

BUCKINGHAM REPORT

AN IN-DEPTH CRITIQUE BY AMERICA'S FOREMOST
CHRISTIAN ANALYZER OF THE ISSUES, PEOPLE &
EVENTS AFFECTING TODAY'S SPIRIT-LED LEADERS

THE WORKAHOLIC PASTOR

Last month I received a phone call from a pastor's wife. She had come home early from an out-of-town trip and caught her husband in the bathroom—sniffing cocaine. I've known her husband for years. He's a real go-getter. He took a church of 600 people and has built it into a congregation of several thousand. He's involved in TV, overseas evangelism, daily radio and a host of other ministries. He's the typical Type-A individual. But as the pressures of having to keep up and having to produce continued to drain his bucket, he turned to chemicals for a refilling. Unfortunately, the chemical he chose is a destroyer. He is now on "sabbatical"—trying to get his life back together in an expensive rehab hospital.

Before you rear back in your self-righteous chair, take a look at your own life. The pastor's sin was not drugs. His sin was his obsession with his work. Work (ministry) became his god. Drugs were simply the fuel his god demanded to keep the machinery running.

Christian leaders work obsessively for different reasons. Some are genuinely motivated by the Holy Spirit—but they are (unfortunately) rare. Others work long and hard—not because they are spiritually motivated—but because they simply enjoy what they are doing. Some are haunted by perfectionistic ego ideals. They are those that Gordon McDonald talks about in his book, **Ordering Your Private World** (Oliver-Nelson). They are "driven" rather than "called." Others work to drown out underlying depression. Their ministry is like alcoholism—although not only acceptable but commended by others.

Ministers with impossibly high ego ideals can't relax even when they do stop working. They imagine everyone else is getting ahead of them. They see the ministry as competition: either against the devil, against another church, against a former failure, or even against their father or some authority figure who told them "you'll never make it." Those who are depressed have to find some other way to submerge their depression when they aren't working. Like my friend, they turn to drugs, alcohol or some kind of outlandish behavior such as extra-marital sex, excessive traveling or overeating. Those who minister because they enjoy it, however, are able to leave their work behind on regular occasions and take a vacation or spend time with a hobby.

Unlike alcohol and drug addiction, workaholism is usually praised by members of our churches and even by fellow pastors. "What a hard-working pastor we have. He has meetings every night and never takes a vacation." This simply feeds the leader's ego or adds to the guilt feelings which are already motivating him, that others are watching and he must not slow down. To mix his workaholism with chemicals, however, in order to keep him "up" is to take a suicide course—and could result in ignominious death.

The workaholic is seldom happy—and never relaxed. The illusion that success is based on bigness just makes it easier for the leader to spend his life running scared, risking illness, skirting moral danger and always suffering from loneliness.

DURATION OF A DECISION

Leaders are decision-makers. However, the wise leader is one who plans his ideas and knows the limits of each decision. Northern visitors to Florida (they are called snowbirds) are familiar with the highway signs: "All the orange juice you can drink for 10 cents." Occasionally a snowbird will stop at one of the roadside stands, pay his dime and receive a cup of fresh-squeezed orange juice. When he asks for a refill, however, he may be surprised to find it will cost him another dime. "But your sign says all you can drink for 10 cents." "That's right," the sly proprietor answers, "and that cup is all you can drink for 10 cents." In other words—that's your money's worth.

Wise decision-makers know the duration time of their decision. If you decide to purchase a copy machine for your office or a sound board for your church, you should take into account how long that piece of equipment will last before it becomes a liability rather than an asset.

Everything in the world is temporary except those things labeled eternal. Everything will be consumed except God's Word and God's people. Everything else has a life cycle—from civilizations to ideas to mechanical things. The wise leader anticipates the life cycle of each decision, rather than acting as if his decision forever settles a problem.

The manager of a large Christian organization installed an accounting system 20 years ago. It was a good system at the time, but across the years the organization has grown and the system gradually became antiquated. In fact, it should have been changed 10 years ago. The accountant who installed it did the organization a vast disservice by not warning them it would be outdated in a certain period of time. As a result the organization held onto it 10 years longer than it should. The result was gross inefficiency in operations during the last 10 years.

When buying a car you should factor in the point you expect the car to outlive its usefulness. That way you will not be disappointed when, at some expected point, it starts costing you money. The same is true with ideas, philosophies, even theologies. As you grow, these things will become outdated as surely as the width of a necktie changes. Every decision needs to be made in the concept of time—and the duration of that decision should be factored in. Thus, before a decision is made someone needs to ask, "How long do you feel that decision will be good for?" This way you will be reminded there is a statute of limitation on every decision.

Let's say I decide to have a Saturday morning men's breakfast in our church. Instead of simply starting with no idea of how long this will last, I should say, "We're going to do this for a year. At the end of the year we'll reevaluate." That will give it a chance to die, if that's what God wants, without my feeling I have to keep its body propped to support my ego.

I have started doing this with all major decisions. If I say, for instance, a decision should last me for the next five years, then three years from now I need to start reassessing. If I get seven years out of a five-year decision, I count it as a bonus. But if it only lasts five years I am not disappointed. Only the fool believes all things last forever.

CHRISTIAN HEADHUNTERS

X How do top Christian organizations find a new chief executive when the former chief leaves or retires? When Stan Mooneyham left World Vision, the board hired a professional—called a headhunter—to go out and find the “right man” to replace the popular though controversial Mooneyham. This particular headhunter, although a Christian, had never worked for a Christian organization. His previous experience had been limited to activity in the corporate circle—searching for presidents, vice presidents and chief executive officers (CEOs). Later when Chuck Bennett announced his plans to leave as president of Mission Aviation Fellowship (MAF), the board turned to this same headhunter to find their top man. Before you wrinkle your nose at such a procedure, compare it with the search committee or pulpit committee tactics often used by today’s churches to find a pastor or staff member.

OPENING UP AT HOME

A pastor who had been under terrible pressure in his ministry finally shared his concerns with his wife and children. To his surprise, their reaction was one of relief. His tension had been evident all along. In fact, as his wife later confided, “We all knew he was in trouble but he was determined not to talk about it.” He had been irritable, and they’d been afraid to ask him about his troubles for fear of invoking additional problems.

Wishing to protect their families from worry, many pastors avoid talking about pressures and problems once they get home. But this can backfire. The pastor may begin taking out some of the stress on family members—without realizing the source. When his loved ones try to comfort him, he feels they’re rubbing him in the wrong direction and responds with anger. Since he hasn’t let them in on the reasons he’s irritable, they worry about all sorts of distressing possibilities—and wonder what they’ve done wrong.

Let your family know what (or who) is making you unhappy. You’ll not only relieve them of a false sense of guilt and real sense of helplessness, you’ll pick the finest support a pastor can have—the support of his wife and children.

IN THIS ISSUE I AM SPOTLIGHTING...

TWO LEADERS—ONE HEAD

A growing number of organizations—and a few churches—are establishing strong leaders in the Number Two position, releasing the Number One leader into broader ministries as an overseer fulfilling an apostolic rather than pastoral role. In such cases the Number One leader does not relinquish headship or final authority, he simply delegates the implementation of his vision to the Number Two leader, who takes charge while remaining in quiet submission to Number One.

This is quite different from the emeritus role of a college president—which is a kind way of putting the old warhorse out to pasture. It is also different from the retirement role played by some pastors who step aside but never do quite get out of the way. This is more to be likened to the corporate president who gives up his presidency and his role as CEO to become chairman of the board.

It is easy to see how conflicts might develop between the two top leaders. Jealousies and insecurities are a constant threat. Number Two will always want more than he has, although he may—out of loyalty and obedience to God—never be overt in his ambitions. Number One will always have to fight the tendency to relax, retire and relinquish more and more authority until his own base is eroded. In many cases, despite constant shows of unity, the congregation will be confused over who is really in charge.

Lessons from the Torah

I am indebted to Pinhas Peli, an Israeli rabbi, who writes of the dynamic involved in this kind of division of leadership by referring to the accounts in the Torah of Moses and Aaron. In the February 22 issue of the **Jerusalem Post**, he points out that the Torah usually mentions Moses first. However, there are cases when Aaron is listed first (Ex. 6:26). The rabbis in the Midrash say this means both were equal in importance—but it represents two different kinds of leadership.

Moses is the charismatic leader whose authority comes not so much from the office he holds but from his personality. Aaron, while admired and loved by people, derives his authority mainly from his office. Moses needs no special garments or other external signs to single him out as a leader; Aaron is recognized by his “sacral vestments” which endow him with “dignity and adornment” (Ex. 28:2).

Aaron counted on his office, his uniform and insignias of rank to give him authority over the people. Moses did not have any of these trappings. He was humble and self-effacing. Yet, at crucial moments of decision, he appeared as powerful and authoritative. When he spoke, the people not only listened, but they recognized his authority and obeyed. Moses was a commander. Aaron occupied a command position.

Does this kind of dual authority cause conflicts? Of course. No matter how long Aaron served in office, he would never be Moses. He was always going to live under the shadow of this father of the people. Even when Moses gradually moved from the role of father to that of grandfather, he was still the patriarch. He always had the last word—and sometimes the first word. There was no way, despite his personal ambition to be in charge, that Aaron would ever rise above being Number Two leader.

However, the conflicts, like all tension, resulted in good. Both types of leadership seem to be necessary in a healthy, balanced church or organization. Churches often suffer because they have only a Moses—a strong-willed, highly popular visionary who lacks leadership skills and organizational abilities. Moses always needs an Aaron—someone who will sit in an office and minister to the spiritual needs of the people. On the other hand, if Aaron (or, horrors, a young, unseasoned Joshua) were in charge, the body would quickly become a slick organization or a driven army. It took Moses to keep it a family.

Two Styles of Leadership

It was God who recognized the need for both kinds of leadership. He commanded Moses to “bring forward your brother Aaron, with his sons, from among the Israelites, to serve me as priests” (Ex. 28:1). This was not easy for Moses—to delegate some of his authority. Not because of ego, for Moses was genuinely humble and secure. No, he was concerned for the people. How would they accept this new leader with his own style of leadership? Would they accuse Moses of nepotism? (They actually did later on during the rebellion of Korah.) And what about the children of Moses? Up until this time Moses had served as both apostle and pastor. Now he was relinquishing the pastoral (priestly) role to another man—and to that man’s children. It would mean his own children would not inherit the position after him. That must have been hard to swallow.

History records the Aaronic office of the priesthood was passed down to the descendants of Aaron, while the children of Moses gradually faded from the picture. But the position held by Moses was unique. It could not be passed along to his children, nor even to his young disciple, Joshua. The charismatic leader is endowed with personal gifts all his own. When he dies, they die with him.

Hebrew scholar Peli points out an interesting word construction in the language of the Torah. When God called Moses, He began saying, **Ve-atta**, "And you," followed by an imperative. This emphasized that from now on Moses must draw from his own resources of strength. Whether he liked being the Number One leader or not—he was one. Although he was unordained, uncrowned and really had no desire to be publicly recognized—he was chosen. **Ve-atta!** You are you, just because you are you. You have no choice but to lead—not because of any office or title, despite others who may want you out of the way so they can lead. You are the leader because God has said so. For Moses, that settled it for all time.

As that early family of believers matures, the distinctions in leadership become more evident. They are not in conflict with each other. Indeed, they complement each other because of their differences. Aaron's job is clearly defined and marked, his chores duly and meticulously prescribed. On the other hand, the work of Moses varies in its methods and approach according to the needs of the hour. No one can really nail him down. He follows the Spirit (**ruach**) as an eagle rides the desert thermals. This causes consternation to the orderly Aaron, but the balance of leadership keeps the people free. To have had Aaron in the Number One slot would have caused the body to move quickly into legalism—like having a CPA as pastor. But the CPA is necessary to the organization as long as he is never in charge. On the other hand, had Moses had free rein, without the restraining balance of Aaron and his scribal perspective, there would have been little spiritual or physical progress.

The term **Ve-atta** appears several times in Moses' career when God intervenes and tells him to act. In Exodus 27-28, for instance, it appears three times as God asserts that Moses is THE authoritative leader and has to act accordingly. He must not let those whom he has appointed override the fact that Moses is the final authority.

1. "**You shall command**" (Ex. 27:20). The term is **Ve-atta texave**. The overseer must always be willing to step in and take charge at any time when he feels the delegated leader is moving in the wrong direction. But to do this all the time, issuing orders and commands, telling the people what to do on a daily basis, would quickly undermine his Number Two leader and erode his delegated authority.
2. "**You shall bring close**" (Ex. 28:1). This time the term is **Ve-atta hakrev**. In this case Moses was commanded to make himself understood without compromising by speaking directly to Aaron and his sons without going to the congregation. This validates an old military principle of not reprimanding or overriding a junior officer in the presence of his subordinates. In this case he approaches Aaron as friend to friend. Instead of issuing an order, he passes along his wishes by putting an arm around his brother's shoulder.
3. "**You shall speak to all the leaders**" (Ex. 28:3). The Hebrew term is **Ve-atta tedaber** and means, literally, "You shall speak to all the wise in heart." The New International Version translates it: "Tell all the skilled men to whom I have given wisdom in such matters..." There are times when the overseer needs to "take charge" of the entire cadre of leaders and instead of expecting Aaron to convey his wishes, to express them personally so there is no possibility of misinterpretation or misunderstanding. This is

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done neither by commanding nor by acting amiably with Aaron on a personal basis, but by way of explaining your point to all the department heads and those in middle leadership. Translated into the church of today, it would be the time the overseer calls for a leadership retreat when it is time to launch out on a major project. Even though Aaron might be the one to set up the arrangements, the overseer would personally conduct several sessions of the retreat in order to share his heart with all those in leadership.

The wise overseer never releases the reins of authority to another man—although he may let them hang slack while the lead horse pulls the load. But never must the lead horse confuse himself with the stagecoach driver who sets both direction and speed. There will come a time, of course, when the overseer will hear a voice from Mt. Nebo. At that time he will separate himself completely, not only from the body, but from his delegated leaders. Until then he must constantly discern—through prayer and the counsel of wise elders—how to apply and when to appropriate the various styles of leadership. Sometimes it is **Ve-atta tezave**, “You shall command!” At other times it is **Ve-atta hakrev**, “You shall bring close!” But always, when you want to make your point of view accepted by those who are wise at heart: **Ve-atta tedaber**, “You shall speak and explain.” Never underestimate the value of personal contact with key leaders as you share your heart and pass along **hasbara** (information).



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