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Lessons on Power and Authority for Today's Conservatives

It is vital that those on the political right — those who are for constitutionalism, liberty, biblical morality, and traditional society — properly understand the principles of power and authority. A comprehension of these concepts is important to be able not only to effectively and ethically wield them for the good of the nation, but also to safeguard oneself against those who use them for evil.

Specifically, this article deals with the subject of charismatic authority, which is one of three forms of authority upon which the leadership of a society may be based, the other two being traditional authority and rational (or legal) authority.



Luis Miguel

I have chosen to look more closely at charismatic authority because of its utility for the dissident Right. Given that the Right has largely been shut out of influence from the top institutions and generally lacks the kind of money the establishment is so effectively able to use to access instruments of social influence (advertising, media coverage, etc.), right-wing activists must find alternative ways to acquire the power with which to effect change.

However, before delving any further into this topic, it's crucial to distinguish between the two separate, yet related, concepts of power and authority.

Power, simply, is the ability or capability to make others act according to one's will. In social dynamics, at the most basic level, the foundation of power is the force of violence. Societies are predicated on the fact that those in power are able to compel the populace to comply with the law by use of violent force.

While in primitive society brute strength is the initial source of power, other assets become keys to power as society grows larger and more complex. Money, for example, can be a source of power. While a rich man is not inherently powerful, he can use his money to obtain power by buying weapons and armies (as would have been the most common course of action in ancient societies) or buying the loyalty of politicians (the most common road to power for the wealthy today).

Personal influence — the ability to persuade minds, stir hearts, and lead men — has always been a source of power. This is because even in the most primitive societies, the raw, physical strength of the individual only gets him so far. No matter how strong a man is, or how skilled with a weapon, he cannot compete against the united force of several enemies.

As a result, from the oldest of times, those who obtained power were not necessarily the strongest, but those with the greatest personal magnetism and charisma — the men most skilled at inspiring, motivating, leading, and organizing the masses.

This brings us close to the subject of charismatic authority, which involves those who are able to use the force of their charisma to obtain political power.

But it is indispensable to understand that political life is predicated not only on power, but also on



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authority. And authority is not only the power to compel, but the *right* to do so. Authority is when subordinates view the leader as having legitimacy to give directives.

Think of America's occupation of Afghanistan. The United States had the greater power. But they never had the authority, the claim to legitimacy. As a result, the occupation was always bound to fail, and as soon as the U.S. military left, the Taliban — which succeeded in winning the fight for legitimacy among the people there — immediately assumed power.

Charismatic authority is when a leader's legitimacy is based on his having a powerful charisma which sets him apart from other men. Traditional authority is when authority is derived from custom (such as the patriarchal leadership of fathers). Rational, or legal, authority is what we usually see nowadays — authority based on the law and established legal institutions.

What is important to understand is that these three types of authority often work in a sequence. Usually, societies begin with a powerful leader who rules by charismatic authority. Eventually the government becomes formalized and, after the leader's passing, the regime creates rules by legal and traditional authority.

The sociologist Max Weber wrote that charisma is "A certain quality of an individual personality, by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader."

Now that we understand how power and authority are acquired, and the transcendent primacy charismatic authority has over other forms of authority, we can apply this to the present day:

Part of the reason the conservative movement has not succeeded as hoped is because it has often attempted to be too intellectual, believing that appeals to reason will make all the difference. However, the reality of human nature is that men are not rational creatures and are more moved by self-interest and emotion than by reason.

The ideas that propelled Donald Trump into the hearts of millions of Americans were articulated by many intelligent men and women before him, but it took someone with his charisma to breathe fire into the movement. Despite his mixed record, he remains the man who, in the eyes of many Americans, is the only one capable of defeating the Deep State. Whether or not he is deserving of that trust, that is the unwavering concept millions have of him.

For those on the right, greater effort must be made not only to educate and inform, but to prepare a new generation of patriots who know how to lead. Without the qualities of leadership, even the best ideas will go nowhere.



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