This is the result of a spiritual existence in social and religious connections.

Haidt (2012) makes a similar point when he cautions rabid atheists and liberals on the limits of their individualized view of morality and what is good for society. He notes how religion has played a strong role in supporting values like respect, sanctity of life, loyalty, and authority, all essential values that support a society. He notes that while many rabid liberals or academics dismiss religion and religious conservatives

because of their moral worldviews, in reality these worldviews foster constructive behaviors, belonging, and beliefs that hold social groups together in healthy ways.

We agree with Swidler and Haidt that some of the authority religion brings is essential for the well-being of groups. As such, proper management of that authority is the issue, not the wholesale elimination of it. We welcome the revival of interest in spirituality in leadership. We want this focus to continue and be sustained, and we believe religious resources can help. Otherwise, we are concerned that the movement to spirituality will self-destruct, without an authoritative structure that blends individual need and communal goals with scriptural principles. We believe a fixation on spirituality as only a psychological or personal manifestation discounts the rich social experiences, expressions and skills needed for leadership. We don't need a theocracy or monopoly in this discourse, but we also don't need our voices of concern to be silenced.

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Questions for Continuing the Dialogue

1. What do you think of when you hear spirituality and religion discussed?

2. Do you view yourself as a spiritual or religious leader? Why or why not?

3. How would you become more of a spiritual or religious leader? What steps or mentoring or resources would you need for that?

4. How do you model spiritual or religious leadership in your work environment?

5. If we were to ask your colleagues how they view you on spiritual or religious leadership, what do you think they would say and why? (Why not ask them?)

6. Of the points brought out in this dialogue, which ones resonate most with you and why?

7. What role do the Scriptures play in your view and practice of spiritual and religious leadership?