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THE SPIRITUALITY OF LEADERSHIP
THE LONERGAN INSIGHT

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What might Jesuit philosopher and theologian Bernard Lonergan be saying about leadership? Lonergan does not seem to offer *direct* insights and reflections on leadership *per se*. But one can discern connections between his key concepts on one hand, and, on the other, some of the critical issues that confront leadership in the world today. Some of these issues are the following: the legitimacy of power and authority, the need for self-transcendence and authenticity in leadership, and the imperative of community and creativity. This article aims to draw from the wellspring of Lonergan's thought some insights that can inform the exercise of leadership in the contemporary horizon. How can Lonergan help expand and deepen our current understanding of leadership? What perspectives from the Lonerganian method can we gain which are applicable to the challenges of leadership today?

My basic thesis can be presented as follows. One critical challenge of leadership is the integration of the leader's interiority and exteriority. By interiority we simply mean what goes on within the self of the leader: his mind and spirit, his heart and soul, and his consciousness and values. By exteriority we refer to the actions and behavioral manifestations of the leader's inner realities. This includes the leader's decisions, projects, initiatives, interventions, and other things he creates. The challenge

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I mentioned is the integration, or the coherence between these two: interiority and exteriority. This challenge addresses questions like the following: How can leaders create projects that flow from right values? What mindset should leaders have so that they act morally or responsibly? What is the basis of a leadership that has legitimate power and authority? What makes an authentic leader?

We can find in Lonergan some clues, if not answers, to these questions on leadership. We can deduce from Lonergan's writings that leaders are called to do tasks of creating and healing in the world. Creating moves the world toward growth and progress, and away from decline. Healing moves people toward their redemption, and away from selfishness. Both creating and healing form meanings and values, which in turn constitute culture. Creating and healing form authentic cultures; decline and selfishness form inauthentic cultures. Authenticity is the basis for a kind of power and authority that is legitimate. Hence authentic leaders possess legitimate power and authority; they build cultures that move the world forward, not backward. Such is the "exteriority" of leadership (see *Diagram*).

How are authentic leaders formed? Where can we find them? These leaders operate from a certain "interiority." For Lonergan, these authentic leaders possess "open minds" which are able to transcend natural inclinations toward biases. Such openness in mindset and consciousness facilitates four qualities which Lonergan calls the "transcendental precepts": attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness, and responsibility. These four precepts correspond to four levels of related, recurrent operations—experiencing, understanding, judging, deciding—which happen within the interiority of the leader. By following the four precepts, leaders are able to transcend natural inclinations toward bias in general, and specifically, toward inattentiveness, obtuseness, unreasonableness, and irresponsibility. Furthermore, we can glean from Lonergan that these precepts form and create insight, love, community, and self-transcendence, and these four dimensions of insight, love, community, and self-transcendence become the force or energy for creating and healing which leaders are called to do in the world. If leaders follow the opposite path of bias,

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inattentiveness, obtuseness, unreasonableness, and irresponsibility, what can be expected is decline in cultures, and the furtherance of inauthenticity and illegitimacy in leadership and power.

The *Diagram* below summarizes the points made above and a discussion on these points follows:



The Leadership Task

In *Healing and Creating in History*, Lonergan identifies two tasks which, upon reflection, we can ascribe to leadership today: the creative task and the healing task. These two are positive courses of action characteristic of the development of civilizations in history. They are complementary: Lonergan imagines the creative task as operating "from below upwards," and the healing task as operating "from above downwards."

The creative task is to "find answers," and this is done through the generation of insight:

> It is a matter of insight, not of one insight but of many, not of isolated insights but of insights that coalesce, that complement and correct one another, that influence policies and programs, that reveal their shortcomings in their concrete results, that give rise to further correcting insights, corrected policies, corrected programs, that gradually accumulate into the all-round, balanced, smoothly functioning system that from the start was needed but at the start was not yet known.[1]

This whole cumulative process of insight concretizes itself in structures of society. This process spurs growth and progress. The opposite is decline, and decline happens when the "flow of insights dry up." Insights are generated only by people who have "open minds," not "biased minds" (the idea of bias in Lonergan will be discussed later). Insight is thus critical to Lonergan's philosophy of history. Historical and social transformations happen through the "wheel of progress," which in turn is fueled by insights which arise, complement, and correct themselves. The wheel of progress becomes a "wheel of decline" when the process is distorted by bias.[2]

The healing task is described by Lonergan as "the transformation of falling in love," which is of different types:

> … the domestic love of the family; the human love of one's tribe, one's city, one's country, mankind; the divine love that orientates man in his cosmos and expresses itself in his worship. Where hatred only sees evil, love reveals values. At once it commands commitment and joyfully carries it out, no matter what the sacrifice involved.[3]

Love has the power to "dissolve" hatred that reinforces biases. In another article, Lonergan writes that "beyond progress and decline

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[1]Bernard Lonergan, "Healing and Creating in History," in *A Third Collection: Papers by Bernard J.F. Lonergan, SJ*, ed. Frederick Crowe (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), 103.

[2]Lonergan, "Healing and Creating in History," 105.

[3]Lonergan, "Healing and Creating in History," 106.

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there is redemption," and its principle is "self-sacrificing love."[4] The healing task for Lonergan consists thus in being able to love in a way that heals hatred and bias, which is grounded in values, and which entails self-sacrifice. This love is found in both human and divine loving.

These two tasks which Lonergan identifies as critical in history could be seen as two essential tasks of leadership today. On one hand, leaders are called to be creative: to generate ideas which in turn are concretized through structures and systems, policies and programs which hopefully respond to the crucial problems of the world today. On the other hand, leaders are also called to complement this creative role with the role of healing and loving. This healing role addresses relationships and people rather than structures and systems. It attends to the recovery of healthy interpersonal relationships that are necessary in leading. It helps move people individually toward what Lonergan calls "redemption." Together, these two roles of creating and healing complement each other since leaders do attend to both structures and people, policies and relationships, tasks and values.

Leadership as Transcendence

The call to leadership is a call to transcendence. Leaders are called to go beyond themselves and see the bigger picture of reality. They are also called to overcome themselves—their needs, weaknesses, and even strengths—and learn how to understand others and work with them with openness, humility, and generosity. They are called to deal with the temptations of power, self-indulgence, and narcissism, which cause the downfall of many leaders. In decision-making, leaders are called to consider broader perspectives, recognize and struggle with their biases, and be as objective and perspicuous as they can be. Some

[4]Bernard Lonergan, "Dialectic of Authority," in *A Third Collection: Papers by Bernard J.F. Lonergan, SJ*, ed. Frederick Crowe (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1985), 10.

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leaders, those who are called to heroism, even transcend their very selves to the point of sacrificing their lives for the sake of others.

The transcendental precepts of Bernard Lonergan can be used as a framework in the formation of transcendence in leadership. To begin with, the transcendentals operate at the level of interiority of leaders. They characterize the intentionality of leaders, and thus they precede action. They are "contained in questions prior to the answers," the *a priori* that "go beyond what we know to seek what we do not know yet." They are "unrestricted in denotation" because "answers are never complete and so only give rise to still further questions." The transcendentals are also "comprehensive in connotation" because "they intend the unknown whole or totality of which our answers reveal only a part."[5] Leaders—especially those who are transcendent—are those who have the ability to follow the imperatives of the transcendentals. They can be attentive rather than inattentive at the level of experience. They are intelligent, not obtuse nor stupid, at the level of understanding. They are reasonable rather than unreasonable at the level of judgment. They are responsible rather than irresponsible and arbitrary at the level of decision.

The transcendental method can be used by leaders as they reflect on situations, examine options, form judgments, and make decisions. Awareness of the precepts and their dispositions toward them can heighten the consciousness, self-awareness, and self-mastery of leaders. They can ask themselves whether decisions are made following the precepts of attentiveness, intelligence, reasonableness, and responsibility, or whether decisions are made deficiently or even in violation of these precepts. In addition to the natural tendencies of inattentiveness, obtuseness, unreasonableness, and irresponsibility which everyone is called to transcend, there is the inclination toward bias, and bias, according to Lonergan, can be of four different forms. There is the bias of personal egoism which focuses on one's personal

[5]Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 11.

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interest and advantage. There is the bias of group egoism pushing for the benefit of one group while disregarding and being hostile toward other groups. There is the bias of the neurotic whose mind is distorted by unique psychological limitations. Finally, there is the general bias of "good men of common sense" bound by a perception of "omnicompetence," "insisting on procedures that no longer work, convinced that the only way to do things is to muddle through," resistant to the challenge of reason and theory.[6] Lonergan's ideal of self-transcendence includes the struggle against one's propensity toward bias and its different forms.

We can find therefore in the framework of Lonergan a structure and path toward the self-transcendence of leaders. There is a normative function to the precepts, and everyone is called to follow it. Leaders, especially, are those who are called to observe it in a special way since they have a role in helping others—their members, followers, constituents—follow it. Research has shown that moral leaders possess higher levels of consciousness than non-leaders. If they follow the path of transcendence shown by the precepts, then they can help others follow it too, enabling them to heighten their consciousness as well. Leaders then model the way to transcendence and higher consciousness.

Community and Leadership

The same transcendental framework of experience, understanding, judgment, and action is used by Lonergan in defining community. Community is not just an aggrupation of persons within the same "geographical frontier." For Lonergan, community is more than this; it is essentially "an achievement of common meaning."[7] Lonergan quickly

[6]Lonergan, "Healing and Creating in History," 105; Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 53.

[7]Bernard Lonergan, "Existenz *and* Aggiornamento," in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* 4, eds. Frederick Crowe and Robert Doran (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 226; Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 79.

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adds that there are varying kinds and degrees of achievement, and this diversity is understood clearly through his transcendental method. Basically, the "common meaning" achieved in community is forged by the following: common field of experience, common understanding, common judgment, and common aims and action. Furthermore,

> without the common field of experience people are out of touch. Without a common way of understanding, they will misunderstand one another, grow suspicious, distrustful, hostile, violent. Without common judgments they will live in different worlds, and without common aims they will work at cross-purposes.[8]

Lonergan adds that common meaning is "realized by will, especially by permanent dedication, in the love that makes families, in the loyalty that makes states, in the faith that makes religions."[9] He envisions that communities become "communities of love" which are "capable of making real and great sacrifices."[10] Such communities become the forces for progress and growth in history, countering the forces of decline and deterioration.

Leadership in the world today is ever challenged to build communities of understanding and action. This task is difficult as people are constantly divided by increasing complexity and multiplicity of differences: culture, race, age, gender, social class, ability, and so on. Forging unity, understanding, cooperation, and teamwork amid these diversities is among the priorities of leadership. Lonergan's framework is useful here since it stresses the centrality of common meaning in community-building, a common meaning that can indeed be achieved amid glaring diversities.

The framework also proposes a process: common meaning can be wielded through common experience, common understanding, common

[8]Lonergan, "Dialectic of Authority," 5–6.

[9]Lonergan, "Existenz *and* Aggiornamento," 226.

[10]Lonergan, "Dialectic of Authority," 10.

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judgment, and common aims. Leaders are challenged to facilitate and animate this process of achieving commonality at these four levels of operations through dialogue and conversation. Because of the complexity and interdependence of these operations, leaders are more and more challenged to undertake this process, not as single specialists, but through teamwork.[11] The extent to which these commonalities are achieved will determine the future of communities in this world, as Lonergan claims: "Community coheres or divides, begins or ends, just where the common field of experience, common understanding, common judgment, common commitments begin and end."[12] It will also determine the future of civilization, because "the source of power is cooperation," and the "carrier of power is the community."[13]

Authenticity, Culture, and Power in Leadership

At this point one can discern in the Lonerganian paradigm a certain passion for making distinctions. He strives for clarity and in doing so he elucidates an almost dualistic perspective on tendencies and outcomes like the following: progress vs. decline, insight vs. bias, attentiveness vs. inattention, intelligence vs. obtuseness, reasonableness vs. unreasonableness, responsibility vs. irresponsibility, self-transcendence vs. selfishness. Through his transcendental precepts he distinguishes the path of community and progress in history. Another distinction can be discerned in Lonergan: the way of authenticity and legitimacy in culture and leadership.

Leaders vary greatly in terms of personality, style, approach, and strategy. There are authoritarian leaders and there are democratic ones. Some follow the transactional approach of getting things done, while others adhere to the more value-based approach of transformational

[11]Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 141–142.

[12]Lonergan, "Existenz *and* Aggiornamento," 226.

[13]Lonergan, "Dialectic of Authority," 5.

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leadership. Others tend to keep one dominant style of strategy and intervention, while others are situational, or their styles vary according to the contingency of the situation. There are leaders who follow strict ethical or moral norms of leadership, while others tend to follow the dictates of indulgent power, more open to compromises and manipulation. Another important distinction is authenticity and inauthenticity of leadership, and Lonergan has something to say about this.

In *Dialectic of Authority*, Lonergan makes connections between culture, authenticity, power, and authority. Culture is "the set of meanings and values that inform a common way of life." These meanings and values can be authentic or inauthentic. They are authentic "in the measure that cumulatively they are the result of the transcendental precepts." They are inauthentic "in the measure that they are the product of cumulative inattention, obtuseness, unreasonableness, irresponsibility."[14] Authenticity is linked to power and authority as follows:

> Authenticity makes power legitimate. It confers on power the aura and prestige of authority. [I]nauthenticity leaves power naked. It reveals power as mere power. Similarly authenticity legitimates authorities, and [i]nauthenticity destroys their authority and reveals them as merely powerful. Legitimated by authenticity authority and authorities have a hold on the consciences of those subject to authority and authorities. But when they lack the legitimating by authenticity, authority and authorities invite the consciences of subjects to repudiate their claims to rule.[15]

The transcendental precepts therefore help form authenticity in leadership. This authenticity "confers" upon the leader a power that is legitimate rather than a power that is "naked." By "naked" power we can understand that power that is not used for the good of others, but only benefits the leader himself. Power, when legitimated by authentic leaders, legitimates as well what Lonergan calls "authority

[14]Lonergan, "Dialectic of Authority," 7.

[15]Lonergan, "Dialectic of Authority," 7–8.

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and authorities," or what we can understand as "leadership per se" and the "leaders" themselves. Legitimate, authentic leadership then has "a hold" on the followers. Authenticity and legitimacy of power and leadership inspire followership. Inauthenticity and illegitimacy of power and leadership however can trigger opposite outcomes, like various forms of withdrawal of support, or movements to resist or remove leaders through peaceful or violent means.

Lonergan also applies authenticity and inauthenticity on the subjects or followers themselves, making a useful description of the dynamics of followership:

> Insofar as they are authentic, they will accept the claims of legitimate authority and legitimate authorities, and they will resist the claims of illegitimate authority and illegitimate authorities. On the other hand, insofar as they are inauthentic, they will resist legitimate claims, and they will support illegitimate claims.[16]

These ideas of Lonergan are useful in leadership theory. First of all, they highlight an important distinction among leaders: authenticity and inauthenticity. Secondly, they define authenticity and inauthenticity in terms of following or violating the transcendental precepts. A leader thus becomes authentic to the extent he is able to live out the precepts, and thus to the extent he can be self-transcendent: "Man achieves authenticity in self-transcendence."[17] Thirdly, authenticity leads to a kind of power and authority that is legitimate, and inauthenticity leads to the opposite direction of illegitimate power and authority. Lastly, the dynamics of authenticity are applicable to both leaders and followers, and to the dynamics of relationship between the two, like support and resistance, cooperation and repudiation.

[16]Lonergan, "Dialectic of Authority," 8.

[17]Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 104.

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Conclusion: Love, Spirituality, and Leadership

Lonergan goes beyond the transcendental notions of experience, intelligence, deliberation, and action by bringing love into the picture. The transcendental precepts of being attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible become actual when one becomes a "being-in-love."[18] The precepts, as discussed earlier, can reveal one's capacity for self-transcendence, but as Lonergan says, "capacity, hankering, intermittent trying are one thing; stable achievement is another." Such "stable achievement" can be understood in terms of the integration of interiority and exteriority, an integration that leads to integrity, consistency, wholeness, and permanence. According to Lonergan, this integration seems to occur "when one falls in love."[19] We can read from these thoughts that Lonergan may be considering "being-in-love," or "being loving," as another transcendental precept. It could be a fifth level, and as such, it sublates, presupposes and complements the other four.[20] It brings about "redemption," and its principle is "self-sacrificing love." To fall in love, according to Lonergan, is

> to go beyond attention, intelligence, reasonableness, responsibility. It is to set up a new principle that has, indeed, its causes, conditions, occasions, but, as long as it lasts, provides the mainspring of one's desire and fear, hope and despair, joy and sorrow.[21]

Lonergan then describes the different kinds of "being-in-love": intimate love found in couples and in the family, love for fellow human beings, and the love of God, as written so comprehensively in the

[18]Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 105.

[19]Bernard Lonergan, "Self Transcendence: Intellectual, Moral, Religious," in *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan* 17: *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965–1980*, eds. Robert Croken and Robert Doran (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 325.

[20]Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 120–121.

[21]Lonergan, "Dialectic of Authority," 10.

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Scriptures. Of all these kinds of love, Lonergan says that religious love is the summit because it is

> the basic fulfillment of our conscious intentionality, of our questions for intelligence, for reflection, for deliberation. It is a fulfillment that brings a deep-set joy that can remain despite humiliation, fatigue, privation, pain, betrayal, desertion. That fulfillment brings a radical peace, the peace that the world cannot give. That fulfillment bears fruit in a love of one's neighbor that strives mightily to bring about the kingdom of God on this earth. On the other hand, the absence of that fulfillment opens the way to the trivialization of human life stemming from the ruthless exercise of power, to despair about human welfare springing from the conviction that the universe is absurd.[22]

From these words of Lonergan, written towards the latter period of his scholarship, we can discern the primacy of love. Love, particularly religious love, facilitates self-transcendence. It follows the principle of self-sacrifice that one has to embrace as one follows the transcendental precepts. This embrace is difficult. It demands a struggle and stretching of consciousness.[23] It is precarious and fragile. It often finds persons caught up in never-ending tensions and contradictions which characterize a dialectic.[24] It straddles between the critical poles of self-centered orientation and other-centered values.[25] But as Lonergan's words imply, the embrace of self-sacrifice and love is our ultimate challenge and our final fulfillment.

Leaders today are called toward this spirit of sacrifice and virtue of loving. As earlier discussed, leadership demands transcendence, and as we have seen above, transcendence will ultimately demand sacrifice and love. Leaders are expected to be the ones who are disposed and capable to respond to this demand. In responding to this demand,

[22]Lonergan, "Self Transcendence: Intellectual, Moral, Religious," 326.

[23]Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 14.

[24]Lonergan, "Dialectic of Authority," 8.

[25]Lonergan, "Self Transcendence: Intellectual, Moral, Religious," 318.

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leadership connects with the spirit, and the spirituality that is formed becomes the wellspring of life, clarity, courage, energy, and hope that leaders so badly need as they navigate the increasingly complex world that we now have. What Lonergan offers can be seen as a path to knowing and living out this spirituality of leadership. For Lonergan, following the transcendental precepts, opening our minds to insight, building communities and cultures of progress and growth, growing in authenticity and legitimacy of power and authority—all these constitute a spirituality grounded in love, especially the love given to and received from the divine.

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