Leadership By Vocation: A Thematic Study in Exodus 3:1-4:17

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Nowadays a great hunger for leadership is manifested in the world in many forms. It is a need observed not only in religious setting but in all areas of life activities. It is a long time since a wide range of treaties and models on leadership are proposed to our thinking making the idea of leadership a very hot academic topic and a new trend for school curriculum.[1] The overall purpose of these models is to enhance leader's capacities and make easier the understanding of the contemporary task of leadership. We retain that generally success and failure are the outcomes to measure the models.

Life processes and relationship between people in ordinary life as in work place is codified so that all human relations are seen through the frame of achievements resulting from the influence of the leader. Researches and findings are numerous enough to justify a necessary elevation of the study to the rank of an academic

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[1]For ideas on leadership program see C. L. Brungardt, "The making of leaders: A review of the research in leadership development and education," *The Journal of Leadership Studies* 3 (1996): 81–95; see also C. L. Brungardt, L. V. Gould, R. Moore, J. Potts, "The emergence of leadership studies: Linking the traditional outcomes of liberal education with leadership development," *The Journal of Leadership Studies* 4 (1997): 53–67; J. C. Rost, *Leadership for the twenty-first century* (NY: Praeger Press, 1991); J. C. Rost, R.A. Baker, "Leadership education in colleges: Toward a 21st century paradigm," *The Journal of Leadership Studies* 7 (2000): 3–12; *Guide to College Majors in Leadership* (n.d.). What is Leadership and Organizational management? http://www.worldwidelearn.com/online-education-guide/business/leadership-major.htm; J. P. Doh, "Can leadership be taught? Perspectives from management educators," *Academy of Management Learning and Education* 2 (2003): 54–67; S. Daloz Parks, *Leadership can be taught: A Bold Approach for a Complex World* (Cambridge: Harvard Business School Press, 2005).

program where it is taught. Teaching leadership[1] is a tremendous task requiring nowadays a specialty because it aims to make literate people in that field so that they can take great responsibility. Even though Stogdill[2] considers that a replication is part of the game in those researches, and it seems that the findings are not without pertinence.

The importance of the subject is assessed by the interest that every institution and domain covering any social venture show in its pursuit. We have reached the point of a fruitful diversification of leadership covering education, business, public administration, healthcare and religious domain. These specificities are far from being divergent but instead it seems that we are facing a great adaptation of the basic principles of all the times. The main ideas include: influence, role, function, style, excellence, service, strategy, task, result or even a call what is in fact approaches by competency.

While recognizing the great benefit of theses advanced steps in leadership study, a space still needs to be filled when it comes to consider leadership in religious setting. In the secular or better the academic writings that are philosophically, sociologically, psychologically task-oriented good insights are laying down and they are useful but the divine realm implied in religious leadership requires more than rules edited just for a man to man relationship with a passion for results. The goal of this study is exactly to point out from a closer look of the vocation narrative of Moses, a model of leadership that has its very basis in the vocation of the leader.

The first section is an overview of the appointment of a leader with an emphasis on the source of leadership and the role of a leader. The origin of this source is found outside of the leaders and the role appears to be unlinked to any choice for leaders cannot depart from it.

Section two is a text focus approach in exodus 3-4 to discover five aspects of a leadership by vocation. The study favors a thematic approach to underline the constant quest of specific disclosure, understanding or even misunderstanding in the narrative. We will refer to this dynamic as knowledge in the following lines for we consider these five aspects as knowledge components of leadership by vocation model. This first part of the study is in fact the theoretical framework of the model which includes not the executive aspect of leadership that we find later in the Exodus-wilderness journey.

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[1]Scott Snook, Nitin Nohria and Rakesh Khurana, *The handbook for Teaching Leadership: Knowing, Doing and Being* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2012), 35-45.

[2]Ralph Stogdill M, *Handbook of Leadership: A Survey of Theory and Research* (NY: Free Press,1974), vii.

1. The Appointment of the Leader

Two important headlines in a presentation of George Barna[1] have drawn my attention and remain in my mind when it comes to reflect on leadership. The first one is that nothing is more important than leadership putting in front row the great desire or necessity of leadership in any culture, perspectives and activity. The truth is that this statement expresses simply but clearly the very basis of this quest of leadership.

The second is: churches must be led by leaders. From this stand I understood that not theologian, evangelist or administrators have the capacity to lead the church but precisely it is the task of leaders. Following the sequences of this idea we end up with a list of spiritual requirements including characteristics and competencies. In the plethora of outstanding works on leadership, the great question of the appointment of the leader seems not to be the primary focus. In this section we want to explore briefly this aspect for it determines the attitudes and the actions of every leader.

1.1. The Source of Leadership

The starting point of our considerations is the source of leadership itself. Bass has underlined two types of leadership simply resumed in transactional and transformational. Both describe a relation between employer and employee where rewards and aspirations are the playgrounds for the greater possible performance.

Max Dupree acknowledges that "One examines leadership beginning not with techniques but rather with premises, not with tools but with beliefs, and not with systems but with understandings."[2] Going further to the premise of Max it is also recognized that in the religious setting the source of leadership should come from God to be relevant. The religious writers understand the "calling"[3] as the real source of any spiritual leadership.[4]

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[1]George Barna, *Leaders on Leadership: Wisdom, Advice and Encouragement on the Art of Leading God's People* (California: Regal, 1997), 17-18. .

[2]Max De Pree, *Leadership Jazz: the Essentials Elements of a Great Leader* (New York: Dell Trade Paperback, 1993) quoted by J. Thomas Wren in *the Leaders Companion: Insights on Leadership Through the Ages* (NY: Free Press, 1995), 453.

[3]Harris W. Lee, *Effective Church Leadership: A Practical Sourcebook* (Silver Spring: Ministerial Association General Conference of SDA, 2003), 27. Barna, 25.

[4]For sake of clarity, the term spiritual leadership equates in this study the

From that stand we can easily say that the appointment in a leadership position is not necessary a call of God. The spiritual leadership intends that it is not a personal choice neither a community decision. It is a vocation having its source outside of the leader and without human criteria. Even though the concept of the calling as source of leadership is well known it is however a great challenge to recognize a vocation.

1.2. The Role of a Leader

If the role of the leader is mostly expressed from the wide range definitions of the term itself, a common ground between them is the orientation towards the achievement of a task or the pursuit of a goal. This achievement is the satisfaction brought by a specific kind a management model under the competence of an emblematic figure. The natural upshot of the calling is that the role of the leader is to be obedient to the caller as understood in Moses experience. All the task descriptions and the skills[1] usually considered in forefront for a leader are vanished when God is the caller. Human will or human agenda are diluted for the leader has just to obey to the caller. While leadership in general is task oriented or people oriented, the leadership by vocation is to be seen as God oriented from the call throughout the execution to the job satisfaction.

The call itself is not enough to qualify the leadership, for it requires a response of the called with the obedient role to make the difference. The desirable effectiveness of the leader lays on God leadership effectiveness on the leader so that his role is well understood from the degree of his pliancy in God's hand. Submission and obedience constitute his qualifications and moreover there are blended with his role.

2. Five Aspects of Knowledge in Moses Vocation Narrative

The narrative of the vocation of Moses as retraced in the specific call in Exodus 3-4 shows a thematic scheme that help us enhance

religious leadership.

[1]Aubrey C. Daniels and James E. Daniels, *Measure of a Leader: the Legendary Leadership Formula for Producing Exceptional Performers and Outstanding Results* (NY: McGraw-Hill, 2007), 63.

the leadership by vocation. Far from being in quest of a position or accepted as leader of the community Moses was doing one's stint when he confronts God or vice versa. This confrontation is in fact a clear mark of the necessity of a positive response or an acceptation for a call to become vocation. The call remains a theory until the precise implementation makes it vocation. This implementation is based on the knowledge as inner experience of the leader. In the Case of Moses five elements from the dialogue in chapters 3 and 4 shape this knowledge that determines his vocation as leader of the Hebrew people.

2.1. Knowledge of the Mandator

In the Exodus account of the encounter at the burning bush Moses stopped to meet and recognize the mandatory. The theophany was necessary to identify the caller who presents himself as the God of Abraham (v.1-6). By saying that he wants to see the great sight (*mareh*), Moses expresses the desire to know deeply or by experience what is happening in the bush. God did not leave any space for speculation about the call. In fact it is quasi impossible to serve and obey an unknown God.

More than a feeling, the call to leadership in a vocation is clearly stated and the caller identified. It could be interesting that human leaders stop for a moment in their busy lives to test the real motifs of their services. It is easy to serve the self, the love for a particular ministry, the people or God, the pursuit of an honor. In leadership by Vocation the main question is then: who or what calls you? Personal choice and acceptation of people acclamation reveal themselves insufficient to lead God's people.

As Moses did at the burning bush, the necessity of a full stop is urgent to see the invisible and explore the possibility of knowing who the real mandator is.

2.2. Knowledge of the Mandate

The text of Exodus gives also another aspect of the necessary knowledge of the one that is called. In verses 7- 10 we read that God has already made the evaluation of the situation and has decided about the intervention. The verbs in this section like I see, I hear, I know, show the in deep knowledge of the case and the engagement

for it. More than the evaluation, the project is already set and the mandate was clear. The mandate is not centered on the capacity of the leader but on God Himself. Seven times the first person common singular is used for God in addition to the three mention of the possessive pronoun "my." The mandate is revealed to Moses and there is no need to add or redefine the strategy for the mandatory had surely seen (ra'oh ra'iti) the necessity. The leader chosen and called by God has to execute God's plan. Moses knew then that a mandate is in order. Without a clear mandate our capacities and even interventions are vain even though they are conceived with the best intention that could exist. A plan for God's People does not come from the leader but from the Mandator.

2.3. Knowledge of the Mandatory[1]

A third aspect of knowledge in the text rise at the question of Moses about himself saying: Who am I? Face to the gigantic mandate, it is a must for the mandatary to acquire self knowledge. After meeting the God of promises, an urgent insight drives the appointed leader to ask himself who am I. In Exodus 3:11-22 Moses is rolling out weakness, fears and concerns with a response from God in each case. The earlier experiences related in the preceding chapters suggest that the competencies and skills necessary to do such task are not reliable and did not give good results. It seems that the leader is casting a shadow on his formation, skills, and talents and experiences that he born with or the one he gains from the schools of Egypt. The stage of humility is the greatest level of leadership by vocation and stressing too much on the leader could mean putting aside the mandator.

The question about himself and the answers of God seem to indicate that they are not talking the same language. Moses is talking about himself God answers by saying not you but me. Who am I? I will be with you. What is your name? I am. I would like to underline that the concern of Moses is God Himself. Who am I? ... I am. It is not important to stress of self because God is " I am"; the task does not necessitate first self whether we call it skill or competence but it requires the great "I am". Measuring his capacities to the mandate makes the leader often vulnerable, weak and at the end fake for the sake of success.

[1]The term mandatary is used in the study to express the idea that the leader is someone that receives a mandate as representative.

2.4. Knowledge of the power of the Mandator

A great challenge for leader is associated to success and failure. The necessity of appropriate attitudes, skills and competencies are taught in order to enhance leader's performance. However in our text we discover again that another important aspect for the leadership by vocation is to rely on the power of the mandator. From verse 2 to 9 in Exodus 4 we find a great demonstration of the power of God, the required tool for leadership.

Two great signs are performed to persuade Moses of the feasibility of the project. The experience of the power of God is the fulcrum of a leader for his vocation. A leader is not ready to work for God people if he does not experiment this power, for the actions are grounded not in the possibility or capacities of the leader but in the power of the mandator. The realization of the plan is not either the success of the leader (mandatory) but the manifestation of the glory of God, the mandator. Moreover after performing the two signs Moses is informed that is not the limit, for God can perform other miracles (v. 9).

2.5. Knowledge of the Sovereignty of the Mandator

The remaining verses of the chapter present a misunderstanding of Moses about God. From verses 10 to 16, we can see excuses to avoid the vocation by refusing God's call. Moreover it is an error that often leaders made when it comes to decide who hold the supremacy in our decision. The great challenge of leadership is to have things done according to the leader's view while in the leadership by vocation leaders are executing mandator's command. Thinking that we would have the last word in our life, it is not surprising that leaders that are called choose to depart from the call and concentrate on their capacities to have the job done. The vocation stand elsewhere for it requires submission and obedience and it is happen only when the callee recognizes the sovereignty of the caller in his life. Leadership by vocation necessitates then a dedicated life. Moses tries to escape by excuses (4v.10) and even by open rejection (4v.13) but the mandator concludes by divine *fiat* and asks him to take the rod and go.

Conclusion

From the example of Moses calling in Exodus 3-4, we observe that leadership should not be seen only in terms of capacities, traits, skills and competencies. These are parameters of success while the leadership by vocation is more centered on the source and appointment of the leader. In relation to God's people, the mandator is God, a particular man is a mandatary and the mandate is designed by the mandator. The only reliable capacity for the task is the power of the mandator while submission and obedience to the mandator are signs of a vocation which is the positive response to the call. Five aspects of knowledge are essentials for the vocation.

First the knowledge of the mandator, then the knowledge of the mandate, after that we find the self knowledge followed by the knowledge of the power of the mandator to end with the sovereignty of the mandator. The leadership by vocation is God centered and it makes a huge difference with other models that are people centered, auto centered and task centered. It is measured not by the success or the failure of the leader but by the glory of God.