

*Sacrifice the Leader:  
How to Cope When Others Shift Their Burdens On to You*

Paul L. Cox

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As a leader, who among us has not felt like we have become the sacrifice when someone has shifted their stuff onto us or have blamed us in order to cover their own issues? I suspect that most of us have experienced something like this. Certainly those who have served the parish have experienced this dilemma.

This book attempts to recognize and deal with this issue. The author states, "As a Baptist pastor I had experienced who would tell me confidential issues in their lives and then, within a few months, either turn against me or leave the church. I realized that in some way I had become the sacrifice for their sins, rather than the Lord Jesus."

(1) He goes on to say that all Christian leaders can be placed in the position of sacrifice.

Author information on the cover says that Cox is a graduate of Pepperdine University and holds a "graduate degree in theology." After some time on his website, I could not find a complete biography. From a blog, I discovered that his degree is from the California Graduate School of Theology and it is a D.Min.

Dr. Cox has pastored churches for over 20 years in American Baptist Churches, USA. He served as president of the Ministries Council of the Pacific Southwest and on the board of the denomination. He and his wife, Donna, are co-directors for Aslan's Place in Hesperia, CA. It is designed to "bring freedom and wholeness to the wounded and captives." He and his wife have three children and seven grandchildren.

The book seems to be a blend of biblical, theological and psychological principle, somewhat like the first part of many D.Min. projects. The chapter titles show that this is true: The Leader as Sacrifice; Is Sacrifice Necessary?; Which Root Word does the Bible Use to Describe Sin?; What Do We Do With Our Guilt?; Someone Needs to Die; Why Do People Act That Way?; The Set Up: A Ready Sacrifice; Avoid Becoming a Sacrifice; Should a Leader do Counseling?; Preventing Being Set Up as a Sacrifice; Goals: Confession, Repentance, and Forgiveness; Avoid Seduction of Power; Handling Your Stress; Leading with Boundaries.

In Chapter 1, the Leader as Sacrifice, the overall purpose of the book seems to be given. "Can You imagine the conflict when the Christian leader may, as a spiritual bear the weight of sins and become a sacrifice for the unresolved sins of those over where he has leadership?" (4). Much like a syllabus, the objectives are given for each sub heading - Avoid Becoming the Goat, Arm Yourself, Get Answers, Understand the language.

Chapter 6 "Why People Act That Way?" the author gives a good description and use of two psychological models: Transactional Analysis and Family Systems. Many current authors are using the Family Systems model to describe church issues and

conflicts, but in recent years not so much reference to TA. Throughout there are several connections to psychological themes.

Two other chapters seem to have some weight for consideration of the subject – Chapters 9 and 12. Chapter 9, “Should a Leader do Counseling?” contains some good thoughts about the advantages and disadvantages about a leader’s role in the counseling process – generally based on one’s training and inclination. This is a question most of us have to deal with. There is also a discussion of the danger of transference. Chapter 12 gives some ideas for avoiding the seduction of power, and this is a flash point for leaders.

How can this volume be used in the context of D.Min. education? I don’t see this book serving as a textbook, it is really more of a pop level work with flashes of academic interests. It could provide some information for one’s presentations in leadership, pastoral care, pastoral theology, identity, teaching and preaching.

For the Director, there are several studies of ministers and their health referred to, especially dealing with stress. One of those was a study of 197 Seventh Day Adventist Ministers. Schaun points out an interesting fact about the D.Min. Degree, “Eighty percent of those who had been involved in a doctor of ministry program found that they had reduced their stress and feeling of isolation.<sup>1</sup>” This is somewhat dated, but probably still true.

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Schaun, *Helping Pastors Cope*. Berrien Springs, MI: Andrew University Press, 1982, p. 124

The bibliography seems adequate and many well-known theories and theorists are included in the content. The volume also speaks directly to the person of the D.Min. Director/Administrator.

The author has a tendency to “string together quotes” (much like some of our students!) without giving adequate narrative between the quotes. An example of this is on pages 113-115 where the author provides three listings followed by a quote. A smoother style would help. Sprinkled throughout are evidences of non-inclusive language. For example a heading in Chapter 9 is, “What is Man?”

Overall, the book seems to achieve the writer’s goals and objectives and can be of help with ideas and personal guidance (in avoiding becoming a scapegoat).

I think this quote from the author in Chapter 12 “Avoid Seduction of Power” (99) under the heading of “When Nothing Works” (109) sums up the author’s intention. “What if you are the leader and all that you do to prevent becoming a sacrifice does not work? What if the person succeeds in making you a sacrifice? He then “crucifies you” and leaves the organization. How do you respond? You have a choice. You need not be crushed. You can choose the way you respond. Your attitude does not have to be that you are worthless. You can learn that the negative thoughts that you nurture are the actual cause of your emotional fluctuation and your sense of low self-esteem. These kinds of thoughts lead to depression and the desire to give up. Managing your thoughts will help eliminate these twisted ideas and allow you to return to a happier a state.”