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Remarks, delivered at Lake Shore Chapel in Douglas, Michigan on July 29, 1979

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Lake Shore Chapel
Douglas, Michigan
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When we look back into human experience, we see that mankind has ordered life in various ways. The family, the tribe, the nation have had different characteristics in different cultures. There have been times when new bursts of insight have transformed the life of the species. Certainly the life and teachings of Christ as they were recorded and passed on through generations profoundly affected life on this planet. Discoveries in the fields of natural and physical sciences have changed the nature of day to day living for most human beings.

As we study history, see the differences among people, analyze the changes, and seek to ascertain how and why we have reached our present condition, we discover that the evolution of life over centuries, with all its variety, contains some constant characteristics. For instance, no matter how backward or advanced a society, authoritarian or democratic it may be, large in numbers of people or small; no matter what conditions confront the society, it selects and bears the stamp of leaders. There are revolutions that overthrow the once powerful, there are groups and individuals who decry and mistrust those who lead and bear responsibility for decisions, but leaders emerge even leaders of the anti-leader movements.

Leadership is a fact of human life. The nature and quality of it may change in different situations or times, but wherever there are groups of individuals joined together for any purpose, one or some (usually a few) will become more dominant than others.

When there is a crisis in leadership there is likely to be a crisis in the organization or the society. This can be the herald of change, the symptom of something wrong, or perhaps just a call for minor adjustment.

The subject of leadership has become the subject of this sermon because our society, one that traditionally subjects leaders to criticism and even abuse, is having severe difficulties with authority, who should exercise it, and those who attempt to lead.

No religious or political movement brings a new level of consciousness or condition of life without strong, credible leaders. Most, if not all, religions are leader dependent. What is there that leadership provides that makes it an essential element in the life of the human species? There are five functions of leadership that I believe must be fulfilled if a society is to survive successfully.

First: Leadership must maintain order. When a society breaks down in chaos, it will remain that way for only a period of time. Human beings cannot stand heavy doses of chaos. They will pay a high price to be relieved from it. We try through law, religion, and value systems to shore up order. Leaders, working through these systems, which leaders themselves have helped evolve, try to maintain order. If they fail, new leaders will emerge. They may be better or worse, but they will be there, and no society will have stability until they are in place.

Second: Leadership must provide justice. I don't mean justice within the existing legal system alone, but justice as a sense among the population that life is reasonably fair according to the values of the society. This requires an acceptable distribution of wealth and redress for serious grievance. It leads to a feeling among people that life as they understand it and can live it is essentially good.

Third: Leadership must recognize potential achievers. In the study of history I am always impressed how the vigor and success of a society in the

long run depends upon intelligence and human energy. The rights of kings or class, or family cannot withstand the force of intelligence and human energy. Leadership will replenish itself. Attempts to fix leadership with a certain class or family may succeed for awhile, but it will not prevail. People are blessed if their society has a value system and leaders that consciously provide for those who are naturally endowed for leadership roles in all fields to rise to the level of their competency - let the cream rise to the top. That is a natural law, and it is the responsibility of leaders to see that it is not violated.

Fourth: Leaders must pursue new levels of consciousness and understanding. There appears to be a life force that drives the human species, not letting it remain the same. No reasonable person can say that the human race today is identical to the human race 5,000 years ago. Discovery leads to discovery and with it new understanding, new perception about the nature of life. Somewhere among the leaders must be those who can help people understand where the life force is carrying them, and what they need to perceive in order to avoid personal or group chaos or physical or psychological destruction. These are the people who help prepare the mind and the spirit for the world in which they live and will live in the future.

Fifth: Leadership must ascertain the conditions of life in the near future. This function is akin to number four, but not exactly the same. The fourth function calls for preparation of the mind and spirit; the fifth for a prediction of potential events and conditions. How will people feed themselves, transport themselves, work, play, etc. If no attention is paid to future events, society may not be prepared, and subsequently be thrown into turmoil. There is a clairvoyance about leadership. Without it there will be a crisis in leadership.

In a world of people with many cultures, differing levels of ability and perception, it is virtually impossible for these five functions to be carried out with equal effectiveness. That is why we as a species have such great social and personal failures. Yet, when in some part of the globe, they combine in proper proportion, people over a period of time, move to a new life. Leadership is one of the most important ingredients in the survival of the species. The converse of that is that perverted leadership contains the possibility of the destruction of the species. For leadership to be truly successful for a significant period, all five functions must be in evidence. The absence of one will insure, I believe, the final demise of the leadership and subsequent revolution, chaos, or a dark age.

I have talked about the functions of leadership, now I will turn to the characteristics of the leader. Let me do that by listing seven axioms for the good leader. Their value may not be limited to leaders alone, but the best of leaders should and do follow them.

1) Do not lie. There is a difference between not lying and telling the truth. For reasons of state, personal relations, or common sense, the leader may decide to avoid telling all he or she knows. There is a place for secrecy and privacy that we are losing, a sign of an insecure and untrusting or untrustworthy society. To overtly lie is to openly attempt to mislead, to make people believe something that is not, and thereby injure their ability to perceive life as it is. Correct perception is important for correct understanding, and people must understand in order to live full lives and ultimately survive. When a leader's lie is discovered the whole fabric of the society or organization is rent. Mistrust results and is always accompanied by confusion, confusion carried to the extreme is chaos.

2) Listen intelligently. Leadership is not provided in a vacuum. For awhile a leader may be able to lead without listening, but his or her effectiveness will not last indefinitely. The feelings of people, the conditions in which they live, and how they react to them are the fuel for leadership. When they are comprehended by the leader he can then work. Without knowing them the leader will sputter. The leader's world becomes unreal without a knowledge of them. Just as any person who loses touch with reality, he will be set aside from making decisions to live in his own little world.

3) Take pleasure in assuming responsibility. The leader usually enjoys exercising influence or authority. The leader likes to be where the action is, and as often as not accepts being the center or near the center of attention with satisfaction. To lead requires a large ego, and an abundance of self-confidence. The society is fortunate if the leaders who emerge are emotionally healthy rather than people whose mental scale is tipped toward the neurotic. The true leader at the height of effectiveness may agonize over decisions, but never over the fact that he or she is the person with the responsibility for making decisions.

4) Communicate with the constituency. Just as the leader must listen to people, so must the leader speak to the constituency in a way that they feel a personal attachment to him or her. The medium may be different for different leaders, but it must illicit response or the speaker loses the ability to lead. Often men and women will hold offices that have the authority and responsibility for leadership, but they fail to communicate to people. Their leadership begins to atrophy. Christ was one of the world's most effective leaders because his thoughts, which are the basis of our religion, had the force of profound insight; such force, that others seized

upon it and became communicating leaders in his name. The leader cannot hide under a bushel for any length of time.

5) Avoid arrogance. The greatest pitfall for the leader is arrogance. It is easy to imagine what happens to a person's self image when he or she is often the center of attention, has the ability or authority to make people do his or her bidding. There have been successful yet arrogant leaders, but arrogance is like cancer. Sometimes it kills quickly and sometimes slowly. It is really an inhuman quality. It is true that some people are superior in intelligence, energy, personality, physical skill to others, but the recognition of this factor does not justify arrogance. Religion, particularly the teachings of Christ, have recognized the human situation; that there is a difference in talent and ability, but there is an equality in the value of the soul, of the individual's identity. When that is accepted, there is no room for arrogance. The great danger of arrogance to the leader is that it encourages others to destroy his influence.

6) Provide time for thinking and reflection. When I have been working solely with people, moving from one appointment to another, one party to another, dictating letters, making decisions, I begin to feel like a battery run machine with a defective generator. The generator is the private time for reading, deciding what to believe, what to eventually say. The leader needs regeneration, from time to time. Without those quiet regenerating hours, the leader cannot carry out the five functions of leadership, particularly the pursuit of new levels of consciousness and understanding, and predicting conditions of life in the future.

7) Understand to whom you are responsible. The leader is always dependent upon those whom he or she tries to lead. That simple fact is not always perceived. People can turn on a good leader and cast the leader aside.

There is vulnerability to leadership, and the leader should always recognize it. In any country where there is freedom of speech and assembly, this vulnerability is always evident. In politics particularly the leaders must know to whom they are responsible or they will not be leaders for long, and even if they do, they may not lead indefinitely. Leadership must eventually satisfy the needs of the led. This may bring popularity and approbation or abuse and defeat. In either case, the leaders must know why they stood where they did, and acted in the manner they chose to act. In the final analysis the leader knows that he must act for his constituency, but he must also act according to his own personal understanding of life. He is responsible to those whom he seeks to lead, but also to himself. If those two responsibilities diverge the leader may have to go in the shade for awhile and hand over the mantle of leadership to another.

On the national level we have had and do have leaders who exemplify the characteristics I have listed and some who have fallen at great cost to the society and themselves because they did not have them. There is no question that life is becoming more complicated for us and for the leaders. The problems of energy, distribution of wealth throughout the globe, the phenomena of multinational corporations, a press that has more of a wolfpack instinct, a labor movement that is all too often shortsighted in the way it tries to serve itself, capitalism that has not served all the needs of man, socialism or communism, the antidote to capitalism, that has proven itself inadequate, and certainly has spent the creative force it may have had, formidable challenges to the value systems of the recent past - - all the uneasiness about the future because we are not sure of those elements which sustained physical life and moral purpose in the past place leadership in crisis. Leaders react in different ways to these crises. We may ask too much from leaders. It may becoming one of the most difficult

periods in the history of our nation for consistent, strong leadership to assert itself without being undermined. But eventually it will for it is in the nature of life to do so. This is true on the national level and on the local level where we live our daily lives.

When we examine the characteristics of leadership, the axioms that have been presented, we come to understand that they are axioms for all of us. In some respects nearly everyone has influence over the lives of others. All of us need to exercise a leadership role sometime, with some people. It is in our best interest and in the interests of those around us to incorporate the characteristics of good leadership in our own lives, and give our loyalty and trust only to those who have given evidence of them in theirs.