



ICCRS LEADERSHIP BULLETIN

Formation for current and new leaders in CCR

VOLUME XXII, NUMBER 4

JULY - SEPTEMBER 2016

Guided by the Spirit:

Disappointment in Leadership

Michelle Moran



Many of the most popular movies are stories of heroes, supermen or women who triumph over difficulties and challenges. Eventually everything works out well and there is a happy ending. It would be wonderful if this was the reality of our lives, unfortunately, things are a little more complex. For those of us who are seasoned leaders, we know that amidst the blessings there are often problems, disagreements, divisions and disappointments. Clearly, it is impossible to totally avoid disappointment, however, I want to suggest some ways in which we can avoid or overcome discouragement and seeming failure.

Invest in the future

I was recently in conversation with a young leader who began by telling me that she wasn't a very good leader and she wanted some ideas about how to improve. I began by asking her what was it that made her think that she wasn't a good leader. She said that when she compared herself to the main leader of the group, she felt very inadequate and ineffective. She said that her leader was someone totally committed to the Lord, a person of great prayer and integrity who worked so hard that she sometimes didn't have time for herself. She described the leader as a courageous risk taker who was willing to take on projects that were big and demanding but in the end she was always able to get the results by encouraging people

to work together. When I asked how long this senior leader had been leading, the young leader replied 20 years.

Certainly, the senior leader was a woman of good spiritual character and tempera-

ment. She was able to draw the team together and get the desired results. However, it would seem that too many things were dependent upon the leader. Unless we as leaders invest in the future many good works of the Spirit eventually flounder and die leaving people disillusioned and disappointed. Obviously, the experienced leader was a good role model but her leadership style was perhaps lacking in the area of identifying, investing in and empowering the next generation of leaders. The senior leader had a

'Timothy' by her side who was keen to learn. Yet the potential of the young leader had not been recognised. She was not being mentored.

Succession planning

Groups and communities flourish with good leadership. However, wise leaders are not only focusing on the present, they are looking to the future and planning ahead. Times of change and transition in leadership bring a natural sense of insecurity. Leadership succession needs to be planned. It can be very disappointing for established leaders to see so many of the things they have worked very hard at establishing not flourishing when there is new leadership. There needs to be a healthy continuity in leadership and this happens when key leaders pay attention to and invest in the next generation.

Be yourself - lead as the person who you are

My advice to the young leader was to affirm her as the unique person that God has created her to be, as Psalm 139 says, we are 'wonderfully made'. Clearly she admired her leader and could learn a lot from her. However, some leaders make the mistake of trying to lead like other people, particularly leaders they admire and respect. This inevitably leads to disappointment and often failure because we can only lead as the people who we are and this is, in fact, our unique gift.

Obviously, we can learn from other people but we have to be prepared to grow in our own particular leadership gifts and to not always be comparing ourselves to others. My golden rule for leaders is to grow in self knowledge to "know yourself and lead as the person that you are". It is also important to recognise that other people are not always the same as we are, they have different personalities, gifts and skills. We can have false or unrealistic expectations of others and this can often lead to frustration and disappointment.

Trust in the Lord

Leadership ultimately flows from responding to God's call. Indeed it is the sense of calling that enables a leader to persevere even in difficulties. The famous leaders in scripture such as Moses, Jeremiah, Jonah, Peter and Paul, all had their own particular leadership gifts alongside their personality defects. All of them were lacking in certain skills. However, they were prepared to trust in the Lord, knowing that

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God who had called them would not fail them. Rather than fearing their own weaknesses and imperfections, in faith, they believed in God's ability to succeed. Too many leaders act as if everything is dependent upon them. Leadership then becomes a human enterprise and when there are difficulties and challenges the temptation is to quit. Those who learn to trust in the Lord are able to endure. Their strength is renewed (Isa 40:28-31).

Trust others

One of the biggest pitfalls in leadership is when the leader thinks that they have to do all the tasks themselves. This can stem from insecurity or a distorted sense of what it means to be hardworking and diligent. Ultimately it leads to burnout or inefficiency. Leaders can become discouraged or fail simply because they tried to do too much. Jethro had to help Moses learn the important skill of delegation. He said; "it is not right to take this on yourself. You will tire yourself out, you and the people with you. The work is too heavy for you. You cannot do it alone" (Ex 18:17). Notice how the weakness or short-sightedness of the leader impacts the whole group. Thankfully Moses took the advice of his father-in-law. As a result, the whole community was empowered and there was a sense of corporate leadership (Ex 18:25-6).

Several of the biblical leaders also learned that it isn't necessary for one leader to possess all the leadership gifts. There can be a wonderful leadership dynamic and synergy when leaders work with others in a complementary way. So Moses and Aaron were a perfect team and Paul and Barnabas were, for a time, a dynamic duo. They lived together in Antioch for a year (Acts 11:26), they were set apart by the Spirit for mission (Acts 13:4), they experienced persecution (Acts 15:50), and won respect from all. Unfortunately, despite all their missionary zeal, endurance and fruitfulness in ministry, after "a violent quarrel they parted company" (Acts 15:39). A seemingly trivial disagreement led to the separation of one of the most dynamic missionary pairings that the Church had ever seen.

Be on your guard

Here we encounter one of the most painful leadership areas, relationship breakdown and division. This not only affects those directly involved, it also impacts the whole community. Infighting, unresolved conflict and tension drains a group and robs them of their spiritual vibrancy. Sadly, some people end up leaving their groups or ministries because they are so disillusioned and disappointed in their leaders behaviour or in the leaders inability to resolve or manage conflict.

John 10:10 says; "the thief comes only to rob, kill and destroy". Certainly the enemy seeks to strategically attack leaders. There is

a proverb that says, "if a wolf attacks the flock he gets a sheep. If he attacks the shepherd he gets the whole flock". St Paul said in his final exhortation to the leaders in Ephesus; "be on your guard for yourselves and for the whole flock which the Holy Spirit has made you the overseers". Leaders therefore need to be alert and attentive engaging in spiritual warfare for themselves and their people. They need to have the insight and courage to try and resolve conflict when it arises. Obviously not every disagreement is a crisis, wisdom is needed in order to discern when 'unhealthy tension' is developing in the group. Undoubtedly, if this is not dealt with it will eventually erupt like a volcano and everyone will be injured.

Trials lead to triumph (Rom 8:37)

Sadly, because of our human and sinful disposition, conflicts and divisions are inevitable. During these difficult times, the leader in their natural disappointment has to draw upon the grace of leadership, in order to lead the whole flock through the difficult phase. This is not easy, it is only by God's grace that we are given the ability to remain steadfast under pressure.

Paradoxically, we often learn the most profound lessons at times of seeming failure or defeat. Jacob wrestled with God (Gen 32:26) the Lord needed to show Jacob that real strength comes only through trust and surrender. Every seasoned leader goes through their own time of trial and disappointment. It is important to remember that; "we are only the earthenware jars that hold the treasure... that power comes from God and not from us" (2 Cor 4:7-8). We do not know the details of Paul's 'thorn in the flesh' (Cf. 2 Cor 12:7) but we know it was something sent by the Lord to prevent him getting too proud. The Lord wants to break through our self reliance and teach us to rely upon him. "My grace is enough for you: my power is at its best in weakness" (2 Cor 12:9). Paul showed us that through his own difficulties he got in touch with his personal weakness and then, by the grace of God, his weakness became his strength; "For it is when I am weak that I am strong" (2 Cor 12:10). Hopefully this word will console all of us in our leadership challenges. It will encourage us to endure and keep moving forward despite the difficulties.

Thankfully, as we learn to lead in the power of the Holy Spirit we recognise that everything is not dependent upon us. We need embrace our leadership calling and aim to do our best and then surrender and trust in the Lord. Paul certainly learned this lesson when he shared this beautiful prayer with the Ephesians; "glory be to him whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine" (Eph 3:20). 🏩



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The ICCRS Leadership Bulletin is published along with the ICCRS Newsletter. Its purpose is to publicise formation on decisive topics in CCR.

Leadership and the call to martyrdom

■ Marcos Volcan



Pope Francis, during his homily on April 7, 2016, said about modern-day martyrs: “These are the lifeblood of the Church; these are the ones that carry the Church forward, the witnesses, who attest that Jesus is Risen, that Jesus is alive, and they bear witness through the consistency of their life and with the gift of Holy Spirit, and, “a witness is one who is consistent in what he says, what he does and what he has received, that is, the Holy Spirit”.

Being a Christian means being consistent in what one says, in what one does, and what one has received, even if witnessing to the Gospel means running the risk of losing one’s own life. Today, we still see so many people living out their faith in Jesus in hostile environments, the Pope said, but their witness is what carries the Church forward: “It is the witness of our martyrs of today – so many! – chased out of their homeland, driven away, having their throats cut, persecuted: they have the courage to confess Jesus even to the point of death. [...] It is the witness of those Christians who live their life seriously, and who say: ‘I can’t do this; I cannot do evil to another; I cannot cheat; I cannot live life halfway, I have to give my witness”.

With these words Pope Francis indicates to us the path a true leader in the Church should follow: consistency with their faith and courage to boldly witness to it, not fearing those who can take our lives, but cannot separate us from the love of God.

“But you will receive the power of the Holy Spirit which will come upon you; and then you will be my witnesses not only in Jerusalem but throughout Judaea and Samaria, and indeed to earth’s remotest end” (Acts 1:8). It is through the Holy Spirit that we receive the strength to bear witness to our faith. It is the Holy Spirit—the love of God—that has been poured into our hearts” (Rm 5:5) who, “enables us to grow firm in power with regard to our inner self, so that Christ may live in our hearts through faith, and then planted in love and built on love, we will have the strength to grasp the breath and the length, the height and the depth, so that, knowing the love of Christ, which is beyond knowledge, we may be filled with the utter fullness of God, whose power, working in us, can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine” (cf Ep 3: 16b-20).

The witness of the martyrs of all times is that of people driven by love, their love for God and for men and who have not allowed themselves to be mistaken for the opinion of the majority.

Saint John Paul II, in his homily for the canonization of Edith Stein, on 11 October 1998, said: “This woman had to face the challenges of such a radically changing century as our own. Her experience is an example to us. The modern world boasts of the enticing door which says: everything is permitted. It ignores the narrow gate of discernment and renunciation. I am speaking especially to you, young Christians, pay attention! Your life is not an endless series of open doors! Listen to your heart! Do not stay on the surface, but go to the heart of things! And when the time is right, have the courage to decide! The Lord is waiting for you to put your freedom in His good hands”.

These words should guide the life of every Christian, and espe-

cially that of the leaders who should constantly repeat to themselves: Pay attention! Your life is not an endless series of open doors! Listen to your heart! Do not stay on the surface, but go to the heart of things! In his homily for the canonization of Maximilian Kolbe, St. John Paul II said that his death “was the clear witness borne to Christ: the witness borne in Christ to the dignity of man, to the sanctity of his life, and to the saving power of death in which the power of love is made manifest. The death of Maximilian Kolbe became a sign of victory. This was victory won over all systematic contempt and hate for man and for what is divine in man a victory like that won by our Lord Jesus Christ on Calvary”.

In today’s world when so many are deprived of their dignity and the sanctify of their lives – take for example the situation of the refugees and the immigrants – we, as Christians, are called to stand for those people even at the sacrifice of the approval of society around us, we have to be bold to stand against the “systematic contempt and hate for man”, as St. John Paul II puts it. We, all the Christian faithful and especially the leaders, are called “to the fullness of the Christian life and the perfection of charity” (LG, 40). In the Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, St. John Paul II calls us to a ‘training in holiness’. And if we look at the life of the martyrs of all times, we will see that martyrdom was the culmination of a life lived in holiness and training to perfection in love.

In the same Apostolic Letter, he also said, “The ways of holiness are many, according to the vocation of each individual. I thank the Lord that in these years he has enabled me to beatify and canonize a large number of Christians, and among them many lay people who attained holiness in the most ordinary circumstances of life. The time has come to re-propose wholeheartedly to everyone this high standard of ordinary Christian living: the whole life of the Christian community and of Christian families must lead in this direction. It is also clear however that the paths to holiness are personal and call for a genuine ‘training in holiness’, adapted to people’s needs (n. 31).

These words delivered to us by a saint, and a martyr in his own way, point to us the direction to follow in becoming ready to respond to the circumstances of our lives and to the challenges of today’s world with the responsibility and commitment of true Christians, people filled with the Holy Spirit who are never afraid to sacrifice their lives in response to the love of God revealed to us by Jesus Christ. Rooted in Him and built up on him, held firm by the faith we have been taught (cf Col 2:7), we too can witness to the world that martyrdom is not a defeat but a victory, the victory of love! I started by quoting Pope Francis and would like to finish by repeating what he said, “a witness is one who is consistent in what he says, in what he does, and what he receives”, even if witnessing to the Gospel means running the risk of losing one’s own life.

“The message of the Cross is folly for those who are on the way to ruin, but for those of us who are on the road to salvation it is the power of God” (1 Co 1:18). 🕯



QUESTIONS TO THE ICCRS DOCTRINAL COMMISSION

The ICCRS Doctrinal Commission, currently headed by Dr. Mary Healy, is in consultation with theologians and experts from around the world.

If you have a question about the CCR, please send it to newsletter@iccrs.org

What does “Christ descended into hell” mean?

When the Apostles’ Creed states that Christ “descended into hell”, it does not explain why or in what way. However, as part of the Paschal Mystery, set between the cross and the resurrection, the descent into hell must have a meaning for our salvation. We will explain the three main ways in which it is a central part of Christ’s saving action, and then add a final comment.

However, before that, we must understand that while in English we only have one word for hell, the Bible has at least two: Hades (Sheol in Hebrew) and Gehenna.

Sheol is the ‘place’ of the dead, who are like shadows cut off from the living and from God (Psalm 6:6; 88:11-13), but who can in some cases await the coming of the Savior. Sheol was thought of as being in the ‘lower regions’, ‘under the earth’.

Gehenna, on the other hand, is a ‘place’ of fire and suffering for the damned—those who have refused Christ’s salvation in a definitive way (see Mt 13:40, 50; 18:8-19)—and for the devil and demons (see Mt 25:41). The Church teaches that from ‘hell’ in this second sense there is no coming back, because those who are there have made a definitive choice against God (see CCC 1035).

The first meaning of Christ’s descent into hell is that he truly died and by doing so vanquished death. The Scriptures say little about the descent into hell, but when they do they refer to the Sheol, the place of death: “The Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (Mt 12:40); Christ “descended into the lower regions of the earth” (Eph 4:9). Acts 2:27 puts on Christ’s lips the words of Psalm 16, addressed to God: “You will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption”, implying he will be in Sheol. This is why the New Testament often states that Christ is “brought back from the dead” (Acts 4:10; 13:34; Rom 8:11; 10:7-9; 1 Cor 15:20; Heb 13:20).

The descent into hell means that Christ died and truly shared the human experience of death. Just as by taking our sin upon himself on the cross he frees us from sin, so by entering into the realm of death and being raised by the Father he conquers death, “the last enemy to be destroyed” (1 Cor 15:26; CCC 636). The doors of the realm of death have been opened; death no longer has the last word. Of course, without the resurrection Christ’s descent into hell would be meaningless, but as a part of the Paschal Mystery as a whole, it is the source of all victory over death and over the small ‘deaths’ and ‘hells’ of our daily

lives, over ‘the fear of death’ that otherwise holds us ‘in lifelong slavery’ (Cf. Heb 2:15).

The second meaning of Christ’s descent into hell is victory over the devil. It is not said that Christ descended into Gehenna. He let himself be brought down by the power of death and shared the condition of the dead, but it is inconceivable that he put himself under the power of the devil and shared the fate of those who refuse God, either the damned or the demons (CCC 633; 636). However, insofar as the devil “has the power of death” (Heb 2:14), overcoming death means vanquishing him. In this sense the descent into the realm of death is the ultimate way for Christ to “enter into the strong man’s house”, the house of evil, and “bind the strong man” (see Mt 12:29; Lk 11:21-22. See Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth*, I, p. 20). Once again, as a part of the Paschal Mystery as a whole, Jesus’ descent is the source of all limits set to the devil’s power and all victories over evil spirits.

In these first two senses Jesus’ victory over death and the devil concerns the whole human race in all times and places. A third meaning of Christ’s descent into hell, however, is that it brings salvation in a more specific way for the righteous who lived and died before him. Very early on, the Church Fathers wondered how salvation could reach those who preceded the coming of the Savior. The descent into hell brought the answer, because Christ could thus touch those who were in Sheol awaiting his coming in faith: “The Gospel was preached even to those who are dead” (1 Peter 4:6; CCC 633-634; 637). Some icons beautifully depict Christ, after having broken down the doors of hell, seizing Adam by the wrist to wrench him out of the pit of death.

A fourth meaning that can contribute to our spiritual life may be added. Though the crucifixion and the apparitions of the Risen Lord are visible moments of the Paschal Mystery, the descent into hell happens outside the range of human perception. This is echoed in the Latin Church by a day of ‘silence’: no liturgical celebration tells of this moment of Christ’s saving action or is specifically devoted to it. We are thus reminded that a great amount of Christ’s work in us happens at a level too deep for us to perceive: in periods in which we feel nothing, it is good to remember that he may be more active than ever, in the most inner recesses of our being, to destroy evil at its roots and set us free. 🙏