



POST VATICAN II PERSPECTIVES ON RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP

By

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INTRODUCTION

On October 11, 2012, we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council. It is truly one of the greatest events in the history of the Church. The Church as a whole has seen revolutionary and mostly positive changes as a result of Vatican II. It has fostered liturgical, social, cultural and economic changes and developments. Christine Moulton of Salt Lake Tribune writes: ***Vatican II is considered the most pivotal church council in recent centuries, not because it declared new doctrines but because it changed the way the faith engages the modern world.*** (fr.the Internet: Huff Post: RELIGION). It opened the windows of the Church and let in the fresh air (although some critics think it also let in the hurricanes.) It made fundamental changes in how Church is organised and governed and in its relationship with

other religions and with the secular world. There is no doubt that the religious especially the religious women experienced the greatest impact of Vatican II radically changing their self-understanding and their lifestyle.

Although Vatican II did not produce a specific document on religious leadership it introduced concepts in different documents that greatly influenced the perception of religious leadership after Vatican II.

INFLUENCE OF VATICAN II ON THE UNDERSTANDING OF RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP

1. PARTICIPATION

Undoubtedly the Church is still highly hierarchical. However, Vatican II did try to encourage more participation from the rank and file members. The Vatican II understanding of the Church is a “communion” of members sharing a common vision and task– to convince people of the world of God’s love and pointing to Christ as the example of how to love and serve him. In this Church lay people are not the passive spectators as they have been for a long time but were encouraged to be active workers in God’s vineyard.

This necessitates a change in religious leaders, in their understanding of their role and in their style of governance. From the highly centralized, monarchical style there developed at least in some congregations a more circular structure and an openness to listen to the rank and file members of the community. Dialogues were introduced and community assemblies became a practice. In many communities the term “superior” is no longer used and is supplanted with terms like “Coordinator”, “Moderator”, etc. Here I will still use the word superior since it is still being used by the greater majority of religious communities.

2. COLLEGIALITY

Wikipedia describes collegiality in the Roman Catholic Church thus “*Collegiality* refers to the doctrine held in the [Roman Catholic Church](#) that the bishops of the world, collectively considered (the [College of Bishops](#)) share the responsibility for the governance and pastoral care of the Church with the [Pope](#). This doctrine was explicitly taught by the [Second Vatican Council](#), though it is grounded in earlier teaching. One of the major changes of the Second Vatican Council was to encourage [Episcopal conferences](#) (bishops' conferences).

In religious leadership, this was expressed in the collective decision making made by General Superiors and their Councils, Prioresses, Abbesses and Provincials with their respective Councils. Down the line local superiors likewise call community assemblies to discuss and decide on issues affecting their communities or their apostolates.

3. SUBSIDIARITY

Subsidiarity is an [organizing](#) principle that matters ought to be handled by the smallest, lowest or least centralized competent authority. Political decisions should be taken at a local level if possible, rather than by a central authority. (Lew Daly (2010-01-08). "[God's Economy](#)". [The Financial Times](#). Retrieved 2010-01-25.)The [Oxford English Dictionary](#) defines subsidiarity as the idea that a central authority should have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks which cannot be performed effectively at a more immediate or local level.

In religious leadership this means that higher superiors allow local or lower superiors to decide matters within their area of jurisdiction and do not interfere unless it is referred to them. This prevents micro-management which is demoralizing for lower officials and is a waste of energy for the higher superiors. Micromanagement can also encourage the members to go over the head of their immediate superiors and go straight to the highest authority which is detrimental to the whole system.

4. ACCOUNTABILITY

Although there is no specific mention of accountability in Vatican II documents, the first three principles of participation, collegiality and subsidiarity necessarily includes leadership accountability . This is going away from the absolute monarchy type of leadership where the leaders are only accountable to God and to themselves and not to their constituencies.

With the new understanding of Church as a community with a common vision and responsibility, Vatican II obliges religious leaders to be accountable to their members. In religious communities, general and provincial chapters include reports of the highest superiors to their members on how they have fulfilled the vision-mission of the congregations or the resolutions and recommendations of previous chapters.

POST VATICAN II RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP MODELS

I would like now to describe three leadership models in detail which were influenced by the principles described above that have their roots in the Second Vatican Council.

I.SERVANT LEADERSHIP

A.Origin of the Term

The term “servant leadership” was popularized in the early 70’s just after the close of Vatican II. The term “ Servant Leadership” and “Servant Leader” were coined by Robert K. Greenleaf in 1970. He coined this phrase in his essay "*The Servant as Leader*". Greenleaf worked a long time AT&T and spent most of his career on management studies, management development and management training. After working at AT&T he started a career as visiting lecturer and management consultant for many companies, universities, churches and non-profit organisations. In 1964 he founded the international non-profit foundation named Center of

Applied Ethics, which was renamed to *The Robert K. Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership* in 1985.

The idea for his essay, "The Servant as Leader," came out of reading *Journey to the East* by Herman Hesse. The story is about a group that went on a mythical journey. The main character of this story is Leo. Leo is the companion and servant of the group, but he somehow sustained the group with his spirit and created in them a sense of well being. Everything was going well until Leo disappeared; the group fell apart and the journey had to be prematurely interrupted. The group cannot exist longer without their servant Leo. After reading this story Greenleaf came to the insight that a good leader is primarily a servant. A good leader must first be a good servant. Therefore he wrote down his essay *The servant as leader*. But his idea also came from his Christian legacy and consciously or unconsciously by the Second Vatican Council:

Though his terms are secular, his definition of leadership is the clearest statement of his belief that the needs of followers are holy and legitimate, and the leaders use of power arises from the consent of the followers. Greenleaf was very focused on action and ends, and he held a Sabbath attitude about organizational life. Like Christ, who said "The Sabbath was made for man(sic), not man(sic) for the Sabbath"¹²¹ Greenleaf believed that institutions should serve people. He also felt that he was on the threshold of an important historical moment, of a paradigm shift in the collective American response to formal authority. (Wikipedia, Robert Greenleaf)

B. Biblical Roots of Servant Leadership

There are Biblical foundations for the concept of Servant Leadership. The word "servant" comes from the Hebrew word "eved" which originally meant slave but evolved to mean trusted. In Isaiah, chapter 52 the "servant of Yahweh" was identified with 1) the nation of Israel serving God, 2) The faithful remnant who served God in difficult times and 3) the Messiah who became the suffering servant.

In the New Testament, Jesus connected himself with the tradition of servant leaders and the suffering servant of Yahweh. (Luke 4: 18-19-) In Mark 9:33-35-JESUS prescribed for the leaders of his Church the same quality: "Those who want to be first must be the very last and servant (diakonos) of all. And in John 13: he dramatically demonstrated this prescription by washing the feet of the apostles, an outstanding gesture of servanthood.

C. Characteristics of a Servant Leader

Larry C. Spears, who has served as President and [CEO](#) of the [Robert K. Greenleaf](#) Center for Servant Leadership since 1990, has extracted a set of 10 [characteristics](#) that are central to the development of a servant leader: I have taken his categories but have adapted them to the religious leader and to a religious context. I have also incorporated some ideas of Howard Young

in his article: “Rediscovering Servant Leadership” (Internet: Assemblies of God: Enrichment Journal)

- **Listening and Availability**: Superiors as Servant Leaders are present to their Sisters not only physically but with their whole being. A servant leader has the motivation to listen actively to subordinates and support them in decision identification. The servant leader particularly needs to pay attention to what remains unspoken This means relying on her inner voice in order to find out what the body, mind and spirit are communicating.^[4]
- **Empathy**: A servant leader attempts to understand and empathize with others. Sisters are entitled to respect and appreciation for their personal development. She should not make herself the measure of judging others but should take them as they are.
- **Healing**: A great strength of a Servant Leader is the ability for healing herself and others. A servant leader tries to help people solve their problems and conflicts in relationships, because she wants to encourage and support the personal development of each individual.^[4] This leads to the formation of a community environment which is dynamic, happy and free of the fear of failure.^[5]
- **Awareness**: A servant leader needs to gain general awareness and especially self-awareness. She has the ability to view situations from a more integrated, holistic position.
- **Persuasion**: Servant Leaders do not take advantage of their power and status by coercing compliance; they rather try to convince those they are leading. This element distinguishes servant leadership most clearly from traditional, authoritarian models.
- **Conceptualization**: A servant leader thinks beyond day-to-day realities. That means she has the ability to see beyond the limits of the daily running of the community but always has the vision of the congregation before her having made it her very own vision.
- **Foresight**: Foresight is the ability to foresee the likely outcome of a situation. It enables the servant leader to learn about the past and to achieve a better understanding about the current reality. It also enables the servant leader to identify consequences about the future...
- **Stewardship**: Religious Leaders have the task to hold their institution in trust for the greater good of the Church and of society. Servant leadership is seen as an obligation to help and serve others. Openness and persuasion are more important than control.
- **Commitment to the growth of people**: A servant leader is convinced that people have an intrinsic value Therefore; she should nurture the personal, professional and spiritual growth of the Sisters in a well worked out plan of On-going Formation. She will develop

gifted Sisters unthreatened by competence because she has inner security and healthy self worth.

- ***Building community:*** *A servant leader's priority is building a loving, prayerful, compassionate community. In turn her community should serve the greater community, especially the poor and the oppressed.*^[4] (WIKEPEDIA)

II.SHARED LEADERSHIP

A. Concept of Shared Leadership

Another significant Post-Vatican model of leadership deviates from the monarchical, centralized leadership that characterized many religious communities in pre-Vatican times and can still be found even today.

According to Peter Smith, this type of leadership concept “believes that rather than relying on a single individual to lead to a successful endeavor, there is need of other group members to take on shared responsibility in problem identification, solutions, and action taking.”

This leadership concept believes in the importance of the individual, that individuals are interested in participating in the development of their well-being, that individuals are able to learn and able to change and can take on responsibility; that individuals and communities can identify problems in their lives, can analyze their situations , arrive at various alternative solutions and act on their chosen alternative; that people can work effectively together to change conditions that may be beyond their individual control ; that community participation and group process are in themselves health enhancing,. (United Way of the Fraser Valley.)

B. Elements of Shared Leadership

According to Robert Gallagher (2001), in the life of a community or institution there are three important tasks: 1) Accomplishing Tasks 2) Maintaining Relationships, 3) Providing for Individual Needs and Wants.

In accomplishing a task, someone has to initiate, make suggestions, propose group action, someone has to get the proper information and share this information. The community is a network of relationship and someone has to attend to foster relationships by encouraging, express group feelings, harmonizing, gate keeping and setting standards. Someone has to see to it that each member of the community has his/her own needs for acceptance, sense of importance and value, friendship, etc.

There is no reason why it must fall to the designated top leader to do all these tasks. Anyone who can do each of these tasks best should be assigned to it.

C. Shared Targets for a Sharing Leader

What specifically should leaders share with their co-workers or in case of religious leaders with their Sisters or lay partners. Phil VanAuken suggests the following:

- **POWER**-the aim of the leader is to empower others, to encourage them to be source of ideas and decisions. This presupposes inner security in the leader
- **FEELINGS AND EMOTIONS**- Leaders should be open both to share and listen to feelings. Leadership is more than making the right decisions. It is also helping people to discover who they are. By acknowledging their own humanity, they invite others to be similarly transparent and real
- **TIME**-Time is a precious commodity and the leader must make a conscious decision to invest that time in people rather than in administrative functions
- **PERSONAL NEEDS**- Leaders should share with others in a sensitive way their own goals, frustrations, pressures and needs. This will make the community feel the need to pray for them and feel with them “true kinship.”
- **TRUST**- Trust allows two or more people to disagree and still respect the motives of each other. It is the lubricant for relationships amidst frictions and differences.
- **TALENTS AND GIFTS**- It is understood that leaders should share their gifts but they should encourage others also to share their gifts and talents. Members of the community should be helped to understand their role, how they can develop and use their gifts for the community.
- **INFORMATION**-As much information must be shared for decision making. Leaders must be givers as well as receivers of information. An atmosphere should be created that members have a desire to talk and listen openly and without fear.
- **SUCCESS AND FAILURES**- Leaders need to talk both about their successes and failures. Success stories encourage others to continue to persevere and failure stories help others to see the leader as a human being with problems like anyone else.
- **PRAYER**- Through communal prayer we find encouragement, empathy, and commitment to seeing all of our life through the eyes of faith

D. How Leaders Subvert Shared Leadership

What actions of the Leader go against the principles of shared leadership? Consider the following:

- **ABUSE OF POWER**- Large differentials in the relative power of leaders and followers can contribute to abuse. Power deprivation exerts its own corruptive influence and can make members of the community fixated on their minimal influence becoming cautious, defensive, critical of others and new ideas and may even engage in sabotage
- **HOARDING OF PRIVILEGES**- Superiors nearly always enjoy greater privileges and when they hoard power and status they contribute to the growing gap between haves and have-nots in the community
- **ENCOURAGING DECEIT**- Superiors have more access to information. Patterns of deception whether they take the form of outright lies ,or hiding or distorting information, destroy the trust that binds the superior and the community

- **ACTING INCONSISTENTLY**- Diverse followers, varying levels of relationships and elements of situations make consistency an ethical burden of leadership. Shadows arise when superiors appear to act arbitrarily, unfairly or show favoritism.
- **MISPLACING OR BETRAYING LOYALTIES**- Superiors have to weigh a range of loyalties or duties when making choices. Leaders cast shadows when they violate the loyalty of the members of the community
- **FAILING TO ASSUME RESPONSIBILITIES**- Superiors act irresponsibly when they fail to make reasonable efforts to prevent misdeeds, ignore or deny ethical problems, don't shoulder the responsibility for the consequences of their directives, hold members to higher standards than themselves.

(((Craig Johnson, 2001 quoted in Shared Leadership by Michele Erina Doyle and Mark K. Smith 2001 and 2012 in Internet: INFED)

E. Values of Shared Leadership for Service (Vincent Warner, Jr)

- **COLLABORATION** rather than **COMPETITION**—puts premium on truthfulness and admitting mistakes
- **CAPACITY** to move to the other side-**COMPASSION**
- **HOLDS ACCOUNTABLE** but does not blame. Blaming is covering up. Accountability offers possibility of growth.
- **WILLING TO COMPROMISE** when appropriate and does not need always to control the outcome.
- **TRUSTING AND VALIDATING OTHERS** which makes possible to be joyful. Joy and cheer come from not always being right.
- **POWER IS FOR PARTICIPATION**, not for domination-power with , rather than power over
- **PUTTING ONESELF AT RISK** with humility and clarity.

F. Reality Check List.

In order to gauge the effectivity of Shared Leadership, the following questions can be asked:

- **ARE THOSE BEING SERVED**
 - **GROWING AS PERSONS?**
 - **BECOMING HEALTHIER?**
 - **BECOMING MORE FREE AND AUTONOMOUS?**
 - **BECOMING MORE SERVICE ORIENTED THEMSELVES?**
 - **SHOWING HOSPITALITY TO THE LEAST PRIVILEGED?**

III. RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP AND POWER- FROM CONTROL TO COMPASSION

Another post-Vatican perspective of religious leadership is with regard to the use of power. **POWER** is the ability to influence. It can either be positive or negative. When power is

expressed as a positive force, via affirmation and correction, it is expressive of CARE. When power becomes a negative force, via exploitation, manipulation or domination, it is experienced as CONTROL.

The dynamics of successful leaders find a key component in the way they give up any need to CONTROL and find ways to EMPOWER others. In our religious communities, the dynamics of power is as much present as in secular institutions. Abuse of power, thirst for power, addiction to power, holding on to power are not unknown in religious communities. In fact many conflicts in the convent are usually a question of power relationships.

But it is likewise true that there is a great source of ENERGY and POWER in doing good, in caring, in compassion that is found in religious communities. It is therefore important for us to reflect on the dynamics of power.

A. VARIOUS WAYS OF USING POWER

According to Starhawk, an American-Indian feminist, there are several ways of using power: "POWER OVER," POWER WITHIN" AND "POWER WITH." She considers "power over" as essentially linked to domination and control, "power from within" to the mysteries that awaken a person's deepest abilities and potential; and "power with" to the social power and influence people wield among their equals. Each type of power is rooted in a mode of consciousness and a worldview. Each has its own language and mythology and depends upon distinct motivations. A religious superior can use power over by being dominant and tyrannical being conscious that "she is the boss". Another may use her authority to discover the latent ability in herself and in her Sisters and can develop these latent abilities. Then she could use "power with" to gather the gifts and talents of all the Sisters for the good of the institution.

Michael Crosby in his book: *The Dynamics of Power: From Control to Compassion*, explores a paradigm shift in the use of power by leaders. I will try here to discuss the main points of the book. (See Power Chart) Although Michael Crosby did not write the book exclusively for religious leaders, it is remarkably applicable to religious leaders in their exercise of power.

B. POWER AS CONTROL

When religious leaders use their power to control, this is grounded in four forms: manipulation, exploitation, coercion and domination but it is primarily maintained by fear and intimidation. Any exercise of control by fear or intimidation is abuse. Thus religious leaders can be abusers consciously or unconsciously. We are very aware of the current sexual abuse of the clergy and how this is covered up playing on the fears of the victims or subtly intimidating them because of the importance of their position and the general respect for them.

In religious communities, religious superiors can likewise cause fear and intimidation among their members by their words, actions and style of management. It is rare for religious superiors to do physical abuse but many can be prone to verbal abuse. According to Crosby this can be worse:

...verbal abuse can be more destructive in a relationship than physical abuse because verbal abusers often try to undermine one's self-image and even destroy self-esteem. They find ways to tear apart self-image. Their goal, conscious or no, is to make the other feel powerless... Verbal abuse need not always be expressed in earthy language. It occurs when I relate to someone who is more introverted who gets overwhelmed by my extroverted behaviour. It occurs when I don't give others a chance to talk or share their ideas before I move on. (Crosby, p. 58)

A religious community with an abusive superior will soon have members with increasing feelings of resentment, anger and dissatisfaction. This can result in outbreaks of rage, or in passive aggressive behaviour or in actual conflict. When this situation is prolonged it can even cause psycho-somatic illnesses in the community. It can also result in the loss of vocations, either in members leaving the community or inability to attract religious vocations.

C.POWER AS CARE AND COMPASSION

It is possible for a religious superior to undergo conversion and begin to use power not as a means of control but to show care and compassion. But this presupposes an insight into the effects of the use of power as means of control. Michael Crosby talks of his personal experience:

“When I finally realized that I had been using power in a way that was destructive and undermining my attempts to bring about the change I so desired, especially in my efforts to influence coworkers to change their working style or people close to me to commit to social change, I realized I had to change; otherwise I would only reinforcing the very control, abuse, conflict, and violence that I purportedly saw in other but not in myself.”- Michael Crosby, p. 89

The converted religious superior has to let go of the dynamics of control and move into a way of CARE in his/her personal life, community, institution and other relationships. Crosby writes about the relationship of care to power:

“If power is never neutral but either a force for help or harm that energizes or de-energizes, and if our way of influencing each other is grounded in ways that overpower or empower each other, then care, simply speaking, is the minimal requirement for all relationships that we consider to be positive, right or good. Since all relationships involve power, how we relate and influence one another in our relationships is critical if we are to have positive, right and good ways of being with each other. Since care is in the form of respect is the core requirement for such relationships, care constitutes the heart of the human condition, if our relationships are going to be constructive at all levels, including those in society itself. Our “first and unending obligation” therefore, is to meet the other as a person who cares. (p. 99)

Care is manifested in genuine affirmation and in nurturing correction and challenge. AFFIRMATION is a basic need of every human being. Everyone needs to be held in esteem, all need to feel respected and honored, to feel valued and worthwhile. We need significant others in our world to tell us we count. And once we are affirmed then the other genuine manifestation of care which is CORRECTION or CHALLENGE can be done. Religious superiors who do not correct or challenge their members are not really caring for them. But the correction must be grounded on genuine respect and affirmation for it to be effective. The effect is the development of FREEDOM and TRUST. In a setting of affirmation and correction, people feel they can be free to say what they think and feel and from this be free to be “who they are” empowering them as persons. TRUST is that dynamic that gets built into a relationship where people are free from fear and intimidation along with being autonomous and self-individuated. Trust is the necessary prerequisite for every healthy relationship. (106)

In this atmosphere of trust and freedom, the members of a community become empowered and healed of their previous wounds. WHEN WE ARE HEALED WE ARE ENABLED TO ENGAGE IN CREATIVE THINKING, POSITIVE FEELING AND **CONSTRUCTIVE ACTION**. The spirit of competitiveness will be supplanted by collaboration in the fulfillment of the institutions’ vision mission. This will create an atmosphere of peace, love, and COMPASSION. This should go beyond our communities into the bigger society: As Crosby writes:

“COMPASSION is the power and force of love released without exceptions or boundaries, into our universe. It is empowering care made universal. It consists of the effort to address the wrongs around us in ever widening circles of justice and mercy to embrace the world with such a kind of care that we work not only to alleviate its pains; we also try to empower those who have been violated in such a way that they can walk free in the future. “

Our religious communities can then also be instruments of peace for society and move the world in the way of COMPASSION.

CONCLUSION:

The theme of our Assembly is: IT WILL NOT BE SO AMONG YOU. These words of Jesus was to contrast the way the world understands power and authority which is to dominate, to oppress and to lord it over people and His own way. How then should it be? We have shown how the Second Vatican Council inspired by the words and example of Jesus, had underscored alternative values for religious leadership which has influenced the three post Vatican II models of leadership, I have described, namely: SERVANT LEADERSHIP, SHARED LEADERSHIP, LEADERSHIP OF CARE AND COMPASSION.

In being religious leaders according to the mind of Christ may we contribute to an ever widening web of compassionate relationships towards a cosmic circle of love and compassion.