

### Exercising Prophetic Leadership:

# Who is your Joshua?

■ Marcos Volcan



Christian leaders, baptised in the power of the Holy Spirit, must make good use of their gifts and abilities for the benefit of Christian community, attending to its real needs.

The business world's main focus is leadership, producing a great number of new training material on the subject. It is, therefore, a vast area of study comprising other subjects such as psychology, economy, marketing, etc. leading to practical application of its principles.

Christian leadership training programs have been using such knowledge to form people, and this has contributed towards more efficient results, especially in view of the new challenges evangelization presents.

Subjects such as "mission", "vision", "goals" and "strategies" have become quite common in dealing with pastoral planning. A great number of leaders and those involved in some kind of ministry, when challenged by new projects, make use of the several concepts and practical resources of management in order to improve their results. Amazingly though, what has been systematized in the form of new areas of knowledge, was already part of the approach of the biblical characters who stood out as leaders of the people of God.

For example, in the Book of Exodus, when the people of Israel were freed from slavery. Jacob's descendants had dwelt in Egypt for about 450 years and had, during that time, formed a nation. However,

the land of Egypt started to be ruled by harsher pharaohs who believed the people of Israel were a menace to their own land; forcing them into slavery and drowning every new-born child in the Nile, thus stopping the Israelites increasing in number.

The Israelites complained to God. God appointed Moses their leader to lead them out of Egypt into the "Promised Land". The so-called "Exodus" forever marked Israel's history; Moses being considered one of its most important leaders. I would like to highlight three stages of Moses' leadership journey: 1. His call from God; 2. Leading people; 3. His successor. In the first stage, Moses' call occurs in the "burning bush" experience. There, he is called to a mission that



seems practically impossible to be fulfilled. When he encountered the "I Am Who I Am", in spite of his weaknesses and fear of what lay ahead, believing that he lacked oratorical ability and material resources, he felt compelled to say yes.

Although he didn't want to leave his life as a shepherd, he had no other reason to say no, and so, after some hesitation, it seems that the bush that was burning outside started burning inside of him and he undertook the mission. Then, for the rest of his life he became totally committed to the vision inside of him. His encounter with God would unfold in many other future encounters, which, no matter how tense they sometimes were, helped to build a human-divine relationship hardly seen in the "Old Covenant", one that later became universal in Jesus when the veil of the sanctuary was torn in two. In this respect, from the perspective of faith, there will always be a gap that even contemporary knowledge is unable to explain. What does it take for someone to take a step like this? What does it take to leave everything behind and throw oneself into such a huge undertaking? It was in the burning bush experience that the friendship started. The conversation Moses had with God still resounds in the ears of many men and women today and continues to unfold: "For these new times, more than just calling them to lead my people, I call men and women to a level of leadership where I not only wish to measure results, but build a friendship with, and reveal to those who serve me the intentions of my heart in order for them to act."

In the second stage we see Moses at work. The vision he had, has now become his mission and presents him with many challenges. Communicating the task to the people and getting their support, as well facing the reluctance of the Egyptian government thus experiencing internal barriers, which remained during the "Passover" when they crossed

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the Red Sea going into the wilderness before finally reaching the “Promised Land”. Moses, unaccustomed to team work, felt overwhelmed. The “stressful” life in the wilderness, with discouraged and complaining people, tested his limits; he was becoming depressed when, following the advice of his father-in-law, he decided to delegate tasks and share the work with other people. This enabled him to focus on his mission, train his people, and prepare a new generation for the fulfilment of God’s promises, thus acquiring the skill of training new leaders; forming qualified people to take on challenging tasks.

During the time they spent in the wilderness another important figure emerged, a man who was faithful to God and committed to the mission: Joshua.

At the third stage, it’s time to fight for the conquest of the land and to prepare the path for transition. Moses felt that his time was over and that his life was coming to an end. Moses was an excellent, innovative leader in times of hazards and difficulties; in him we find a vigorous personality, but he was aging and new skills were needed in order to lead a people who had finally matured. This indicated that a change should take place. Moses’ mission was to lead the people up to the border of the Promised Land. Moses successor, Joshua, had the mission of leading the people into the Promised Land. Joshua had a motivating personality and the ability to plan strategically. Joshua is a model of succession inspired by the will of God and attending to the needs of the new times. Joshua had to continue what Moses had started, and to manage it with freedom. God did not allow Moses to “retire” – he died before they entered the Promised Land and left a legacy of a mission carried out with zeal and love for the people of God.

This kind of transition reminds me of an experience I had when I was twelve. During a sporting event in my town, some colleagues and I were asked to carry a torch for some blocks around our school. Everything was well prepared for the occasion and we were told to wait for the torch to arrive at a given location. When my turn to carry the torch came I thought it was an easy task in the beginning, but as I continued to run and the distance increased, even though the torch didn’t weigh much, it seemed to be heavier and heavier. I was relieved when I saw someone ahead waiting to take the torch; I felt encouraged, and was happy to pass it on.

Years later, I attended an event called “Fanning the Flame”, a gathering of leaders from several different countries. During that weekend we were encouraged, by means of comparisons, to perform our ministry activities as if we were taking part in the Olympic Games, where the torch is lit and goes around different places, carried by different people, but

always with the same goal, to keep burning to the end. It reminded of that experience I had at the age of twelve and which, to this day, is a principle that guides me whenever I have to pass on a leadership position I hold. Meaning that I try to carry out the mission with zeal and good disposition of heart, always trying to keep the strength to get to the end with the torch burning. And when the time comes to hand over the torch, I can do it without regrets, knowing that my time has come to an end. Every Christian leader should understand his calling for leadership, but should also know that there comes a time to withdraw from it, and following the example of Moses, they should prepare a Joshua to take over.

Therefore, a natural concern regarding leadership is to find other people that have God’s call on their lives, one that is strong enough to ensure that they take firm steps in faith, always trusting God; people who are able to develop skills that will help them manage problems and challenges they may face. Teaching new leaders how to pass on to others their leadership positions is as important as training them to become leaders. This is something that should never be neglected. Investing in new leaders will not suffice. It is also necessary to pass on to them our positions, tasks and jobs and resist the temptation to think that we are irreplaceable or that we are the masters of the harvest.

On the other hand, it is the responsibility of those to whom we passed on the leadership role to take good care of everything, as Joshua did; continuing Moses’ legacy, the legacy of those who served the Lord before them. This is an ability that is rarely found in the world of politics or business, and also among us who serve the Lord, one that only mature personalities possess and which is necessary in any area of human activity, especially when it comes to leading the people of God. However, even if new leaders are unable to maintain this continuity, we shouldn’t let our joy be diminished, for the golden rule in the service of the Gospel of Jesus is to expect neither praise nor trophies.

What really matters is the relationship we have built with God and our assurance that we have given the best of ourselves and of our gifts. This is worth more than anything. We shouldn’t expect neither payment nor instant recognition, especially because a true leader sometimes has to be firm and resolute and make decisions that may not always please everybody.

When we pass on the torch to our successor, we should also “die”, in other words, we should become aware of the fact that our time is over, that God Himself will take care of His people and, if He so wishes, He will call us to other missions and tasks. We should not be afraid of anything; if we say yes to Him, he will give us more of His Spirit, and will always be at our side. 🕯



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# Spreading out in unity

■ Maria Eugenia F. Góngora



**W**ith one heart all these joined constantly in prayer, together with some women, including Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers... When Pentecost day came round, they had all met together (Acts 1:14; 2:1).

Since that day, all of them remained together, rather than in a physical location, in one heart. United in hope, belief and confidence—characteristics in which Mary had much to do, since her maternal feelings had encouraged them to ‘remain’. The promise of Jesus came true, all his work was crowned here. The Spirit entered the heart of man, transformed his heart of stone into a new one capable to love, to go to others so they also could live the experience. Passive and locked up hearts that are now ‘worried’ about the need to urgently go out to communicate to everyone the Good News. From the unit of Pentecost, they receive the Holy Spirit and from there go out to all the paths of the world where He will lead them to. The beautiful paragraph number 26 of John Paul II’s encyclical letter on the permanent validity of the Church’s missionary mandate clearly indicates that from Pentecost the communities were open and missionary! It is confirmed throughout the Acts of the Apostles, a book of the Holy Spirit. Full of fire, they go announcing, as faithful, courageous witnesses, the message of salvation, not by their own power, ‘but you will receive the power of the Holy Spirit which will come on 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).

Introducing, by their witness, the new culture, that of Pentecost. Words, wonders and miracles the Lord allowed them to perform and in that way many were following; such was the attraction that the communities grew and multiplied, ‘And the numbers of men and women who came to believe in the Lord increased steadily’ (Acts 5:14).

With simplicity, full of love, despite the great dangers and persecution, they did not stop, ‘what I spoke and proclaimed was not meant to convince by philosophical argument, but to demonstrate the convincing power of the Spirit, so that your faith should depend not on human wisdom but on the power of God’ (1 Cor 2:4-5).

Different personalities, ways of thinking and seeing things, for the sake of Jesus and guided by the Holy Spirit. ‘The apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus with great power, and they were all accorded great respect’ (Acts 4:33).

The Acts repeatedly tell us how many men and women opened the message of salvation. As yesterday, today we remain members of the same spiritual family, inherited from the apostles at Pentecost—ecclesial communion, which is the Church. Pope Francis reminds us: ‘Yet I realize that no words of encouragement will be enough unless the fire of the Holy Spirit burns in our hearts. A spirit-filled evangelisation is one guided by the Holy Spirit, for He is the soul of the Church called to proclaim the Gospel’ (*Evangelii gaudium* 267). The Spirit is moving us to go down every road, introducing and expanding this culture, that one day will be full and perfect, since now we taste the first fruits. Even in the midst of

struggles, trials and persecution, Paul comforts us when he says, ‘Can anything cut us off from the love of Christ — can hardships or distress, or persecution, or lack of food and clothing, or threats or violence’ (Rm 8,35). The Holy Spirit inspires us through Peter, today Francis, saying: ‘I expect you to share with everyone in the Church the grace of baptism in the Holy Spirit. [...] Remember that the Church was born “on the move”, that Pentecost morning’

By nature the Church is missionary; her founder is our Lord Jesus Christ, missionary of God the Father, through the power of his Holy Spirit, and in the dynamism of Pentecost He sends us to do what He did. United in that *koinonia* (ecclesial communion), attracted towards the same point, towards the explosion of Pentecost, towards Jesus who gives us his Spirit, it is like the exercise of centripetal circles, towards the centre, to go out then and be prepared and strong in his holy harmony and momentum. As a divine dynamic, centripetal circles become by the action of love into centrifugal, in other words, that they go to reach out to all—the grace emanates from the community, from each of us. That will be the way to introduce the Culture of Pentecost, from our smallness and simplicity, cheerfully announcing what we first lived. Let’s always remember that the mission unites us! As in the first communities, this testimony will make the Church attractive, and the other will want to live like Christ. What a wonderful discipleship will be that new ones that were reached out by the love enter into the centripetal circles, to go out then as witnesses of the Risen.

With certainty and holy daring His Holiness Pope Francis is also repeating to us: ‘I prefer a Church which is bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets, rather than a Church which is unhealthy from being confined and from clinging to its own security’ (*Evangelii gaudium* 49). It is the powerful force of the Spirit of Jesus that comes as a reminder that we belong to a Church, necessarily ‘concerned’ about going out to announce to everyone the grace we have received. As in the early days, men and women are, perhaps unknowingly, expecting this announcement, which is capable of giving life.

No wonder the word most used by Pope Francis is go out. The CCR blossomed as a providential response of God to this time. Pope Benedict XVI often said that to us. It is a response that cannot remain mute to today’s world, which is living times of great upheaval, indifference and pain. It seems that we are becoming familiar, and not in a few places, with the culture of death; it gradually penetrates to the point that we think that this is normal... that is to say, to live without God. We are called, with that *parrhesia* of the early Church, to get on the move, to go out, so that they tell about us just as they told about the first Christians: ‘The people who have been turning the whole world upside down have come here now’ (Acts 17:6). ‘Keeping our missionary fervour alive calls for firm trust in the Holy Spirit, for it is He who “helps us in our weakness” (Rom 8:26)’ (*Evangelii gaudium* 280). ‘With the Holy Spirit, Mary is always present in the midst of the people. She joined the disciples in praying for the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:14) and thus made possible the missionary outburst which took place at Pentecost’ (ib. 284). 🕯



## 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](mailto:newsletter@iccrs.org)

# Does God test us?

When people are in the midst of a difficult trial such as sickness, unemployment, or the loss of a loved one, it is not uncommon to hear them say: “God is testing me.” Or sometimes another person will tell the sufferer, “God is testing you.”

Is it true that God tests people? What do Scripture and Tradition tell us about how we should understand such trials?

In Scripture we find several different passages in which God is said to test someone. For instance, Genesis 22 tells us, “After these things God tested Abraham,” and then narrates the most difficult test imaginable: Abraham is asked to sacrifice his only beloved son, Isaac.

The book of Job describes how God allowed Satan to take away, first, Job’s children and possessions, and second, Job’s own health. In his anguish Job cries out to God, “What is man, that you make so much of him, and that you set your mind upon him, visit him every morning, and test him every moment?” (Job 7:17-19).

God tests people not only through trials but also through blessings. During Israel’s desert journey, God told Moses, “Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day’s portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not” (Exod 16:4-5). God tested his people as to whether they would trust him and obey his command not to gather manna on the sabbath.

Not only in the Old Testament but also for Christians, being tested by trials is a normal part of human life. The First Letter of Peter says, “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed” (1 Pet 4:12-13).

In all these examples, it is important to recognize that God does not test human beings to increase his own knowledge. He already knows us perfectly. Rather he tests us for our sake. His “tests” are not like a teacher giving a final exam, but like a goldsmith trying gold in the fire, to refine and purify it. So Scripture encourages us, “Now for a little while you may have to suffer various trials, so that the genuineness of your faith, more precious than gold which though perishable is tested by fire, may result to praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:6-7).

It is also essential to make a distinction that was not yet clear in the Old Testament period: the distinction between what God allows and what God directly causes. God tests us in the sense that he allows us to encounter temptation or suffering, but he himself does not directly cause these things. He allows them for our good, that we might learn to resist evil and grow in humility, trust and reliance on God. As Moses told the Israelites, God “fed you in the wilderness with manna... that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end” (Deut 8:16).

We must avoid a very common misunderstanding in regards to sickness and other trials. Many people think that because God has allowed these adversities in our life, therefore it would be wrong for us to pray to be healed or delivered from an adversity. But this does not follow at all. In fact, the Lord wants us to grow in faith by confidently praying to him for all our needs, including our need for health and the fullness of life.

If a person is seriously ill, we do not hesitate to advise them to see a doctor as soon as possible. We recognize that to seek healing through a doctor is the proper response to illness, and it in no way implies that a person is unwilling to carry their cross. Likewise, if someone is suffering the loss of their job or home, or some other trial, we do not say, “Just grin and bear it.” Rather we seek to relieve their suffering and provide for their needs. Why then would we think that it is wrong to pray to God for healing from sickness or relief from other trials? Sirach expresses this balanced perspective: “My son, when you are ill, delay not, but pray to God, who will heal you.... Then give the doctor his place lest he leave; for you need him too” (Sir 38:9, 13). God works sometimes through doctors and sometimes miraculously through prayer.

Finally we should also make a distinction between a test and a temptation. God allows us to be tested by adversity, but he will never tempt us to sin. “Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am being tempted by God,” for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one. But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire” (James 1:13-14). Scripture also teaches us to have confidence that God will always provide a way to overcome temptations. “No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it” (1 Cor 10:13). 🏠