



Turning Lost Students into Christ-Centered Laborers

THE SEARCH FOR LEADERS • J. Oswald Sanders

Promotion cometh neither from the east, nor from the west, nor from the south. But God . . . putteth down one, and setteth up another (Psalm 75:6-7).

Give me a man of God—one man,
Whose faith is master of his mind,
And I will right all wrongs
And bless the name of all mankind.

Give me a man of God—one man,
Whose tongue is touched with heaven's fire,
And I will flame the darkest hearts
With high resolve and clean desire.

Give me a man of God—one man,
One mighty prophet of the Lord,
And I will give you peace on earth,
Bought with a prayer and not a sword.

Give me a man of God—...one man,
True to the vision that he sees,
And I will build your broken shrines
And bring the nations to their knees.

- George Liddell

God and man are constantly searching for leaders in the various branches of Christian enterprise. In the Scriptures, God is frequently represented as searching for a man of a certain type. Not men, but a man. Not a group, an individual.

“The Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14).

“I beheld, and lo, there was no man” (Jer. 4:25).

“Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem and see...if ye can find a man...that executeth judgment, that seeketh the truth; and I will pardon it” (Jer. 5:1).

“I sought a man...that should...stand in the gap” (Ezek. 22:30).

Both Scripture and the history of Israel and the church attest that when God does discover a man who conforms to His spiritual requirement, who is willing to pay the full price of discipleship, He uses him to the limit, despite his patent shortcomings. Such men were Moses, Gideon and David, Martin Luther, John Wesley, Adoniram Judson, William Carey, and a host of others.



The supernatural nature of the church demands a leadership which rises above the human. And yet, has there ever been a greater dearth of God-anointed and God-mastered men to meet this crucial need? In a sense it has always been true that this type of dedicated leadership has been in short supply, for the simple reason that its demands are too stringent. “The Church is painfully in need of leaders,” lamented William Sangster. “I wait to hear a voice and no voice comes. I love the back seat in Synod and Conference. I would always rather listen than speak—but there is no clarion voice to listen to.”

The overriding need of the church, if it is to discharge its obligation to the rising generation, is for a leadership that is authoritative, spiritual, and sacrificial. Authoritative—because people love to be led by one who knows where he is going, and who inspires confidence. They follow almost without question the man who shows himself wise and strong, who adheres to what he believes. Spiritual—because a leadership that is unspiritual, that can be fully explained in terms of the natural, although ever so attractive and competent, will result only in sterility and moral and spiritual bankruptcy. Sacrificial—because modeled on the life of the One who gave Himself a sacrifice for the whole world, who left us an example that we should follow His steps.

The church has always prospered most when it has been blessed with strong and spiritual leaders who expected and experienced the touch of the supernatural in their service. The lack of such men is a symptom of the malaise that has gripped it. The clarion voices that used to make the pulpit the paramount influence in the land are tragically few. In a world aflame, the voice of the church has sunk to a pathetic whisper. It is the binding duty of those impositions of leadership to face up to the situation and do all in their power to see that the torch of a truly spiritual leadership is passed on to the younger men.

Leadership is often viewed as the product of natural endowments and traits of personality—intellectual capacity, force of will, enthusiasm. That such talents and scholastic attainments do greatly enhance leadership is beyond question, but these are not the factors of paramount importance in the spiritual leader. “The real qualities of leadership are to be found in those who are willing to suffer for the sake of objectives great enough to demand their wholehearted obedience.”

Spiritual leaders are not made by election or appointment, by men or any combination of men, nor by conferences or synods. Only God can make them. Simply holding a position of importance does not constitute one a leader. Nor does taking courses in leadership or resolving to become a leader. The only method is that of qualifying to be a leader. Religious position can be conferred by bishops and boards, but not spiritual authority, which is the prime essential of Christian leadership. This comes—often unsought—to those who in earlier life have proved themselves worthy of it by spirituality, discipline, ability, and diligence. Men who have heeded the command: “Seekest thou great things for thyself? Seek them not,” and instead have sought first the kingdom of God.

Spiritual leadership is a thing of the Spirit and is conferred by God alone. When His searching eye alights on a man who has qualified, He anoints him with His Spirit and separates him to his distinctive ministry (Acts 9:17; 22:21).

Samuel Logan Brengle was one of the truly great leaders of the Salvation Army. A man of scholarship as well as of singular spiritual power, he outlined the road to spiritual authority and leadership in challenging words: “It is not won by promotion, but by many prayers and tears. It is attained by confessions of sin, and much heart searching and humbling before God; by self-surrender, a courageous sacrifice of every idol, a bold, deathless, uncompromising and uncomplaining embracing of the cross, and by an eternal, unfaltering looking unto Jesus crucified. It is not gained by seeking great things for ourselves, but rather, like Paul, by counting those things that are gain to us as loss for Christ. That is a great price, but it must be unflinchingly paid by him who would be not merely a nominal but a real spiritual leader of men, a leader whose power is recognized and felt in heaven, on earth, and in hell.”

This is the type of man for whom God is searching, on whose behalf He desires to show Himself strong (II Chron. 16:9). But not all who aspire to leadership are willing to pay so exacting a price. However, God’s conditions must be complied with in secret before He will honor a man in public. Our Lord made it clear to James and John that there



is a sovereignty about leadership in His kingdom. The highest positions are reserved for those who have qualified in secret. It is this element of sovereignty that begets awe and a great humility in those to whom leadership is entrusted.

It remains to be said that there can be such a thing as inverted leadership. If those in positions of power and influence fail to lead their people into the spiritual uplands, they will unconsciously, yet nonetheless surely, lead them down into the lowlands, for none can live to himself.

Give me men to match my mountains,
Give me men to match my plains,
Men with empires in their purpose,
Men with eras in their brains.

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