

# **Organizational Consultation XXXIII: The Appreciative Leader Leadership in the Sacred Domain**

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Most of the old notions about leadership were based on sacred perspectives regarding the world. A great leader is an emissary of God. He (and it is usually a male) succeeds his father, by God's will, and possesses great wisdom and talent given to him by God. He needs this God-given authority in order to achieve some divine mission. Just as God is paternal in character, so the leaders of human institutions treat their employees as children. Just as God is omniscience and omnipotent, so the traditional leader is unquestionable with regard to knowledge, skill and legitimacy of power. God reigns in heaven. Men of wisdom, courage and vision reign on earth. All is well in heaven and on earth—until things begin to change in complex, unpredictable and turbulent ways.

## **Sacred Perspectives on Leadership**

God reigns supreme in the minds of mankind when and where there are thoughts about leadership. We must acknowledge that virtually all of our notions about leadership come from sacred sources. Most Western societies and many Eastern societies first assigned leadership to priestly representatives of God and the Church. Even our militaristic models of leadership have always been linked to sacred missions, visions and values. One has only to listen to the religious rhetoric of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century Cold War or the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Jihads and Wars Against Terrorism. We assign great power and responsibility to our military leaders because they have God on their side.

The modern world attempted, without long term success, to divorce itself from the sacred, especially in the ongoing operations of its organizations. As Max Weber noted at the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, modern bureaucracy was not established to not only eliminate nepotism and other vestiges of family-owned and operated businesses; it was also established to drive the sacred dimension out of secular organizations.<sup>1</sup> Men and women turned to secular professionals rather than sacred priests for their inspiration and guidance. They turned to lawyers rather than

preachers, physicians rather than spiritual healers, and computer programmers rather than theologians. Professionals who wear the secular vestments of psychiatry or psychology became the modern-day recipients of confession and sources of absolution.<sup>ii</sup>

This modern-day attempt to separate the secular and sacred in organizations did not endure. Weber himself recognized that the primary economic forces driving modern capitalism are based in the sacred perspectives of John Calvin and Martin Luther regarding man's individual relationship to God and the tangible signs of predestined salvation that are to be found in the accumulation of wealth.<sup>iii</sup> The late 20<sup>th</sup> Century and early 21<sup>st</sup> Century have seen a return to the sacred. Mankind insists on living in a world that is filled with spiritual meaning and divine purpose. Contemporary organizations are once again being acknowledged as sacred.

We see that many of the mechanistic, technological and scientific metaphors used in modern management (e.g. "contract," "input," "procedures" and "data") are being or must be replaced by new metaphors (e.g. "human capital" and "empowerment"). Modern, mechanistic terms are being replaced by traditional terms (e.g. "appreciation," "charter" and "sanctuary"). In the case of leadership theory, we are returning to traditional models and to the notion of a spiritual domain of leadership, while simultaneously creating new metaphors about transformation and context. Our attention turns to the relationship between leadership and the domain of the sacred. In moving into this special domain, I bring along a guide, Teilhard de Chardin, and, in particular, the road map he originally prepared more than sixty years ago for inhabitants of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century: *The Phenomenon of Man*.

## **Sacred Leadership**

At the start of the final section of *The Phenomenon of Man*, Teilhard describes a typical reaction to the existential space-time angst that is experienced by mankind. He notes that: "when Man has realized that he carries the world's future in himself and that a limitless future stretches before him . . . , his first reflect often leads him along the dangerous course of seeking fulfillment in isolation."<sup>iv</sup> Teilhard observes, in prophetic manner, that: "modern man no longer knows what to do with the time and the potentialities he has unleashed. We groan under the burden of this wealth. We are haunted by the fear of 'unemployment.' Sometimes we are tempted to trample

this super-abundance back into the matter from which it sprang without stopping to think how impossible and monstrous such an act against nature would be.”<sup>v</sup>

The first step in the formulation of a new perspective regarding the role of mankind in the cosmos, according to Teilhard, requires dismissal of an old, modernist deification of science:<sup>vi</sup>

The nineteenth century had lived in sight of a promised land. It thought that we were on the threshold of a Golden Age, lit up and organized by science, warmed by fraternity. Instead of that, we find ourselves slipped back into a world of spreading and ever more tragic dissension. Though possible and even perhaps probable in theory, the idea of a spirit of the earth does not stand up to the test of experience. No, man will never succeed in going beyond man by uniting with himself. That Utopia must be abandoned as soon as possible and there is no more to be said.

Teilhard may be right. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century, or perhaps the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, may someday be identified as an era in which science is dethroning or de-deified. Certainly, the science of management and the science of man are now in a state of disrepair. There is a reintroduction of the spiritual realities that during the rule of science were considered a throwback to superstition and the Middle Ages. A central task of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century may very well be the reunification of science and religion:<sup>vii</sup>

To outward appearance, the modern world was born of an anti-religious movement: man becoming self-sufficient and reason supplanting belief. Our generation and the two that preceded it have heard little but talk of the conflict between science and faith; indeed it seemed at one moment a foregone conclusion that the former was destined to take the place of the latter. But as the tension is prolonged, the conflict visibly seems to need to be resolved in terms of an entirely different form of equilibrium – not in elimination, nor duality, but in synthesis. After close on two centuries of passionate struggles, neither science nor faith has succeeded in discrediting its adversary. On the contrary, it becomes obvious that neither can develop normally without the other. And the reason is simple: the same life animates both. Neither in its impetus nor its achievements can science go to its limits without becoming tinged with mysticism and charged with faith.

Teilhard proposes that we build a new model of reality, based on a sense of collective responsibility. “The peak of ourselves,” Teilhard tells us, “[and] the acme of our originality, is not our individuality but our person; and according to the evolutionary structure of the world, we can only find our person by uniting together. There is no mind without synthesis.”<sup>viii</sup> Leadership comes at the point of sacred synthesis, as Teilhard, Eisler and Greenleaf suggest with regard to leader as lover, partner and servant. The notion of love as a function of leadership, and the interplay between the individual and collective, speak to *the centrality of synthesis in appreciative thought*.<sup>ix</sup> Teilhard suggests that: “after allowing itself to be captivated in excess by the charms of analysis to the extent of falling into illusion, modern thought is at last getting used once more to the idea of the creative value of synthesis in evolution. It is beginning to see that there is definitely more in the molecule than in the atom, more in the cell than in the molecule, more in society than in the individual, and more in mathematical construction than in calculations and theorems.”<sup>x</sup>

### **Spirit and Appreciation**

According to Teilhard, improvement in the human organism and human society remains indeterminate, or even insoluble, unless mankind, and, in particular, its leaders, come to acknowledge unity in the universe. *Appreciative leaders must fully appreciate the value of a synthetic and integrative rather than analytic way of perceiving and acting in this world.* More specifically: “the only universe capable of containing the human person is an irreversibly ‘personalising’ universe—one that blends the secular and sacred.”<sup>xi</sup> This synthesis, then, becomes the primary challenge associated with appreciative leadership in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Even a secular management guru like Peter Drucker declares that: “management is deeply involved in spiritual concerns—the nature of man, good and evil.”<sup>xii</sup>

My dear friend and colleague, Gary Quehl has noted, in his essay on the inner world of leadership, that “the human spirit is the important but neglected dimension of leadership.”<sup>xiii</sup> According to Quehl:<sup>xiv</sup>

. . . all true leadership is spiritual leadership. It is spiritual because leaders try to invoke the best in themselves and other people, and their best is intimately tied to a deep sense of their self, of their spirit, of what Carl Jung once called the “principle and archetype of

orientation and meaning.” When the human spirit is richly at work, the inner and outer worlds of the leader operate in fluid harmony. When the inner spirit falters or fails, however, the leader is often positioned to fail as well.

Quehl offers several specific suggestions concerning how a leader can begin to “work spiritually smarter.” Suffice it to say that *future understanding of effective appreciative leadership functions and the experience of being an appreciative leader may require re-examination of the spiritual foundations that support contemporary organizations*. It may also require that we come to recognize and appreciate the spiritual roles that have always been played by those who are privileged and burdened with the responsibility of leadership.

### **Concluding Comments**

have laid out a formidable set of developmental tasks for contemporary leaders in this set of essays. We must appreciate the many challenges associated with leadership in a 21<sup>st</sup> Century context and cut our leaders some slack as they figure out how best to meet these challenges. But there are great rewards associated with great leadership. When we are doing our best work as appreciative leaders, and when we are making full use of appreciative strategies, then we will be in a position to release an enormous reservoir of human capital in our organization. This capital is indispensable to the newly born world of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Without this capital, we can’t possibly solve the problems that inevitably arise from the complexity, unpredictability and turbulence of our new century.

Given the leadership challenges that I have identified in this final set of essays about appreciative leadership, perhaps it is best to close with a wish. Or is it a prayer? May we all succeed in serving a fundamental sacred function . . . . *the appreciative release of human capital in our organizations and in our societies*.

## End Notes

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- <sup>i</sup> Max Weber. *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. New York: Free Press, 1947.
- <sup>ii</sup> Robert Bellah and others. *Habits of the Heart*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985.
- <sup>iii</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958.
- <sup>iv</sup> Teilhard de Chardin. *The Phenomenon of Man*. New York: HarperCollins, 1955, p. 237.
- <sup>v</sup> Teilhard de Chardin. *The Phenomenon of Man*. New York: HarperCollins, 1955, pp. 252-253.
- <sup>vi</sup> Teilhard de Chardin. *The Phenomenon of Man*. New York: HarperCollins, 1955, p. 254.
- <sup>vii</sup> Teilhard de Chardin. *The Phenomenon of Man*. New York: HarperCollins, 1953, p. 293.
- <sup>viii</sup> Teilhard de Chardin. *The Phenomenon of Man*. New York: HarperCollins, 1953, p. 263.
- <sup>ix</sup> Teilhard offers an interesting parallel to the Gestalt principle that has been prevalent in other disciplines and other intellectual traditions. The Nobel Prize-winning biologist, Michael Polanyi, for instance, extends and anchors Teilhard's principle in his proposition that all learning involves the integration of parts into wholes, whether this learning be a child's first tentative steps or the formulation of a new scientific theorem.
- <sup>x</sup> Teilhard de Chardin. *The Phenomenon of Man*. New York: HarperCollins, 1955, P. 268.
- <sup>xi</sup> Teilhard de Chardin. *The Phenomenon of Man*. New York: HarperCollins, 1955, p. 290.
- <sup>xii</sup> Peter Drucker. *The New Realities. New Realities*. New York: HarperCollins, 1989, p. 231.
- <sup>xiii</sup> Gary Quehl. "The Inner World of Leadership." Unpublished essay, Orinda, California, 1991, p. 2.
- <sup>xiv</sup> Gary Quehl. "The Inner World of Leadership." Unpublished essay, Orinda, California, 1991, p. 2.