SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY ACROSS CULTURES: LEADERSHIP, CULTURE & THE HOLY SPIRIT – EAST AND WEST

By

D. Michael Crow

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Crow, D. Michael

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CHAPTER 1
RESEARCH DESIGN

I had been troubled for days. I sought God repeatedly about my agony and guilt, but couldn’t get free of a distorting anxiety of spirit. It was early 1983 in Bogor, in the mountains of Java, Indonesia, and I was scheduled to teach morning and evening sessions for one week in a YWAM DTS (Youth With A Mission, Discipleship Training School, a six month program consisting of three months of lectures on character and spirituality, followed by three months of evangelism and outreach).

Monday morning I taught as scheduled on knowing God, his character and his ways. The host complimented my Indonesian. I was grateful for our language training and especially for the opportunity Katie and I had to live with Ibu Betty Tan, an Indonesian woman who put aside her English for the six months we lived with her.

That afternoon I cried out to God, but the turmoil persisted. I taught the evening session as scheduled, then stayed up until 2 A.M. seeking God. Still I found no answer. On Tuesday I taught as usual, while a sense of distance from God wrenched my soul. I skipped lunch and went to my knees, “Lord, I can’t do this anymore. I can’t teach another word until You tell me what to say. I only want Your will, and nothing else.”

At last the Spirit of God exposed the root of my sin. This was my first time teaching in a DTS, and I wanted to do a good, no … a great job! I spent months in
preparation. This would be the best teaching on knowing God these students had ever heard! They would be “wowed” by my portraits of God’s character. I could see their mouths dropping open as they got a better glimpse of God. I could picture them sitting awestruck at the gracious words that fell from my lips! Soon they would applaud this source of light and wisdom, knowing that a great teacher had been in their midst!

Gently, unerringly, the Holy Spirit nailed the wretched pride in my heart. Preoccupied with my teaching, my focus had changed. In my heart of hearts, I was trying to impress them with me and my teaching, and not with God Himself! Conviction went deep as I repented of a self-aggrandizing arrogance that would use an opportunity to glorify God to exalt self instead. Cleansing and peace refreshed my soul.

At last I could move on. “Lord, what would You have me teach tonight?” What the Spirit seemed to say surprised me. “Confess your sin then sit down. Do not teach tonight.” I was startled, but had learned my lesson. Obedience to God was more important than talking about God. I spent the rest of the day resting in his Presence.

The worship that night was deeply refreshing. Finally, Brother Alexi turned the meeting over to me. I thanked him, then said, “Saudara-saudari …” “Brothers and sisters. For two days I have taught you many good concepts about knowing God. As far as I know, it was all right and true. But I have had no rest of spirit. My heart has not been right before God or before you. I have been trying to impress you with myself and my teaching, and not with God. God has convicted me of my sin, and I confess this now to you. I have been wrong. Please forgive me.” I bowed my head in silence.
Brother Alexi and several staff put their arms around my shoulder to pray for me. After prayer, they sat down, expecting me to teach. I stood there for a moment, and said, “The Lord has shown me that I am not to teach tonight. I don’t have anything else to say. Thank you for your forgiveness and your prayers. I hand the meeting back to Brother Alexi.” I sat down, expecting them to close the meeting and have a night off.

Brother Alexi sat still in his chair for a few moments, then stood. The twenty or thirty Indonesian young people sat quietly, reverently. Brother Alexi said, “The Lord has also convicted me of a sin I need to confess.” He shared and asked the students to pray for him. Then another staff member confessed a sin and asked for prayer. Then one of the students in a back seat walked to the front to repent and ask for their prayers. Another, and another and still another came. Soon there were students and staff lined up waiting in turn to confess their sins and ask for prayer.

The meeting continued in this way for the next two and a half hours. I could hardly believe my eyes. The Spirit of God was dealing with many deep issues in their lives. He was bringing breakthroughs and freeing people from sins I had no idea they were struggling with. It was an awesome moment in the presence of God. Spiritual authority had truly been at work! The rest of the week went great as we contemplated together more of God’s nature and character. The Spirit of God met us all.

I would be dishonest if I left you with the impression that this was the whole story. By Friday, I tried to reproduce another time of “openness and brokenness,” as it is known in YWAM. I taught, shared some of my own struggles, then sat down expecting
the same thing to happen again. The atmosphere was strained. Some shared a few insignificant things. I closed the last session early, feeling it had been a “dud.”

I felt disappointed. Only later I realized I had tried to manipulate the Spirit of God into meeting us in the same way as he had met us a few days before. I felt like Peter, who confessed Jesus’ messianic nature, then turned around moments later to reprove his Messiah for contemplating the Cross. He had voiced revelation from God, only to be rebuked later as a mouthpiece of Satan (see Mt 16)! How powerful is the influence of our own thought on what God wants to do through us by his Spirit!

This experience gave me a taste of how God works in spiritual authority. Seven lessons about spiritual authority come to mind:

- Spiritual authority is always consistent with, and never contradicts biblical authority. But it also goes beyond biblical authority, in the sense that it operates not by the letter, but by the Spirit of the Word.

- Spiritual authority is entirely antithetical to the elevation of self over God. It always glorifies God above all else. It is passionate about exalting Christ.

- Spiritual authority occurs in broken repentance in response to the promptings of the Spirit of Christ. It recognizes and responds to the immediate, contemporary work of the Spirit. It will always be characterized by holiness before God.

- Spiritual authority models vulnerability, authenticity and obedience to God, beyond conventionality. It is willing to violate the expected in order to obey God.

- In Indonesia’s stratified and layered culture, my confession as a person of status (teacher) was highly unusual. Yet God used it, with the support of Indonesian leaders who followed my lead, for spiritual impact.

- Spiritual authority is dependent on organizational ethos and follower responsiveness. In a non-YWAM setting where “openness and brokenness” are not permissible responses, the effect on the hearers may have been quite different.

- Spiritual authority cannot be mimicked and manipulated. It is dependent above all on what God is doing and our alignment with Him, and not on what we do.
Purpose and Goals

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the nature of spiritual authority and its relationship to the cultural dynamics of leadership. My goals are to:

1. Overview some key biblical concepts about spiritual authority, and summarize how the concept has evolved in the centuries since.

2. Survey the primary theoretical perspectives related to spiritual authority, especially in regard to leadership and charisma.

3. Explore the cultural contours of leadership to see how culture shapes leadership expectations and thence how spiritual authority relates to culture.


5. Suggest a generalized pattern of how spiritual authority develops in a leader over a lifetime based on two longitudinal case studies of spiritual authority.

Significance

This material will help anyone who wishes to lead and minister with spiritual authority, especially cross-culturally. It will assist non-Western leaders in seeing their own valuable cultural contributions to leadership. It will also facilitate cross-cultural leaders in working through issues of leadership, transition and indigenization.

I have shared parts of this material with leaders from Asia, Africa, Europe and Latin America, as well as with ethnic minorities in North America. Repeatedly, missionaries have said, “Why hasn’t anyone told us about this before?” Nationals have resonated with these ideas, finding their own cultural leadership patterns affirmed rather than ignored. They have felt liberated to scrutinize and critique the inherent Western values and assumptions of so much teaching in the name of “Christian leadership.”
Problem Statement

The central issue addressed in this dissertation is the relationship between culture and spiritual authority among Asian and Western Christian leaders.

Research Questions

1. What does Scripture and church history teach us about the nature of spiritual authority and how the concept has developed over time?

2. What can the concept of charisma tell us about the nature, practices and possible dangers of spiritual authority?

3. What is the role of culture in shaping leadership expectations and how does this relate to spiritual authority?

4. What can the “ideal” experience of spiritual authority of contemporary Asian and Western Christian leaders teach us about spiritual authority across cultures?

5. What are some prominent growth patterns in the development of spiritual authority throughout a leader’s lifetime?

Preview: Where are We Going?

Our exploration of the dynamics of spiritual authority across cultures begins with an introductory look at spiritual authority itself in Chapters 1, 2 and 3. Chapter 1 introduces the research design, then defines and clarifies the nature of spiritual authority, suggesting a Componential Model of Spiritual Authority. Four of the dimensions will be discussed in detail, though all seven will be noted throughout the study.

Chapter 2 looks at spiritual authority in Scripture. In the Old Testament (OT), Moses, Samuel, Saul, David, Jeremiah, Haggai and Zechariah reveal characteristic dynamics at work in and around spiritual authority. In the New Testament (NT), Jesus’ spiritual authority demonstrates a person-precept-purity-power dynamism, which he then
delegates to us. Paul’s defense against the Corinthian coalition exposes some socio-cultural and political subtleties involved in exercising spiritual authority.

Chapter 3 scans church history, showing how the concept of spiritual authority vacillated between pneumatic and institutional extremes in the centuries since Paul. It illustrates how sociological dynamic both impacts and is influenced by theology.

Chapters 4 and 5 move to a second theme, the concept of charisma. In Chapter 4 classical charisma explores the interaction of leaders, followers and their affinity to cosmic order. Psychological charisma looks at the intra- and inter-personal aspects of leadership. Neo-charisma demystifies charisma, showing the power of morally self-transcending leadership, identifying key competencies for inspiring the same. The alternative charisma of Chapter 5 warns of the spurious and sinister that can happen in the name of spiritual authority. Seven biblical criteria discern eight examples of charisma that could masquerade as spiritual authority or be used as ideologies of dominance.

Chapters 6 and 7 transition into the third major focus of this study, an examination of what I call the “cultural contours of leadership.” This includes six cultural sculptors of leadership expectations, including: civilization, nationality, inter-personal dynamics, family structure, concepts of power and historical cosmology. It begins with a global perspective then narrows to Asian and Chinese concepts of leadership expectations. These six sculptors provide the matrix for understanding the “three-by-seven” model of spiritual authority across cultures in the chapters to follow.

Chapters 8, 9, and 10 introduce the fourth focus of this study, my 1997 survey on spiritual authority among leaders at the Asian Missions Congress II (AMCII) in Thailand.
These chapters bring convergence to the discussions of the nature of spiritual authority, charisma and the cultural contours of leadership. The heart of this dissertation, the AMCI survey analyzes how 110 leaders from fifteen countries view spiritual authority operating in their lives in an optimum experience. This is spiritual authority at its ideal.

Chapter 8 introduces the AMCI survey instrument, methodology, and demographic profile of the respondents. It provides a “sampler” of their experiences in spiritual authority plus their cognitive-affective-evaluative reflections on that experience. Chapter 9 utilizes factor analysis to isolate three dimensions and seven behaviors of the “ideal” in spiritual authority based on these experiences. Chapter 10 uses grounded theory to explore how the “Best” and “Worst” in spiritual authority was seen by Asians and Westerners. ANOVA (analysis of variance) identifies the cultural nuances of this spiritual authority experience for five regions of the world. This three-by-seven model of spiritual authority, plus its macro-cultural variations, is my unique contribution to Christian leadership theory on spiritual authority across cultures.

Turning from this “snapshot” of the ideal in spiritual authority, Chapters 11 and 12 survey the fifth theme of this study, a long-term, panoramic view of spiritual authority. It uses two case studies (J. Hudson Taylor and Watchman Nee) to identify growth patterns in spiritual authority over a lifetime. Lifespan development theories provide a backdrop for my four-stage pattern of development in spiritual authority, and its “checklist” for growth.

Chapter 13 reviews the findings of this study, integrating the multiple paradigms for analyzing spiritual authority by applying them to the lives of Taylor and Nee. It
suggests a seven-step process for developing a personal spiritual authority profile. This chapter closes the dissertation with a striking biblical example of spiritual authority across cultures, showing how radically divergent the results can be (revival or murder) when the same pneumatic power is viewed from different cultural perspectives.

**Theological Assumptions**

My theological assumptions concur with general evangelical convictions, including: the final authority of Scripture, the supremacy and uniqueness of Christ, the sinfulness of humanity, the atoning work of the Cross, reconciliation to God through repentance and faith, the present work of the Holy Spirit and Christ’s second coming.

**God and Inclusive Language**

Regarding the use of inclusive language in reference to God, I recognize that God is neither male nor female, but stands above gender. The Chinese word ta¹ and the Indonesian words ia or dia are not gender specific, but are generalized pronouns that can refer to either “he,” “she” or “it.” All three words can refer to God without gender connotations. Inclusive language for God is a non-issue for Indonesians and Chinese.

While the Gospels certainly use feminine descriptors to reveal God’s nature, the majority of descriptors are masculine (e.g., Jesus refers to God as “Father” not “Mother,” though feminine characteristics are implied in some passages, such as Mt 23:37 “as a hen

¹ There are two romanized spelling systems for Chinese words (Wade-Giles and Pinyin). For quotations, I follow the system used by the author quoted. Elsewhere I use the newer Pinyin system.
gathers her chicks’"). This proclivity toward the masculine is partly due, no doubt, to the original cultural settings in which Scripture was composed.

Language is culturally determined, in the case of gender, as in many other aspects. As this dissertation shows, there are horizontal and vertical cultures (as well as many others). Scripture does not seem to favor one over another. Fuller students are advised in “The School of World Mission Doctor of Philosophy Handbook” to use “horizontally nondiscriminatory language” with reference to God (SWM Doctoral Advising Team 1999:19). But this seems to be a culturally-determined issue. Western culture is largely horizontal or egalitarian in its orientation. While I am personally and deeply committed to the value of both men and women in ministry, I do not feel that Western-based egalitarian values of non-gender-specific language with reference to God are universally applicable. This seems to impose Western cultural values on Scripture, on the words of Jesus and on other cultures seeking to be faithful to Scripture.

Because this dissertation is in English, I will use English pronouns. But English only has three pronouns, “he,” “she” and “it.” The impersonal connotations of “it” seem inappropriate to use with reference to God in light of the personal imagery of God in Scripture. “She” does not seem to fit the generalized picture of God in the Gospels.

In this dissertation, I have opted to use masculine pronouns with reference to God. I do so, not to say that God is inherently masculine, but more in line with the imagery of God most often used by Jesus. This appears to be more faithful to Scripture, while neutralizing the influences of Western culture on gender-related language issues. With reference to human beings, I consistently use non-discriminatory language.
Christology and Spiritual Authority

I am unashamedly evangelical in my convictions. I believe that genuine encounter with God is possible only through the elimination of the barrier to such encounter, human sin. I also hold that sin has only been atoned for in the Cross of Christ. Christ as mediator, fully God and fully Man, is therefore the one and only means of genuine encounter with God. A Christology of uniqueness (Christ is the only way of knowing God) draws us irreversibly to this conclusion.

My view of spiritual authority likewise assumes the exclusivity of Christ. Apart from Christ working through a person by the Holy Spirit, there is no spiritual authority (although there are many varieties of counterfeit spiritual authority as we will explore in a later chapter). I take the position that Christ is the only mediator to bring human beings to God (Jn 14:6; Ac 4:12; 1 Tim 2:5); Christ is likewise the only mediator of true spiritual authority to human beings influencing others for God (2 Cor 11:4).

Delimitations

This study is delimited in two ways. First, although much has been written about the authority of Scripture, very little has been written about spiritual authority as such. This dissertation is not about scriptural authority, but spiritual authority. At the same time, everything written here about spiritual authority is gladly submitted to the judgment of Scripture as the final standard of truth.

Second, for me, spiritual authority is primarily concerned with pneumatic leadership, or leading and ministering in the Spirit. This may or may not include such
issues as spiritual warfare, exorcism of demons, power encounter, inner and physical healing, signs and wonders and the like. Fuller Seminary professor Charles H. Kraft has pointed out that spiritual warfare, the cosmic conflict between God and Satan “is the essential backdrop from which to interpret the Bible and discover what spiritual authority is all about” (Kraft 1997:33).

I recognize this cosmic conflict and have seen the operation of signs and wonders in my own ministry. Nevertheless, there are instances, biblical and extra-biblical, historical and contemporary, in which spiritual authority operated very strongly, but supernatural signs and wonders as such did not occur.

In that sense, spiritual authority is a larger umbrella covering spiritual warfare and signs and wonders, but which also speaks to the powerful work of the Spirit without overt manifestations of miraculous power. Many of the same dynamics are at work in each. Indeed, as my survey findings show, the power dimension of spiritual authority constitutes one of three primary orientations of spiritual authority.

**Methodologies**

A variety of methodologies are used in this dissertation, depending on the material under discussion. The biblical studies required an array of exegetical methods. In the development and analysis of my survey at the *Asian Missions Congress II* in Pattaya, Thailand (Sept 30–Oct 3, 1997), focus group methodologies and quantitative statistical methods were used including: descriptive analysis, factor analysis, reliability analysis and analysis of variance (ANOVA). In the biographical materials, a qualitative
grounded theory approach was used, informed by anthropological and case study methodologies. Each methodology is explained as it is encountered in the text.

A further note on grounded theory: grounded theory is “derived from data, systematically gathered and analyzed” (Strauss and Corbin 1998:12). One of the comparative techniques used in grounded theory is “systematic comparison” which compares “an incident in the data to one recalled from experience or from the literature. The purpose of this comparison is to sensitize the researcher to properties and dimensions in the data that might have been overlooked” (1998:95).

It is probably already evident to the reader that on occasion the text draws on my own personal experience and that of others from my survey data and from the literature. This is done intentionally to introduce and/or illustrate the concept being discussed and to identify dimensions “that might have been overlooked.” Hopefully it also makes the reading of this dissertation more interesting, readable and applicable.

**Definitions**

In this dissertation, the term “leader” (and synonyms) is used in the broadest sense to mean any person who influences others in a given direction. This may include popes or housewives, pastors or plumbers, missionaries or misfits. The term “followers” (and synonyms) is used to refer to those so influenced.

The Greek word *pneuma* means “Spirit (of God); inner life, self, … spirit being or power, … wind, … breath” (Newman 1971:145). In the title and throughout this dissertation the adjective “pneumatic” (and cognates) refers to various aspects of
leadership originating either in the inner life of a person, in the Spirit of God or in another spirit being. Usually it refers to the Holy Spirit. When referring to another kind of *pneuma* (human or demonic) this is made clear in the context.

The central topic of this paper is spiritual authority and how it is expressed and understood across cultures. Before we proceed, we need to take a closer look at the nature and meaning of spiritual authority itself. How do we define spiritual authority?

**What is Spiritual Authority?**

What happens when the Transcendent One penetrates the veil protecting this empirical world from the splendors and terrors of the invisible beyond? The writer to the Hebrews describes the reaction of Israel and Moses to the most dramatic intrusion of the divine recorded in the Old Testament, God speaking at Mount Sinai:

> You have not had to approach things which your senses could experience as they did in the old days--flaming fire, black darkness, rushing wind and out of it a trumpet-blast, a voice speaking human words. So terrible was that voice that those who heard it begged and prayed that it might stop speaking, … So fearful was the spectacle that Moses cried out, “I am terrified and tremble at this sight!” (Heb 12:18-21, Phillips Version).

The invasion of the divine on earth always caused a dread sense of awe, joy and wonder. We saw it in Abraham’s night-time sacrifice and in Jacob’s wrestling with the angel; in Moses before the burning bush and in Joshua’s encounter with the Lord of hosts; in Samuel’s hearing the voice of God and in Solomon’s request for wisdom; in Ezekiel’s vision of the wheels and in Jeremiah’s struggle with his call.

The New Testament records the same numinous power of the Holy. Zechariah, Joseph and Mary are told not to fear the angel’s appearance. Peter begs Jesus to leave
since he is a sinful man. The three “inner disciples” fall on their faces at the brilliance of Jesus’ transfiguration. Saul (Paul) is struck blind by his encounter with the risen Christ and John falls at his feet as if dead on Patmos. Whenever the living God “stoops down to look on the heavens and the earth” (Ps 113:6), the awesome powers of heaven break into the ordinariness of this world, and human beings are transformed.

This was especially so in Jesus’ cross and resurrection. In some mysterious way, the passion event becomes the touchstone and transforming pivot for every person who encounters the living God. As God invaded human history once in Christ two millennia ago, so he has invaded innumerable human lives since, by means of a faith encounter with the crucified and risen Christ.

The Bible records scores of “divine invasions” as mentioned above, with Christ as the culminating hinge-point and lightning rod of spiritual experience. But what is the nature of this experience, especially when passed from one human being to others?

I define spiritual authority as the working of God’s Spirit through a leader’s calling, giftedness and spirituality to influence others toward God’s revealed purpose. It is an invasion of the divine in Christ, by which God penetrates the empirical veil of created existence through a willing vessel, to exert a transformative influence by the power of the Spirit on others for God’s glory. It occurs when God communicates his purposes through a person in harmony with him to affect a restorative influence on other human beings. Spiritual authority is characterized by a sense of God’s presence, a sense of destiny or calling, godly character, spiritual gifting, and divine working to fulfill his
revealed purposes. It grows out of our being before God, our communication of his Word, and the power of his Spirit working through our gifting.

Is there a paradigm by which we can frame our study of spiritual authority? The following discussion builds a working model of the seven components of spiritual authority, which resurface in various ways throughout this dissertation.

What are the Components of Spiritual Authority?

Iredell Jenkins saw authority (in general) as a triadic relationship between leaders, followers and purposes. “Authority is vested in rulers or governors; it is acknowledged by subjects or citizens; it is directed toward definite values or goals” (1976:36). He went on to emphasize that all three components must be present, though any element may dominate. If one element is entirely displaced by the others, “then authority as such vanishes, to be replaced by despotism [absence of follower willingness], anarchy [absence of leadership], or apathy [absence of purpose]” (1976:37).

Aristotle (385-322 B.C.) presented a similar model in his exposition of rhetorical persuasion, an important element of authority. He spoke of the character of the speaker (ethos, custom), the feelings and reactions of the audience (pathos, passion) and the logic of the discourse (logos, word) (see Hayes and Holladay 1987:74-75). Aristotle’s three-fold model parallels Jenkins’ three components of authority: leader, followers and purpose or vision.

These three components, (ethos—the character of the leader, pathos—the response of the followers, and logos—discourse, purpose or vision) represent an anthropocentric
view of authority. God is not in the picture. But there is no spiritual authority apart from God. What would a theocentric view of authority or spiritual authority look like?

R. Baine Harris differentiated between “(1) Ultimate Religious Authority, such as God or Brahmin and (2) Representative Religious Authority, such as a religious individual or a church who ‘stands for’ ultimate religious authority” (1976:136).

Richard T. De George said that God “exercises his authority over [human beings], whether or not they recognize him and his authority…. Divine authority is exercised by God; … religious authority … is exercised by human beings” (1985:218).

Religious authority is exercised by people to represent God. When the pope authorized the Inquisition, he exercised religious authority. But was that spiritual authority? Is there a difference between using religious status as authority to do things in God’s name, and God’s working through a person with spiritual authority?

Spirituality mentor, Richard J. Foster, in his book Celebration of Discipline (1978) insisted that spiritual authority does not reside in external religious symbols or acts of authority. True spiritual authority originates, not with people, but with God.

Authority does not reside in positions, or degrees, or titles, or tenure, or any outward symbol. The way of Christ is in another direction altogether: the way of spiritual authority. Spiritual authority is God-ordained and God-sustained. Human institutions may acknowledge this authority or they may not; it makes no difference. The person with spiritual authority may have an outward position or may not; again, it makes no difference. Spiritual authority is marked by both compassion and power. Those who walk in the Spirit can identify it immediately (1978:108, emphasis his).

In his Idea of the Holy (1917), Rudolf Otto coined the term “numinous” based on the Latin numen to refer to God’s “Majesty and Mystery and superhuman Otherness”
Otto urged us to recall a deeply-felt religious experience. Such experiences evoke a feeling that is “qualitatively different … [a sense of] creature-consciousness … overwhelmed by its own nothingness in contrast to that which is supreme above all creatures…. The numinous is thus felt as objective and outside the self” (Otto 1950:9-11). This “mysterium tremendum,” is an experiential sense of God. It stirs within us strong ebullitions of personal piety … thrillingly vibrant and resonant … up from the depths of the soul … leading to the strangest excitements, … to transport and to ecstasy…. It may become the hushed, trembling, and speechless humility of the creature in the presence of … mystery inexpressible and above all creatures (1950:12-13, emphasis his).

Otto suggested five “elements” in this numinous experience of “the Holy.” These include:

1. THE ELEMENT OF AWFULNESS: A terror … an inward shuddering …. something spectral … “religious dread” … the quality of exaltedness and sublimity…. the soul, held speechless, trembles inwardly to the farthest fibre of its being …. A mystical awe … Something supra-rational throbs and gleams, palpable and visible, … prompting to a sense of “terror” (1950:13-19).

2. THE ELEMENT OF “OVERPOWERINGNESS” (“MAJESTAS”): Absolute unapproachability … overpoweringness … aweful majesty … the annihilation of the self, … the transcendent as the sole and entire reality … supreme and absolute … the finite self contrasted with it becomes conscious even in its nullity that “I am naught, Thou art all” … consciousness of the littleness of every creature in face of that which is above all creatures (1950:19-22).

3. THE ELEMENT OF “ENERGY” OR URGENCY: Vitality, passion, … impetus…. a force that knows not stint nor stay, which is urgent, active, compelling, and alive … the “mysticism of love” … “consuming fire,” whose burning strength the mystic can hardly bear (1950:23-24).

4. THE “WHOLLY OTHER:” [A] blank wonder, an astonishment that strikes us dumb, amazement absolute…. The “wholly other” … quite beyond the sphere of the usual
the “supramundane,” … above the whole world order … absolutely and intrinsically other…. The “transcendent” and “supernatural” become forthwith designations for a unique “wholly other” reality (1950:25-30).

5. THE ELEMENT OF FASCINATION: daunting “awefulness” and “majesty” … uniquely attractive and fascinating … horror and dread, but at the same time … a potent charm … that captivates and transports … a strange ravishment … and rapture … Possession of and by the numen … is sought for its own sake … a beatitude beyond compare … a bliss which embraces all … the tongue can only stammer brokenly … the beatific vision of God (1950:31-35, emphasis his).

The Vision of the Missionary Flames

In 1982, in a small sitting room at Mount Alvernia Hospital in Singapore, I was meditating on Daniel (11:32b, KJV), “but the people that do know their God shall be strong, and do exploits.” Katie was being examined upstairs for the birth of our twin boys, Christopher and Bryan. I was excited about their birth, but something more was stirring inside. My heart was crying out, “O God, I want to know You more deeply than I’ve ever known You before. And Lord, I want to do exploits for Your Kingdom!”

Suddenly a hush came over the room. No one was there but me … and the Presence. It seemed he wanted to speak to me. I could only bow and worship in silent anticipation. Then I felt as though I was caught up in a rush of swirling wind. I could see in my mind’s eye a map of Asia. Singapore was glowing brightly like a ball of fire, and small flames where shooting out from it in all directions across Asia. I sensed him say to me, “I want you to train Asian missionaries for Asia’s unreached peoples.”

I could hardly contain my exhilaration. I could only utter worship, praise and thanksgiving. God had called me to a task for Him, bigger than I had anticipated, and for furthering his cause among Asia’s unreached peoples! I was ecstatic.
But this soon turned to anxiety. In spite of two years of ministry among Natives in Canada, two years in Indonesia, and one year in Singapore, I was only twenty-nine years old. I felt so inexperienced. I was both elated and terrified! How could I fulfill this dream? Overwhelmed, I whispered, “It’s too big for me. I can’t do it.” Later I heard someone say, “If your vision doesn’t scare you half to death, it’s probably not from God anyway!” I qualified; I was scared. Yet despite my sense of inadequacy, and the discouragements of others, an inner passion persisted that refused to be quenched.

This vision was given to me in 1982. God took another six years to prepare me in Singapore, Europe and USA, before bringing me back to start Bethany School of Missions (BSM) in Singapore in 1988. During that time as I contemplated God’s call and prepared to fulfill it, I learned to share that vision as part of the foundation of my spiritual authority for launching and expanding BSM.

BSM is now indigenized under Singaporean leadership and graduates are serving in sixteen countries across Asia in evangelism, church planting, leadership training and social ministries. Now BSM is educating teams of trainers to start new missionary training schools in nine countries across Asia and Africa. Missionary flames are going out to the nations! God is fulfilling the vision!

**A Componential Model of Spiritual Authority**

From my own “deeply-felt religious experience” of the vision of the missionary flames, I recognize Otto’s five elements of the “numinous” as integral to spiritual authority. “Spiritual authority is God-ordained and God-sustained” (Foster 1978:108). It
begins and ends with God. Here is the most essential element in our model of spiritual authority, the numinous Presence of God, with its sense of dreadful awe, overpowering majesty, compelling urgency, transcendent “Otherness,” and beatific fascination. A working model of spiritual authority incorporates the numinous in Christ with the three components of authority discussed earlier (ethos, pathos and logos).

A fifth important component in any model of spiritual authority includes the reality of spiritual powers seeking to usurp or obstruct the work of Christ in people’s lives. Evil powers (Greek, daimonia, demons) attempt to interfere with the leadership process, as we shall see in Paul’s conflict with the Corinthian intruders.

A sixth component is the situation itself, the context (Latin contextus—to weave together, connect) surrounding the leadership conversation. Jesus’ leadership took on a different flavor when he was confronting the scribes and Pharisees, as opposed to his personal interaction with the disciples in the upper room. The impact of contextus on spiritual authority shows up clearly in the lives of Nee and Taylor in Chapter 11.

A final important component in the spiritual authority model is the historical residue (Greek histos), which shapes the current profile of both leaders and led. Paul may have responded very differently to the Judaizers had he not developed such penetrating insight into the futility of justification by works through his own history as a Pharisee (Ac 23:6; 26:5; Phil 3:5). Chapter 7 examines the historical influences (histos) shaping Chinese concepts of power and how this affects leadership today.

All seven components play a role in the exercise of spiritual authority. Each has its own influence in any leadership situation, as suggested in Figure 1.
In order to make our discussion more manageable, I am limiting my focus to four of the seven components: numinous, ethos, pathos and logos. I will refer to the other components in passing throughout the paper, but the main thrust of this study will be on these four components. The reader is referred to other excellent works for addressing the other components (daimonia), (contextus) and (histos). 


3 See Clinton’s “Tree Diagram of Leadership Elements” (n.d.:80).
In spiritual authority, a continuous interaction arises between *ethos* (leader), *pathos* (followers), *logos* (message, vision or purpose), and *numinous* (God’s presence). Spiritual authority is the working of God’s Spirit (the *numinous*) through a leader’s calling, giftedness and spirituality (*ethos*) to influence others (*pathos*) toward God’s revealed purpose and intention (*logos*). Each of these four components must be present for genuine spiritual authority to occur. If one is obliterated, distortions emerge and spiritual authority is lost. Kept in proper proportion, spiritual authority occurs and God’s purposes are furthered.

**Spiritual Authority and Other Forms of Authority**

Before we proceed, we need to distinguish between spiritual authority and other types of authority. It is helpful to see what spiritual authority is, and what it is not.

**Spiritual Authority and Supernatural Power**

An important distinction must be made between spiritual authority and supernatural power. They are closely related, but are not the same (see Figure 2).

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Moses demonstrated both high spiritual authority and supernatural power in the Ten Plagues. Jeremiah demonstrated high spiritual authority in predicting the fall of Jerusalem, but low supernatural power (he performed almost no miracles). Samson showed high supernatural power, but low spiritual authority, especially in his moral failures. Pilate was low in both areas. Spiritual authority is not supernatural power.

**Spiritual Authority and Charismatic Authority**

The concept of charisma is closely related to spiritual authority, but they are not the same (see Figure 3). Apollos displayed both high charisma and high spiritual
authority in Ephesus and Corinth. Paul’s conflict with the Corinthian intruders suggests that Paul was low in charisma, but high in spiritual authority. The intruders were high in charisma, but low in spiritual authority. Pilate was low in both areas. Spiritual authority is not charisma. We will return to this important theme again in Chapter 4.

**FIGURE 3**

**SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY AND CHARISMA**

**Spiritual Authority and Moral Authority**

A subtle but important distinction exists between moral and spiritual authority. Moral authority can happen without spiritual authority, but the reverse cannot occur.
In Figure 4, Billy Graham, Mother Teresa and Nee represent high levels of both moral authority and spiritual authority. Gandhi admired Christ, but rejected him as the only Savior of humankind. Gandhi, Muhammad and Buddha demonstrated high moral authority, but apart from Christ had no spiritual authority. Saddam Hussein, Bill Clinton (in his Monica Lewinski scandal), and Larry Flint’s pornography demonstrate low levels of both moral and spiritual authority. It is not possible to have low moral authority and high spiritual authority (Quadrant C). Moral authority and spiritual authority are closely related, but are not the same.
Spiritual Authority and Positional Authority

A person with spiritual authority “may have an outward position or may not; again, it makes no difference” (Foster 1978:108). A person can have high positional authority, but be low in spiritual authority. The reverse may also be true. Figure 5 relates spiritual authority to positional authority in the case of various biblical leaders.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quadrant A</th>
<th>Quadrant B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hi</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>James (Acts 15)</td>
<td>Caiaphas</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quadrant C</th>
<th>Quadrant D</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeremiah</td>
<td>Ananias &amp; Sapphira</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FIGURE 5

SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY AND POSITIONAL AUTHORITY

In Quadrant A, James demonstrated a high level of both spiritual authority and positional authority as he led the Jerusalem Council discussions (Ac 15). Jeremiah had very low positional authority in the years approaching the destruction of Jerusalem by the
Babylonians, although he certainly had high spiritual authority, in that he accurately represented God’s heart for Judah at that time. Caiaphas had high positional authority as high priest in the time of Jesus, but obviously had very low spiritual authority. Ananias and Sapphira had neither positional nor spiritual authority (Ac 5). Positional authority can serve spiritual authority or supplant it. In discussing alternative charisma in Chapter 5, we will examine the nature of positional power abuse by spiritual leaders.

**Spiritual Authority: Intrinsic and Extrinsic**

Finally, an important distinction must be made between intrinsic spiritual authority (ISA) and extrinsic spiritual authority (ESA). In his “Biblical Leadership Commentary” (1999a) J. Robert Clinton defined spiritual authority from both an extrinsic (follower) perspective and an intrinsic (leader) perspective:

> From the standpoint of the follower, spiritual authority is the right to influence, conferred upon a leader by followers, because of their perception of spirituality in that leader. From the leader’s perspective spiritual authority is that characteristic of a God-anointed leader, developed upon an experiential power base—giftedness, character, deep experiences with God—that enables him/her to influence followers through persuasion, force of modeling and moral expertise (1999a:167).

Foster made the same point in a different way: “Spiritual authority is God-ordained and God-sustained [ISA]. Human institutions [ESA] may acknowledge this authority or they may not; it makes no difference” (1978:108). Thus spiritual authority has two important loci, which must always be kept in view (see Figure 6):

- **INTRINSIC SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY (ISA):** Refers to God’s authoritative presence and power at work in and through a person who represents him and communicates his purposes to a particular group of people. Its primary locus is in the relation between God and that leader.
• **EXTRINSIC SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY (ESA):** Refers to how followers respond to a leader whom they perceive represents God’s authority, presence, power and purposes. Its primary locus is in the relation between a leader and his/her followers and in how those followers respond to that leader and to God.

![SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY: INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC](image)

**FIGURE 6**

**SPRITUAL AUTHORITY: INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC**

Nee, Taylor, Jesus at his transfiguration and Paul in Ephesus all demonstrated high ESA and ISA. There was a deep spirituality that others recognized and responded to. Jeremiah, Moses at Korah’s rebellion, Jesus on the Cross and Paul with the Corinthian intruders all exhibited high ISA (God working through them), but encountered
low ESA (human recognition). The Corinthian intruders, Peter at Antioch, and Jimmy Swaggart (before his pornographic exposure) displayed high ESA but low ISA.

A missionary was visiting the pastor of his home church who said, “God is really moving in the church!” Knowing of some problem situations in the church, the missionary asked, “In a church this large, how do you know God is moving?” The pastor answered, “This year our collection came to $1 million!” The missionary answered, “If that’s the case, then God must be moving through Donald Trump too!”

Is popular response or hefty giving the measure of the movement of God’s Spirit? Not necessarily. This confuses ESA with ISA. Just because ESA is strong, does not necessarily mean ISA is present. We must discern ISA by other criteria. The findings of my survey among 110 leaders in Asia (especially the three-by-seven model of spiritual authority in Chapter 9) help provide some of these criteria.

ISA centers on the relation between God and a leader. ESA centers on the relation between leader and followers. ESA depends to a significant degree on culturally conditioned leadership expectations. The relationship of ISA to ESA, or “spiritual authority across cultures” is the central theme of this dissertation.

The Essential and the Peripheral in Spiritual Authority

The above comparisons (spiritual authority and positional authority, supernatural power, charisma, moral authority and ISA/ESA) help us recognize what is indispensable and what is not in spiritual authority. Figure 7 summarizes seven essentials that are always present when spiritual authority is operating. If one of these is missing, spiritual
authority is skewed and caricatures of true spiritual authority appear. Figure 7 also takes note of the peripherals, those elements which may or may not accompany the exercise of true spiritual authority.

**FIGURE 7**

**THE SEVEN ESSENTIALS OF SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY**

Spiritual authority is the presence and activity of Spirit of God at work in and through a godly leader by means of his or her calling, gifting, character and vision to influence others towards the purposes of God in Christ. The way this influence is expressed and interpreted is colored by the cultural expectations of both leader and led.
ESA and Cultural Nuance

This dissertation assumes a biblical epistemology (“how we know what we know”) regarding spiritual authority. The Bible presents many ways of “knowing” (visions, dreams, inner voice) beyond the traditional empirical means of knowing (the five senses). Spiritual authority senses the movement of the Spirit permeating the “membrane” separating Creator and creature (ISA), then communicates those divine intimations to others (ESA) in culturally appropriate ways. It is thus bi-directional:

- **RECEPTION OF DIVINE INTENT (ISA):** Spiritual authority begins by discerning divine intention via biblical insight, visions, dreams, God’s voice, gifts of the Spirit, guidance and so on. Voicing that intent via one or more of the five senses releases divine power on this side of the membrane. Spiritual authority is the result.

- **TRANSMISSION OF DIVINE INTENT (ESA):** This must be communicated to others effectively. The human side of spiritual authority is infused with cultural nuance. Spiritual authority reads the divine as it permeates the membrane, and influences others in culturally appropriate ways to align with that divine intent.

While ISA may be the same in terms of the operation of God through a leader, ESA must be expressed differently with different kinds of followers. In addition, ESA and ISA have their ebbs and flows. They can vary over time with a single group of followers. They also vary among different groups of followers.

When Paul preached in Ephesus, “all the Jews and Greeks who lived in the province of Asia heard the word of the Lord” (Ac 19:10). Churches were planted in Ephesus (Ac 19:1; 20:17), Laodicea, Hierapolis and Colosse (Col 4:13-16). He or his disciples may have also planted the other famous churches of Revelation (Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and Philadelphia, Rev 2 and 3). Paul’s ISA and ESA were both high. At the same time, across the Aegean Sea in Corinth, the false apostles were
eroding Paul’s ESA by calling into question his ISA, based on cultural, financial and political issues (see my study of 2 Cor 10-13 in Chapter 2). A faction in the Corinthian church attributed high ESA to these intruders, though in fact they had low ISA, as we shall see in our study of Paul. ISA and ESA are related but are not the same.

**FIGURE 8**

**TWO LOCI OF SPIRITUAL AUTHORITY**

Figure 8 presents the two primary loci in spiritual authority and also suggests the importance of cultural differences in extrinsic spiritual authority. All leadership, including spiritual leadership, is “extraordinarily sensitive to cultural nuance” (Pye 1985:vii). While the “upward” dimension of spiritual authority sensitizes itself to the
intimations of the *numinous* (ISA), the “downward” dimension of spiritual authority is nuanced by cultural dynamics that shape one’s view of leadership and influence (ESA).  

**Personal Background**

Where am I coming from when I talk about spiritual authority across cultures? What is my background and how has it affected my views on this topic?

**Ministry, Education and Organizational Experience**

In 1971, I had an experience in which I found God in Christ (or rather, he found me). Later that year I was filled with the Spirit and God called me to teach and preach his Word. Twelve months later God called me into missions. I moved to Minneapolis, MN where I studied at Bethany College of Missions (BCOM) from 1972-75.

After graduation in 1975 and marriage to Katie, we served as house-parents in Canada among Native Americans for two years. We worked as missionaries from 1980-1982 in Indonesia among Javanese and Chinese. We moved to Singapore in 1982 to serve as DTS staff (trainers-counselors) for a year and a half among people from many nationalities. We then worked with YWAM in Holland, Belgium and Yugoslavia until 1984. In 1984-85 we returned to USA and I lectured at BCOM. We returned to Singapore in 1985 where I served as co-pastor of Church of Singapore-Jurong. In 1988 I started Bethany School of Missions (Singapore) to train Asian missionaries. BSM(S)

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5 Note the parallels in Figure 8 with the inspiration of Scripture. Evangelicals believe God inspired both author and text, while retaining the characteristics of each author (Paul, Luke, John, etc). Liberals believe God inspired (in a general sense) the author, but not the text. I hold an Evangelical view of the inspiration of Scripture, and see loose parallels between spiritual authority and the Liberal position. God may inspire prophetic utterances, etc, but they do not have the accuracy and authority of Scripture.
was indigenized in 1994 and expanded from training Asian missionaries to training trainers to start new missionary training schools in other parts of Asia and Africa.

In 1995 we moved to Pasadena, California for our studies at Fuller Theological Seminary. Katie received her M.A. in Intercultural Studies (focus on cross-cultural counseling). I received my M.A. in Intercultural Studies (focus on leadership) and am now finishing my Ph.D. Intercultural Studies (focus on cross-cultural leadership).

Organizationally, we have worked with Arrowhead Foundation (1975-77), Bethany Fellowship Missions (1977-99), Youth With A Mission (1981-84), Church of Singapore-Jurong (1985-95) and Bethany School of Missions (Singapore) (1988-95). In 1999 we joined Church Resource Ministries.

**My Own Sculptor of Leadership Values**

From 1980-95 I served as a missionary in Indonesia and Singapore, with increasing leadership responsibility. Although I worked with many ethnic groups throughout those fifteen years, the group I worked with most and learned the most from in terms of leadership and culture were the Chinese, especially in Singapore.\(^6\)

Singapore is a society shaped by four major cultures of the world (Chinese, Malay, Indian and British) and all the major religions of the world (Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, ancestor worship, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism and Christianity). It uses four major world languages (English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil), plus dozens of

\(^6\) I am especially grateful to Church of Singapore–Jurong (a bi-lingual church using English and Mandarin), which invited me to serve as co-pastor, elder, and on their church board (1985-95). This gave me an invaluable perspective on spiritual authority in a Chinese context. Interaction with Chinese Christian leaders in Indonesia and Malaysia also contributed valuable insights.
other dialects. It operates with a government and legal system inherited from the British, yet molded by Asian values, which reshape those influences profoundly.

A small country (4 million people on an island twenty-six miles long and sixteen miles wide), Singapore’s sophisticated technology is fully interfaced with the international economy. It has produced a very modern, efficient nation-state that has progressed rapidly under strong and capable leadership since it was founded in 1963.

The church in Singapore (as well as in other Southeast Asian countries) has grown dramatically in the last thirty years. The number of Christians has increased from two to twenty percent, the majority as converts from other religions. Churches are young, energetic and evangelistic. Missions has become a major part of their vision.

Serving in the dynamic church setting of Singapore (and Southeast Asia) for a decade and a half profoundly impacted my understanding of the multiple influences that shape Christian leadership. Sifting through these has caused me to contemplate some of the more universal fashioners of cultural leadership expectations and how spiritual authority operates within those expectations. But before we look at the cultural contours of leadership in spiritual authority in any depth, we must first ground ourselves in the Scriptures, in order to formulate a biblical view of spiritual authority.