

as inherently and permanently unable to relate 'correctly' to other women and men.

What I am suggesting is that a hard-line interpretation of the Instruction is not warranted either by its own argument or by the tradition out of which it comes. But this must appear a meagre finding by the side of other concerns, including the wider issue of Catholic teaching about homosexuality, and in particular the idea that a homosexual orientation is *per se* a 'disorder'. And of course there remain questions about the theology and practice of priesthood in today's Church.

The Instruction echoes the *Catechism* in speaking of the 'respect and sensitivity' due to homosexual people and in its insistence that 'every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided'. But one may surmise that no amount of explanation in terms of the meaning of the scholastic expression *deordinatio* will allay the fear or soothe the hurt of the homosexual person – or his or her family or friends – who understands the word 'disorder' in any of its normal English usages. And how could anyone think that a reference to 'the current situation' (see the statement of the Instruction's aim above) would not be read as linking homosexuality with child sexual abuse, a linkage which is both erroneous and offensive?

It remains the case that this Instruction is normative for policy in the years ahead and the question of its proper interpretation cannot be sidestepped, not least so that suitable candidates are not deterred from coming forward for ordination. The *sensus* embodied in the responses of those principally charged with its implementation is encouraging. And it can only be hoped that the *ekklēsia* will benefit from the reflection and debate which it has provoked.

**Dredging up.** We are fond of dredging up historical events to be used in an attempt to bolster our own position by discrediting the 'other'. Happenings of three or four hundred years ago still have life in Ireland. Let us avoid adding the crusades and the Indian 'mutiny' to the list that most of us know only too well.

—STEPHEN SKUCE, *The Faiths of Ireland* (Dublin: The Columba Press) p. 190

## Courageous Conversations

— the spiritually intelligent leader

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Donal O'Leary

Last year a few of us\* organized a national conference on 'Leadership for Transformation'. It set out to be a reflective experience about a new, dynamic approach to leadership in educational and pastoral settings. We wanted to provide an opportunity for a creative and inspiring exploration into the meaning of leadership in the Catholic community, rather than focusing on the more technical aspects of managerial expertise and leadership skills. We hoped that the conference would be a launch-pad for a radical renewal of approaches to pastoral and educational leadership based on a renewed meaning of the Incarnation. We wanted to focus, too, on the human and spiritual development of each person as the basis for authentic leadership.

What we were beginning to believe was this: that just as we teach and preach *who we are*, so also, we lead and serve *who we are*. What we do as leaders will depend on who we are as persons. 'To live on the outside,' as Parker J. Palmer reminds us, 'the truth we know on the inside.' There is, therefore, a deep need for self-knowledge; for what we call the inner work of humanizing and transforming our role as leaders. True Catholic leadership is not achieved by 'bolting on the religious bit' to the work of the good leader. It is achieved, first, by the inner transformation of the leader's own self, and then by the manner in which this transformation infuses everything that the leader says and does. The challenge to today's Catholic leaders is to trust in the holiness of the human heart; to rediscover the blueprint for leadership in the

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\*The inspiration and organization of the National 'Leadership for Transformation' Conferences is provided by two UK Diocesan Advisors, Frank McDermott (Hallam) and Theresa Laverick (Leeds). A number of international leaders, including Ireland's Bishop Willie Walsh, spoke at our two experiential gatherings in settings that acknowledged multi-sensory listening and learning, making room for the vision of the heart, as well as the wisdom of the head.

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graces of baptism; to believe that the more integrated and authentic the very lives of leaders are, the more empowering their ministry will be.

Now is the time, we felt, to embrace and celebrate the unique revelation that the vision of Jesus has to offer to the vision and exercise of leadership, both within our own communities and within the leadership ministries of the world as well. The Incarnation reveals that the most effective Christian leader is, at the same time, the most truly human one. This vision holds that there are not two different ways of being a good leader – one ‘merely’ human, the other Christian. ‘It is a glorious destiny,’ wrote Thomas Merton, ‘to be a member of the human race, though it is a race dedicated to many absurdities and one which makes many terrible mistakes: yet, with all that, God glorified himself in becoming a member of the human race.’

Christian leadership, in school or parish, is achieved and deepened, we suggested, ultimately and only, by the human authenticity and integrity of those who are called to be leaders. According to our faith-tradition it is revealed, that only in our true humanity are we truly divine. Within whatever circles or levels of influence people work in the community, their transformative power as leaders, both personally and professionally, is fundamentally based on that revelation.

In our notion of leadership in any community, we believe there are many leaders, not just one. Leadership is distributed. It resides not solely in the individual at the top, so to speak, but in every person at every level, who in one way or another, acts as a leader to a group of followers or within a circle of influence – wherever in the institution or organisation that person is – deputy, positions of responsibility, co-ordinators or team. The issue is about integrating true leadership into every role, at every level. The goal of leadership is not about reaching the top of a hierarchical ladder, but about the authentic vision and inspiration we create on whatever rung of it we find ourselves. In a sense, if we use the image of a ladder at all, then every rung contains the heart of leadership. Bending the ladder into some kind of circle is a more promising image! In a circle, as Joan Chittister reminds us, there is only eye-to-eye conversation, only shoulder to shoulder contact, only community to aspire to rather than hierarchy.

#### ONLY CONNECT

We were excited by another discovery. There is a powerful spirituality that can underpin and inspire contemporary secular developments in the art of leadership. Conversely, secular styles and skills have an enriching relevance to a spirituality of leadership.

The goal of the Christian life is the transformation of our humanity: the same goal is at the heart of true leadership models today. That is the common ground – the exploration of humanity. Most current developments in leadership qualities emphasize the central role of the human, emotional and spiritual realities of the leader.

There is a fresh dynamic in this bridging of two approaches to leadership – the spiritual and the secular. They are both grounded and built on the soul-work of the leader. They have arrived at this consensus from different angles – one from ‘human wisdom’, the other from ‘revealed truth’. It is a moment to celebrate when we can hold them both together because that is what Jesus came to establish, the divine energy within all real human endeavour.

Because our humanity is deeply flawed, it takes much determined effort to keep our self-awareness sharp and true. The invitation today is to become a spiritually intelligent leader, that is, one who is intelligent about the spiritual energy and power, for light and darkness, within herself and within those around her. And all of this requires what I call inner soul-work. ‘The spiritual dimension of one’s life is the absolute key to successful leadership’ (National College for School Leadership).

Spiritual intelligence is not meant to be understood as another, separate leadership style distinct from those other ‘non-religious’ dimensions devoted to transformation of the ways we lead and serve. Spiritually intelligent leadership provides, rather, a kind of vibrant resonance, a ‘glue’, an interior design like the veins of a leaf, that hold, evaluate and affirm the aspirations of what we tend to regard as ‘merely secular’ styles and aspects of leadership.

#### TWO STORIES – ONE PLOT

The spiritually intelligent leader identifies the gift and the burden of being human as the locus of transformation. So do the visionaries and managers of change in the market-places and business schools of our planet. The wisdom of the world, so to speak, and the revelation of God in the Christian tradition, come together in the human heart. Both marvellous stories have the same plot. Both honour the transforming energy and power of the essence of ‘who we are’. That is why both approaches work out of a common wisdom – that just as ‘we teach and preach who we are’, we also ‘lead who we are’.

We, as Christians, are in our home territory when it comes to exploring and naming the mystery of our sublime and sacred humanity. What I mean is that Christian spirituality has a unique insight into the nature of our hopelessly complex human hearts. There is this beautiful theology of nature and grace, of human imagination, of sacrament, that offers a ground-plan, a kind of

x-ray, into what makes that heart beat with a strange longing and a huge desire. No leadership style will transform our community, either pastorally or educationally, if we fail to cherish – and challenge – the human heart which is the source of all transformation. And this cherishing and challenging is a truly spiritual work to undertake.

Spiritually intelligent leadership is the nourisher, the interpreter and the midwife of the innate goodness of every human heart. The spiritually intelligent leader connects the objective strategies with the inner vision, the tangible with the intangible, the more obvious with the hidden. She never loses sight of mystery. Without this spiritual context and horizon, most approaches to leadership for transformation are going to run into all kinds of trouble, will founder in the quagmires of original sin.

And that, too, is why contemporary models of leadership emphasize the necessity of a personal purification and transformation in the leader's own self, before a wider transformation begins to happen. 'First, *become* the change you want to see in the world' wrote Gandhi (quoted by Centre of Excellence in Leadership). What I notice is that even the most competitive and hard-nosed companies include qualities such as transparency, trustworthiness, spirituality, forgiveness, inspiration, healing, inner transformation and meditation in their guidelines and training programmes. Until recently, we Catholics, were almost apologetic for using such words!

#### HUMAN/SPIRITUAL CHARACTERISTICS OF LEADERSHIP

In our Spring Conference last year we offered a few examples of how spirituality and humanity might come together in the spiritually intelligent leader, fleshing out and enhancing the popular appeal of the best of current leadership types and management models.

- It is difficult to lead when you are afraid. The fear blocks out the very graces that make a good leader. It is your anxiety, not anything positive, that those around you will catch. *Courage* is a key emotion in effective leadership.
- It is difficult to lead when you are resentful. Everything about the way you do your work as a leader will be diminished by this emotion. *Letting go of pettiness* is central to the work of a leader. Former President Harry S. Truman said, 'There is no limit to what you can achieve provided you don't mind who gets the credit.'
- It is difficult to lead when you have lost your *passion*. Every model of leadership gives a priority to enthusiasm. And the issue of motivation is paramount. Both Archbishop Derek

Worlock and Archbishop Rowan Williams asked much the same question, 'Are you prepared to break your heart in pursuit of the vision of true leadership?'

- It is difficult to lead when you are too safe, too cautious or too closed. Where there is no *openness* there is no growing. Where there is no *trusting* there is no risking. When everyone is thinking the same way, nobody is thinking very much.
- And it is difficult to lead when the notion of service is far from your mind. Without a grounded *humility and vulnerability* (hard-won graces, to be sure), the leader becomes a vain and insecure figure – maybe successful, for a while, but not for long. There is a dignity about being a servant that keeps the leader level-headed!
- It is not easy to empower others when your own *confidence* is only surface-deep. Confidence is infectious. It features in all the lists of priorities for good leadership. Robust self-esteem often goes back to childhood experiences. It does not exclude uncertainty, or mistakes. But it does include a sense of one's own uniqueness.
- One of the greatest assets a leader has is that of drawing on an *inner authority*. This inner authority gives rise to the confidence we have just mentioned. It is an inner resonance that is difficult to define. Do you speak, act and lead out of your *ego* or your *essence*? Do you listen to your 'inner voice'? Are you familiar with that voice?
- Transparency* is the fruit of the constant search, not for perfection, but for authenticity and integrity. To be truly authentic, to be transparent, to be honest. In an age of corporate cover-up, in State and Church, *trustworthiness* comes top of the list of 'most desirable leadership qualities'.
- Many researchers hold that a certain type of personal, physical presence is found in true leadership; a real presence; a presence that witnesses; a presence that speaks of justice and compassion, a presence that transforms.
- What lies at the heart of all of these characteristics and dimensions of good management and leadership is *self-awareness*. Without a knowledge of our own weaknesses, wounds and shadow, we will never be able to lead or liberate others into their true selves. We can only walk with others, sensitively and usefully, as far as we have walked with ourselves. We can only win the minds and hearts of others to the extent that we have won over our own.
- The non-negotiable basis for achieving and acquiring the qualities I have just outlined is the *contemplative dimension* of our lives, the total surrender of our own hearts into the peace, power

and passion of the heart of the Mystery. It is here, during that silent, daily time set apart for meditation, during which even religion-less leaders are renewed, that the spiritual dimension of leadership is nourished and maintained.

In contemplation, the soul is searched. From the loving eye, only light shines out; it sees gift where the fearful eye sees only threat. People gravitate towards the loving leaders; they take the risks and accept the challenge to become, more fully, who they already are – and that is, that they are leaders too. The true leader, is, in that sense, a leader of leaders.

#### COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS

That was the title we gave our Winter National Conference on Leadership for Transformation. During the day we outlined four dimensions of these courageous conversations. One was about exploring the theology and spirituality that underpin our renewed understanding of what it means to be a leader. That is a most fruitful exploration. Another dimension centred around the fact that without the inner, personal transformation in the leader's own self, a wider transformation will not happen. Without the inner soul-work of the leader, there will never be any spiritual intelligence. The third conversation emphasized the importance of keeping the vision open, of not wrapping it all up too soon. When we are too driven to complete our plans for the future, no matter how enlightened we may think them to be, we may, indeed, be building something new – but within the same old paradigms. Did not Einstein say something about the fact that the shape and structure that causes the collapse of an organization can never be the source of its own renewal? There has to be 'an urgent waiting-time'. Let me discuss this a little.

So often we catch glimpses of new horizons of possibility, swift insights into the way things could really be, brief mountaintop experiences of a world transformed. That is what we felt happened at our first Conference Day. But it is surprising how quickly we lose heart, lose our nerve, and lose the dream too. There is a compulsion for clarity, a tyranny of certainty. How do we hold the plans lightly, forever open and unfolding, allowing for mystery to remain mystery, always working with 'beginner's mind'? How do we keep one eye on the distant horizon while, like the landscape painter, tracing, as best we can, the here-and-now reality and implications of that vista. To see the butterfly in the caterpillar, the apple in the seed, the saint in the sinner, the God disguised in the ordinary. There is a delicate moment before birth, a waiting-time for the shape to emerge. This conversation is really about imagination.

The fourth conversation, as we have seen, is to believe in the true wisdom of our world, but deepened and enlightened by Christ. 'Revelation comes bound in two volumes,' wrote Thomas Aquinas, 'the book of the world and the book of the scriptures.' And the human heart is where both volumes come together. It is also, and for that reason, the place where leadership for transformation is created. These courageous conversations must continue. And, by definition, we cannot be sure where they will lead us.

#### THE HEART OF A LEADER

Personalizing, for a moment, the enterprise of leadership, I offer a brief profile of what this leader might look like. She is someone who is capable of holding within herself the tension of the paradoxes of life. She knows that the greater the soul, the greater the shadow. She does not always require certainty but can live with unknowing and mystery. She does not need to be always 'right', in charge of, or in roles of command and decision-making. She is ready to empty the cupboards of her life of titles, offices and public importance. She knows who she is when everything is taken away. She has learned the hard truth that only her authentic self will eventually and always win through. She sees herself as a co-creator with God in her demanding work of leadership.

The leader is liberated enough to be care-free and be care-free, because he knows he is not alone. He is free because he knows that God is greater than any system or organizational structure. He is free because, while he strives with every fibre of his being to make his community a place of collaborative ministry and compassion, he can do so without undue stress, fear or anxiety. Aware of his own fallibility and weaknesses, he does not judge or condemn either colleague or competitor. He learns to pray for a quick patience rather than say words that take ages to retract. He is well aware that what he does not transform within himself, he will transmit outwards. What is not inwardly healed is projected.

The leader is trying to live by a simple but difficult wisdom, where to be authentic, transparent and open is more important than to be always successful, obeyed or respected. She can now tell the difference between acting out of her ego and acting out of her essence. Because of her daily habits of reflection and prayer, she is finding new spaces in her soul to deepen her inner life and her outward personality. She is finding a vibrant zest for life in the middle of her increasing work-load. She does not lose heart for long because she sees her work against an infinite horizon. This means that whatever about the immediate outcomes of her life's efforts, against the infinite horizon of God's acres, nothing is wasted and everything is harvested.