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Spiritual Leadership: A Fresh Look at an Ancient Human Issue

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INTRODUCTION

Spiritual Leadership: A Fresh Look at an Ancient Human Issue

SCOTT T. ALLISON, CRAIG T. KOCHER, AND
GEORGE R. GOETHALS

◆ We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield, and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearthstone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

—Abraham Lincoln, Inaugural Address, March 4, 1861

Abraham Lincoln's iconic phrase, "the better angels of our nature," revealed his belief that the noblest qualities of humanity would heal a divided nation. This book, *Frontiers in Spiritual Leadership: Discovering the Better Angels of Our Nature*, is about the expression of these noble qualities and how leaders such as Lincoln make that expression possible. Lincoln was arguably America's greatest spiritual leader. His words and actions promoting justice, equality, and reconciliation were a spiritual tonic to war-weary citizens yearning for healing and unification. Lincoln exuded charisma with his unique look, confident mannerisms, and deft speeches that often quoted or paraphrased scripture in ways that resonated to his audience (Goethals and Allison 2014). He sprinkled his orations with quintessential phrases such as "a house divided

against itself cannot stand.” The house metaphor might have had an impact by itself, but surely its spiritual origins gave it additional power. Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation contained appeals to important values and divine approval, concluding that “upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God.”

What Is Spiritual Leadership?

This volume was inspired by the confluence of the terms “spirituality” and “leadership.” These two phenomena appear, at first glance, to be unrelated. On closer examination, they are twin processes. Merriam-Webster’s dictionary defines spirit as “the force within a person that is believed to give the body life, energy, and power.” Similarly, leadership is said to be the force within a group that is said to give it life, energy, and power. Combining the two terms, we can say that spiritual leadership refers to the process by which a person or persons within a group give it life-affirming aims and the power to bring those aims to fruition. This definition of spiritual leadership is consistent with previous efforts to define the phenomenon. Adopting an organizational behavior perspective, Fry and Nisiewicz (2012) proposed that spiritual leadership “involves intrinsically motivating and inspiring” followers through faith in a “vision of service” within a cultural context “based on altruistic love” (4). These scholars identified two key processes of spiritual leadership. First, spiritual leaders create “a vision in which leaders and followers experience a sense of calling so that their lives have meaning.” Second, they “establish a culture based on the values of altruistic love whereby leaders and followers have a sense of membership, feel understood and appreciated, and have genuine care, concern, and appreciation for both self and others” (5).

Doohan (2007) has gone so far as to claim that spiritual leadership is the only acceptable form of leadership in the world today. “The heart of leadership,” according to Doohan, “lies in the heart of leaders” (12). From this perspective, leaders are called to consider their interdependence with the world, and not simply their roles within their organizations. Leadership is about the exercise of “moral values, ethics, resources of our hearts and heads, the joy of a leadership mind, the need to face the world with soul, the challenge to bring love, spirituality, and virtue to contemporary organizations” (12). In a similar vein, Benefiel

(2005) defines spiritual leadership as leadership that takes into account the “intellectual, emotional, and relational depth of human character, as well as the continuing capability and yearning for personal development and evolution” (7). Spiritual leadership “manifests itself in humor, compassion, and relational competence” (7). Benefiel concludes that leaders who apply spiritual principles can bring about “individual and organizational transformation” (8).

The significance of transformation is a recurring theme in various treatments of spiritual leadership. Political scientist James MacGregor Burns (1978) proposed one of the first theories of exemplary leadership, although he never directly referred to any of the components of such leadership as “spiritual.” Burns identified the highest form of leadership as transforming leadership. Drawing from Abraham Maslow’s (1943) humanistic work on self-actualization, Burns believed that transforming leaders play an important role in satisfying followers’ lower needs, thereby elevating them for the important work that they, that is, leaders and followers, can do together to produce significant change for the better. As Burns described transforming leadership, individuals engage each other “in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality.” Both leaders and followers will be elevated such that the leaders create a “new cadre of leaders.” This conception follows Maslow closely, though it makes explicit an idea that is largely implicit in Maslow, and that is that the self-actualized person is a moral actor (Goethals and Allison 2016).

Previous research on heroic leadership suggests that the most spiritually enlightened leaders exhibit high degrees of morality and competence to followers (Allison and Goethals, 2011, 2013). A heroic leader’s demonstration of exemplary morality can have an elevating effect on followers. Recent scholarship suggests that moral exemplars evoke a unique emotional response, which psychologist Jonathan Haidt (2003) has, in fact, called “elevation.” Haidt borrowed the term “elevation” from Thomas Jefferson, who used the phrase “moral elevation” to describe the euphoric feeling one gets when reading great literature. When people experience elevation, they feel a mix of awe, reverence, and admiration for a morally beautiful act. The emotion is described as similar to calmness, warmth, and love. Haidt argues that elevation is “elicited by acts of virtue or moral beauty; it causes warm, open feelings in the chest” (121). Most importantly, the feeling of elevation has a concomitant behavioral component: a desire to become a better person. Elevation “motivates people to behave more virtuously themselves.” A form of moral and spiritual self-efficacy, elevation transforms people

into believing they are capable of engaging in significant pro-social action.

Transformation holds the key to the mythic hero's successful completion of his or her journey, according to Joseph Campbell (1949). The ingredients of this classic journey are well known to storytellers. A hero is cast into a dangerous, unfamiliar world and is charged with accomplishing a daunting task that requires assistance from sidekicks and mentors. There are formidable obstacles along the way and villainous characters to overcome. After many trials and much suffering, the hero prevails and then gives back what he or she has learned to society. Success on this journey requires a personal transformation. With assistance from leaders, whom Campbell calls mentors, heroes acquire an important quality that was conspicuously missing, and holding them back, before the journey. All heroes start out "incomplete" in some sense; they lack some essential strength that is crucial to their personal and spiritual development. This missing attribute can be humility, courage, compassion, faith, resilience, or some fundamental truth about themselves and the world.

The discovery, or recovery, of the missing quality produces a personal transformation that enables heroes to rise above their suffering and prevail. Campbell believed that the hero's journey was, in part, a spiritual journey of self-completion and connection to one's self and the world. "The function of myth," wrote Campbell, "is to put us in sync—with ourselves, with our social group, and with the environment in which we live" (19). Campbell (1991) also revealed "the final secret" of hero stories—"to teach you how to penetrate the labyrinth of life in such a way that its spiritual values come through" (34). Most importantly, the culmination of the hero's journey is his or her engagement in spiritual leadership. That is, heroes give back what was once given to them. After having been mentored on their journey, heroes later become the mentor figure to other people who are on earlier stages of their own journey. As Richard Rohr (2014) observes, "transformed people transform people" (126).

Spiritually Intelligent Leadership

We acknowledge that terms such as "morality," "heroism," and "spirituality" can mean different things to different people. This fact suggests that spiritual leadership itself is in the eye of the beholder. In their chapter in this volume, Allison and Setterberg note that if we define

spiritual leadership as leadership that serves a higher moral purpose, then we must be mindful that morality can be twisted to serve the psychological needs and goals of the beholder. A sad truth is that many God-loving nations have waged wars against each other, with leadership on each side claiming the spiritually superior upper hand. At the same time, it can be argued that there are clear benefits to living in a time when spirituality can carry with it so many different connotations. A spiritual practice today can include attending a church service, taking a yoga class, beholding a dazzling sunset, watching children play, or even solving a vexing math equation. Astrow et al. (2001) define spirituality as “the search for transcendent meaning” that can be expressed in religious practice or expressed “exclusively in [people’s] relationship to nature, music, the arts, a set of philosophical beliefs, or relationships with friends and family” (14).

For many, the belief in a higher power is the centerpiece of spirituality. Such a power need not be divine for people to be transformed spiritually in mind and in heart. Mohr (2006) adopts this broad definition of spirituality by defining the term as “a person’s experience of, or a belief in, a power apart from his or her own existence” (378). Kaiser (2000) extends this definition of spirituality to include “a broad set of principles that transcend[s] all religions. Spirituality is about the relationship between ourselves and something larger. That ‘something’ can be the good of the community or the people who are served by your agency or school or with energies greater than ourselves. Spirituality means being in the right relationship with all that is. It is a stance of harmlessness toward all living beings and an understanding of their mutual interdependence” (78).

Love and Talbot (1999) provided a synthesis of spirituality based on their review of scholarship by theologians, social scientists, and health-care specialists. Their analysis revealed that spirituality is an internal process of (a) “seeking personal authenticity, genuineness, and wholeness as an aspect of identity development”; (b) “transcending one’s egocentricity in the development of a greater connectedness to self and others”; (c) “deriving meaning, purpose, and direction in one’s life”; and (d) developing “openness to exploring a relationship with an intangible and pervasive power that exists beyond human existence and rational human knowing” (96). These four perspectives have clear connections to the aims of transformational leadership as described by James MacGregor Burns (1978). Burns identified the ability of transforming leaders to elevate the motivation and morality of followers by instilling them with meaning, purpose, and higher-level values.

One could argue that spiritually gifted leaders possess a high degree of spiritual intelligence. Zohar (1997) proposed that spiritually intelligent individuals are guided by a moral vision and show great humility, compassion, resilience, and an appreciation for diversity. Wigglesworth (2006) argued that spiritual intelligence is essential for effective leadership, stating that the most spiritually gifted leaders possess “the ability to act with wisdom and compassion, while maintaining inner and outer peace, regardless of the circumstances” (31). Emmons (2000) suggested that spiritually intelligent individuals possess “the adaptive use of spiritual information to facilitate everyday problem solving and goal attainment.” From this perspective, effective spiritual leaders are virtuous individuals who sanctify everyday experience, possess a socially relevant purpose in life, have a well-developed conscience, and are committed to promoting human values. Over the past decade, scholarship devoted to understanding spirituality and its role in human activities such as leadership is burgeoning in psychology, sociology, political science, economics, philosophy, and religion (Miller 2012; Paloutzian and Park 2014).



The Genesis of This Book



As noted earlier, this book was inspired by our interest in exemplary leadership that incorporates spiritual principles. The three editors of this volume hold positions at three different units within the University of Richmond. The lead editor, Scott Allison, is a professor of social psychology, who studies heroism and villainy. On several occasions he has invited the second editor, Craig Kocher, to give guest lectures in his classes on the psychology of heroism. Kocher is the university chaplain and Jessie Ball duPont Chair of the Chaplaincy. Allison was struck by how much his students resonated with Kocher’s spiritual approach to psychological issues pertaining to morality, and one day over coffee the two decided to embark on a book project examining spiritual leadership. While Allison brought his psychological expertise on the topic and Kocher his theological background and his seven years of experience as the university’s spiritual leader, the two men realized that the volume would benefit considerably from the many talents of George Goethals, a full-time member of the faculty in the Jepson School of Leadership Studies.

At first, Goethals offered some resistance to the idea of collaborating on this book. With his secular orientation, what could he bring to the

table? Allison and Kocher assured him that his long and storied professional background, coupled with his many personal gifts, made him an ideal contributor to scholarship bearing on spiritual leadership. In his career, Goethals has enjoyed considerable success as the chair of the Williams College Psychology Department, acting dean of the Faculty, provost, founder and chair of the program in leadership studies, and editor of numerous academic journals and books. Allison and Kocher knew that during Goethals's effective administering of these leadership positions, he exemplified spiritual leadership at its finest. Goethals, like Kocher, leads with the heart. Building relationships and leading with meaning, purpose, compassion, humility, and warmth have been the signature of Goethals's leadership. These spiritual qualities in both Goethals and Kocher are what attracted Allison to this project and to this special collaboration.

We acknowledge that our tripartite editorial arrangement has its advantages and disadvantages. One obvious benefit, mentioned earlier, is the fact we hail from three different disciplinary units: psychology, the chaplaincy, and leadership studies. Psychology is viewed by many as a key intellectual hub in a liberal arts campus, with its connections to the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities. The Jepson School of Leadership Studies boasts of a multidisciplinary approach to leadership and is staffed by faculty from eight different disciplines. The Chaplaincy's stated mission is "to inspire generous faith and engage the heart of the University." These three diverse perspectives assisted us in bringing fresh ideas, a healthy synergy, and different sets of connections to potential faculty contributors across our campus. The three of us also represent somewhat different age cohorts. Goethals is the eldest and wisest of the three. Allison sits comfortably in middle age, while Kocher is a youthful dervish. In our teamwork, we discovered that the differences in our age and experience had a counterbalancing effect and offered a rich synergism.

The central disadvantage of our collaboration is perhaps obvious. The three of us are middle class, White, European American males, each of whom, much to our amusement and consternation, drives a Toyota Prius. Our recognition of this demographic and automotive homogeneity inspired us to work feverishly to produce a volume with diverse content and spirit. We set out to solicit chapters that provided coverage over as wide a spectrum of spirituality as possible. Our volume is split into two sections; the first half focuses on historical perspectives on spiritual leadership, whereas the second half addresses contemporary approaches to spiritual leadership. Within each section, we sought to

cover as much terrain as possible in terms of substantive content and disciplinary perspectives. We believe that we have assembled an outstanding collection of authors who tell a compelling story about spiritual leadership from a variety of viewpoints and drawing from many different spiritual traditions.

Overview of the Chapters in This Book

Our volume begins in rousing fashion with a thoughtful Foreword by our university's most recent former president, Ed Ayers. We hope that you take a moment to read Ayers's short preamble to the book. His unique perspective on our collection of essays reveals him to have been one of our university's most outstanding spiritual leaders. As we have noted, the first half of this volume focuses on historical perspectives in spiritual leadership while the second half addresses contemporary issues. Our historical section opens with a chapter by professor of religion Stephanie Cobb, who writes a thoughtful essay titled "Women's Leadership in the Early Church: Possibilities and Pushbacks." Cobb explores the roles that were sometimes available to women in the early church, along with the ways in which the church—or the culture at large—resisted women's spiritual leadership. Rather than drawing conclusions about what was or ought to be, Cobb's chapter challenges readers to observe differences in discourses and to see the ways various cultural concerns affected leadership possibilities for women in the early church.

In chapter 2, Peter Kaufman from the Jepson School of Leadership Studies writes a compelling piece titled "Clerical Leadership in Late Antiquity: Augustine on Bishops' Polemical and Pastoral Burdens." Kaufman explores the leadership qualities of St. Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, who is widely regarded as one of the most influential theologians and pastoral leaders in the Christian tradition. Augustine faced significant challenges in shaping the character of the clergy and church doctrine amid enormous social unrest and significant personal turmoil. In chapter 3, history professor Sydney Watts offers an illuminating essay titled "The Spiritual Leadership of Madame Guyon and Madame de Maintenon under Louis XIV." Watts focuses on the spiritual leadership of two elite French women, Madame Guyon and Madame de Maintenon, who dedicated their lives to instill in young women a desire for virtue and pure love—spiritual goals that eclipsed the subordinate place women held under patriarchal authority. During the late

seventeenth- and early eighteenth centuries, religious identity among French female elites was often caught between the political and ecclesiastic tensions under royal absolutism and the personal demands put upon women as forms of movable property as much as ossified vessels of aristocratic beauty. As the Counter-Reformation brought with it a place for women to engage their intellectual faculties in the salon, many sought new ways to cultivate their spiritual lives by focusing on questions of religious piety and morals.

In chapter 4, E. Claiborne Robins School of Law Professor Henry Chambers contributes a cogent essay titled “The President as Spiritual Leader: Pardons, Punishment, Forgiveness, Mercy and Justice.” Chambers explores the power of pardon and how this power gives the president (or governor in some cases) the authority, but not the obligation, to exercise spiritual leadership regarding punishment and justice. Chambers concludes his essay saying that although the president does not have the obligation to exercise spiritual leadership, he can be judged poorly for failing to exercise spiritual leadership in this context. In chapter 5, George R. Goethals from the Jepson School of Leadership Studies offers a fascinating piece titled “Reconciliation and Its Failures: Reconstruction to Jim Crow.” Goethals writes about forgiveness, reconciliation, and justice in the decades following the Civil War. Abraham Lincoln sought reconciliation with the South and both freedom and justice for former slaves. Achieving both reconciliation and justice proved to be impossible during and after Reconstruction, leading to the Jim Crow era of the early twentieth century. Reconciliation fared better than justice for 100 years. In the last 50 years, a measure of justice has been achieved.

Chapter 6 concludes our section on historical approaches to spiritual leadership. In this chapter, David D. Burhans, chaplain emeritus of the University of Richmond, writes a reflective essay that he aptly calls “The Pursuit of Wonder. Here Burhans offers an institutional and personal model of spiritual leadership in a unique university setting. Burhans provides a 30-year historical account of highlights in the creation and evolution of the University of Richmond Chaplaincy. This chapter recounts details of the personal and professional growth of the university chaplain, “the pastor, preacher and spiritual leader of the University community.” Burhans’s chapter contains one of our favorite passages in the volume: “Wonder just might be another name for God. The title of this chapter, The Pursuit of Wonder, may be a worthy human goal. But the ultimate truth is, Wonder is in pursuit of us.”

The second half of our volume, focusing on contemporary approaches to spiritual leadership. It opens with chapter 7, authored by Elisabeth Rose Gruner, professor of English, and is titled “Leading through Reading in Contemporary Young Adult Fantasy by Philip Pullman and Terry Pratchett.” In this stimulating chapter, Gruner analyzes sacred and other texts in the *His Dark Materials* trilogy by Philip Pullman and the Tiffany Aching novels by Terry Pratchett. She argues that reading enables moral and spiritual development—a development that emphasizes storytelling and caregiving. Storytelling and caregiving in fact turn out to be related gifts, elements of a kind of feminist leadership that has its roots in critical reading.

In chapter 8, Jennifer L. Erkulwater, professor of political science, writes a thoughtful piece titled “Engaged Spirituality and Egalitarianism in US Social Welfare Policy.” Erkulwater examines, from the lens of American history, the ways in which faith has served as a staging ground for mass movements on behalf of social justice. The contemporary discourse of faith and faith-based organizations, however, buttresses neoliberal policies that risk undermining democratic citizenship and moral outrage at pervasive social and economic inequalities. Erkulwater reviews the emergence of religious neoliberalism in social welfare policy since 1990. Next, chapter 9, authored by Thad Williamson of the Jepson School of Leadership Studies, presents an inspiring essay titled “A Change Is Gonna Come”: Spiritual Leadership for Social Change in the United States.” In this chapter, Williamson considers the role of religious faith in leadership for social change, with a particular focus on leadership for racial justice in the United States. The chapter shows how religious commitments were integral, not incidental, to the leadership of Harriet Beecher Stowe in the antislavery movement and Martin Luther King Jr. in the civil rights movement. The final section considers the implications of these examples for the current historical era, in which present-day leaders for social change can no longer confidently appeal to widely shared religious beliefs in building coalitions for dramatic social change.

In chapter 10, Craig T. Kocher, the university chaplain at Richmond, writes a stimulating essay titled “Living a Life of Consequence: How Not to Chase a Fake Rabbit.” Kocher observes how talented young people in the United States find the process of making meaning and discovering a life path to be confusing and overwhelming. His chapter describes the cultural context in which young people are entering adulthood and then narrates possible ways for them to develop a deeper understanding of themselves, what they are to do professionally, and

how they are to live with integrity. The chapter grounds this process in Craig Kocher's own understanding of spiritual leadership. Next, in chapter 11, Scott Allison, professor of psychology, and his student Gwendolyn C. Setterberg write a psychologically interesting piece titled "Suffering and Sacrifice: Individual and Collective Benefits, and Implications for Leadership." Allison and Setterberg review the ways in which suffering and sacrifice provide emotional, behavioral, and spiritual benefits to human beings. They propose six principles of suffering, drawing from both ancient and modern spiritual traditions and a large body of psychological research on the determinants of happiness and mental health. Their conclusion is that suffering is the soil from which exemplary leadership germinates.

Wrapping up our section on contemporary perspectives is chapter 12, written by Richard L. Morrill, Distinguished University Professor of Ethics. Morrill's outstanding essay is titled "Leadership, Spirituality and Values in a Secular Age: Insights from Charles Taylor and James MacGregor Burns." In this chapter, Morrill traces the thought of two eminent scholars concerning the place of values in leadership and in moral experience. Burns, the historian and leadership theorist, places a commanding emphasis on the place of foundational values such as equality and liberty in his concept of transforming leadership, and Taylor, the philosopher and historian of ideas, examines the centrality of moral experience in the human quest for personal and spiritual fullness. Morrill draws on themes from the perspectives of both thinkers in showing the centrality of values in the practice of leadership.

This edited volume concludes with a thoughtful Afterword by Richmond's chancellor, E. Bruce Heilman. We do not exaggerate when we say that none of the editors of this volume, nor any of its contributors, would have found their way to Richmond without the groundbreaking vision and accomplishments of Bruce Heilman. Some of this visionary thinking is described in David D. Burhans's chapter in this volume, but there is much more to Heilman's remarkable stewardship than can be told in a single page, chapter, or book. Heilman's leadership at our university has not just been spiritual; it has been profound and almost mythic in its sweep.

Overall, we hope you enjoy this initial effort of ours to present a rough landscape of spiritual leadership that centers on a number of spiritual principles that are fundamental to effective and inspired leadership. These principles emphasize the values of love, forgiveness, pardon, meaning, purpose, wonder, compassion, humility, trust, sacrifice,

courage, justice, caregiving, equality, and liberty. In a world that produces more than its share of disturbed leaders bent on the destructive pursuits of conquest, genocide, and oppression, we pause to rejoice that there are ample gifted and enlightened individuals whose leadership has embodied the most exquisite qualities of humanity. We dedicate this book to all these awakened leaders—past, present, and future.

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