Influence, Power & Authority

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Relevance of the Article to Paul’s Philemon Letter

Paul is operating to the far right on Wrong’s continuum. Persuasion is the dominant power form being used to influence Philemon. Spiritual authority and the voluntary reception of influence are highlighted. Philemon has the clear right to choose not to follow Paul’s advice. Paul gives him that choice, while at the same time putting on great persuasive arguments for following his advice. It is clear that Paul is depending upon spiritual authority to pull off the major paradigm shift he wants to see in Philemon’s response.

4. Influence, Power, and Authority

Introduction

A major lesson concerning how a leader ought to influence states:

Effective leaders value spiritual authority as a primary power base.

To understand this important principle we need to define some terms. The terms that are used to describe leadership make a difference in how we see leadership. Three important terms are influence, power, and authority. Sometimes these important terms are used interchangeable in leadership literature. I use a simplified adaptation of Dennis Wrong’s basic schema for relating these concepts—though I have adapted it to fit my understanding of spiritual authority. Influence is the most embracing of the concepts. Power is intended use of influence. And authority is one kind of power usually associated with tight organizations.

Figure Ph 4-1, which follows, lays out Wrong’s adapted taxonomy of influence, power, and authority forms. Notice for the book of Philemon, Paul is operating to the far right on this diagram.

41 See Dennis Wrong, Power—Its Forms, Bases, and Uses. San Francisco, CA: Harper and Row, 1979. This is a brilliant treatment involving definitions of power concepts as well as recognition of how these forms change over time. His analysis gave a complicated taxonomy which I have simplified and adapted. 42 Christian organizations operate on a continuum from tight to loose. The more loose an organization is the more it is characterized by voluntary workers who are not paid to do some job but do it because they want to. Therefore leaders in loose organizations do not have as much authority as those in tight organizations which are characterized by paid workers, structures levels of leadership, and supervisory responsibility (that is, people have bosses who can fire them if they don’t submit to authority).
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INFLUENCE

\[ \text{can be} \]
\[ \text{Intended} = \text{POWER} \]

which has forms such as

\[ \text{Unintended} \]

\[ \text{Force} \quad \text{Manipulation} \quad \text{Authority} \quad \text{Persuasion} \]

\[ \text{coercive} \quad \text{induced} \quad \text{legitimate} \quad \text{competent} \quad \text{personal} \]

\[ \text{various forms of organizational authority} \]

\[ \text{Spiritual Authority} \]

\[ \text{Involuntary Reception of Influence} \quad \text{Voluntary Reception of Influence} \]

**Figure Phm 4-1. Leadership Influence Components** — (Adapted from Wrong)

**Explanation**

Leaders are people with God-given capacities and God-given responsibilities who are influencing specific groups of people toward God’s purposes for them. They are intentional in their use of means to influence, meaning using deliberate power forms. When we describe such leaders we are coming down the right side of the diagram in Figure Phm 4-1. Leaders have a right to influence. The ability to influence comes through the control of power bases.

**Definition**

**Power base** refers to the source of credibility, power differential, or resources which enables a leader (power holder) to have authority to exercise influence on followers (power subjects).

**Definition**

**Authority** refers to the right to exercise leadership influence by a leader over followers with respect to some field of influence.

Power is manifested in power forms which bring about compliance. The four major power forms in our tree diagram include FORCE, MANIPULATION, AUTHORITY, AND PERSUASION. Authority is further sub-divided into coercive, induced, legitimate, competent, and personal. Spiritual authority is a hybrid combination of persuasion and legitimate, competent, and personal authority.

Power forms depend upon power bases. Bases come from power resources—those individual and collective assets such as organization, money, reputation, personal appeal, manipulative skills, interpersonal skills, kinds of knowledge, information, indwelling Holy Spirit, giftedness.

The central concept of authority is the right to exercise influence. That right is recognized both by leader and follower. It is based upon common assumptions about the field of influence. For a spiritual leader the field of influence has to do with God’s purposes and His directions for accomplishing specific aims that He reveals. Morality, corporate guidance, and clarification of truth are three aspects within the field of influence which define the leader's range of use of authority.

Table Phm 4-1 details a number of important concepts that help clarify how a leader influences.
Table Phm 4-1. Influence, Power, Authority Concepts Defined

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Influence, Power, Authority Concepts</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Power forms</td>
<td>Power forms refer to four general terms of influence means: force, manipulation, authority, and persuasion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Force</td>
<td>A force power form refers to the use of physical and psychic influence means to gain compliance. This form is now rarely used by spiritual leaders though historically it has been used.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manipulation</td>
<td>A manipulative power form refers to any influence means whereby a leader gains compliance of a follower where the follower does not have awareness of the leader's intents and therefore does not necessarily have freedom to exert moral responsibility in the situation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authority</td>
<td>An authority power form refers to influence means such as: coercive authority, induced authority, legitimate authority, competent authority, personal authority and spiritual authority. See definitions which follow in this Table Phm 4-1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persuasion</td>
<td>A persuasive power form refers to any influence means such as arguments, appeals or exhortations whereby the leader gains compliance of the follower yet protects the freedom of the follower to exercise moral responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coercive Authority</td>
<td>Coercive authority is the form of power in which a leader obtains compliance by using influence means such as threat of force or of punishment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Induced Authority</td>
<td>Induced authority is the form of power in which a leader obtains compliance by using influence means of promise of reward or some gain for the follower.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legitimate Authority</td>
<td>Legitimate authority is the form of power in which a leader obtains compliance by using influence pressure consonant with common expectations of the role or positions held by the follower and leader.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Competent Authority</td>
<td>Competent authority is the form of power in which a leader obtains or can expect (but not demand) compliance by virtue of acknowledged expertise in some field of endeavor. The authority is limited to that field of endeavor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Authority</td>
<td>Personal authority is the form of power in which a leader obtains or expects compliance (but can not demand it) by virtue of the follower's recognition of the leader's personal characteristics.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Machiavelli\(^{44}\) posited two real ultimate motivations: fear and love. For him, fear was the stronger of the two and hence a vital part of effective leadership. Jesus advocated love as the stronger. On the power continuum, those forms to the left of inducement all utilize the motivation of fear—they are categorized by the notion of involuntary reception of influence. Those from induced authority to the right all have in essence love as the primary motivation. They are categorized by the notion of voluntary reception of influence.

Hersey and Blanchard\(^{45}\) give terms which help us understand further the competent authority form. They use the term expert to indicate a person who has expertise, skill and knowledge about something so as to command respect from followers. In addition, they define information to indicate the leader's possession of information that is valuable to followers. Competent power includes this as well. From a Christian standpoint, giftedness—a God-given capacity—fits under competent power.

Two terms from Hersey and Blanchard help us understand further the personal power sub-form. Referent power is a type of power based on the leader's personal traits. Such a leader is usually liked and admired by others because of personality, sincerity, or the like. Modeling describes the Christian

\(^{43}\)Manipulation in general usually has only negative connotations in western societies since it usually implies influencing against one's wishes. While it is true that manipulation is usually bad, it does not have to be so. The definition above is neutral. It is the motivation behind and the ultimate purpose of the influence that is the key.

\(^{44}\)His views were published in the classic, The Prince.

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equivalent of this form. Follower are influenced by leaders they admire. They want to emulate them. Connection power refers to a type of power that arises because a leader has connections to influential or powerful people. In leadership emergence theory this is called networking power.

Leaders will need the entire range of power forms and authority forms in order to lead followers. It is helpful to know this as well as the negative and positive aspects of these forms.

Understanding Spiritual Authority Via Influence, Power, and Authority Concepts

Now we can examine that major trans-Biblical lesson I stated earlier.

Effective Leaders Value Spiritual Authority As A Primary Power Base.

While it will take a whole range of power forms to accomplish God's purposes to take immature followers to maturity, it should be the goal of spiritual leaders to move people toward the right on the power continuum so that they voluntarily accept leadership and follow for mature reasons. So, leaders who are concerned with developing followers should be continually using spiritual authority whenever possible. From our diagram in Figure Phm 4-1, spiritual authority is defined as a hybrid power form which includes influence via persuasion and authority, especially competent and personal. Legitimate authority frequently helps supplement spiritual authority but does not guarantee it. Notice the voluntary aspect of the spiritual authority definition.

Definition

Spiritual authority is the right to influence conferred upon a leader by followers because of their perception of spirituality in that leader.

An expanded clarification of this definition describes spiritual authority further as that characteristic of a God-anointed leader, which is developed upon an experiential power base that enables him/her to influence followers through:

1. Persuasion (a major power form),
2. Force of modeling (fits under the personal authority form) and
3. Moral expertise (fits under the competent authority form).

Spiritual authority comes to a leader in three major ways. As leaders go through deep experiences with God they experience the sufficiency of God to meet them in those situations. They come to know God. This experiential knowledge of God and the deep experiences with God are part of the experiential acquisition of spiritual authority. A second way that spiritual authority comes is through a life which models godliness. When the Spirit of God is transforming a life into the image of Christ, those characteristics of love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance carry great weight in giving credibility that the leader is consistent inward and outward. Both of these sources of spiritual authority reflect themselves dominantly via the personal authority form. A third way that spiritual authority comes is through gifted power. When a leader can demonstrates gifted power—that is, a clear testimony to divine intervention in the ministry—there will be spiritual authority. This source of spirituality buttresses the competent authority form. While all three of these ways of getting spiritual authority should be a part of a leader, it is frequently the case that one or more of the elements dominates.

Conclusion

Some closing observations on spiritual authority are worth noting:

1. Spiritual authority is the ideal form of influence that should be used by leaders.

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46See Dennis Wrong, Power--Its Forms, Bases, and Uses. New York: Harper and Row, 1979. He gives an excellent treatment of definitions as well as the dynamics of the forms. When certain forms are overused they tend to change to other types of forms.

47This is the model God uses with us as believers. He can force us to do things and sometimes does, but He always prefers for us to willingly obey.
2. Because of the responsibility of leaders, that is, they must influence—it will require more than just spiritual authority as a power base because of immature followers who cannot recognize spiritual authority.

3. Leaders must develop followers in maturity so that they can more sensitively see God’s use of spiritual authority in a leader.

4. Leaders who do not develop followers in maturity will find they have to use the less ideal forms of power (coercive, inducive, legitimate) more often.

5. These forms tend to degenerate toward the left on the continuum becoming less effective over time. This in turn often drives a leader to abuse his/her authority because of the need to force influence.

6. Spiritual authority, like any of the authority forms, can be abused.

7. Mature leaders never abuse spiritual authority.

8. Spiritual authority is ideally used to build up followers and carry out God’s purposes for them.

9. Leaders should treasure deep processing with God, knowing that God will use it to develop their spiritual authority.

10. Giftedness alone, even when backed by unusual power, is not a safe source of spiritual authority. Giftedness backed by godliness is the more balanced safe source of spiritual authority.

Jesus led almost totally by spiritual authority. Paul, having to deal frequently with immature believers, uses almost the whole range of authority forms. However, whenever Paul can he uses spiritual authority. Both of these models set the pattern for Christian leaders.

An awareness of what spiritual authority is and how it relates to the basic ways a leader influences forms a solid foundation upon which to move toward spiritual authority.

**Effective Leaders Value Spiritual Authority As A Primary Power Base.**

Do you value spiritual authority? Are you using it to influence specific groups of God’s people toward His purposes for them?

See **Articles, 20. Pauline Leadership Styles, 22. Spiritual Authority—Defined, Six Characteristics.**