

9/11 AND A HEMORRHAGING CATHOLIC CHURCH: TEACHABLE MOMENTS FOR CATHOLIC SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

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A few years ago, the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development published a book for educational leaders entitled *The Hero's Journey* (Brown & Moffett, 1999), in which the authors applied the compelling and controlling metaphors of legendary heroes (leaders) to the challenges faced by educational leaders in contemporary culture. Using references to Odysseus, Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, Luke Skywalker in *Star Wars*, Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and the Arthurian knights in the quest of the Holy Grail, the authors detected five common threads woven into all of the heroes' stories:

1. The hero *departs* from home, goes on a journey, takes a risk, and leaves the places of comfort and safety and the complacency of the status quo.
2. The hero goes out to *search* for something more meaningful, something that gives new purpose, even something *sacra*, holy, the quest.
3. The hero *encounters* the demons, the monsters, evil, wicked witches, and Darth Vaders.
4. The hero stays steady on the course, *perseveres*, because he or she receives support from friends who share the vision and believe in the mission.
5. The true hero always *returns* home, a better person because of the journey.

Campbell (1989) says the true hero sees the status quo as the biggest demon and always returns home bringing hope to a dying culture.

Why did the writers use imagery and metaphors? Because they have tremendous power over the human psyche, they refocus our thinking as to what is important; they bring us back to a part of ourselves from which we may feel estranged, alienated, or perhaps even lost.

As Catholic educators, we too believe in the power of imagery; only our source is Scripture. In his book *Interpretation and Obedience*, Brueggemann (1991) discusses a scene from the Book of Kings. The people of Israel are devastated, starving, dying under the siege of the Assyrian army. The stench of death is everywhere and there is weeping and wailing behind the wall of

Jerusalem. The general of the Assyrian army decides to locate his army on a nearby hill and wait out the inevitable surrender of Israel. Some Assyrian soldiers scale the wall, start walking back and forth, and begin taunting and teasing the Israelites with “Where is your God now?” “Why isn’t he coming to help you?” “Surrender; it’s all over; come to the wall and talk to us.” Behind the wall, the prophet Isaiah comes and gathers his suffering people around him and tells them it is time for a serious conversation to take place behind the wall (II Kings 18:1-37). It is a pivotal, watershed moment, for two conversations are going to occur: (1) behind the wall, (2) at the wall.

We must first gather behind the wall and remember who we are, “Yahweh’s people,” and weep because we have forgotten this. We cannot go to the wall (the world) unless we are credible people. We cannot go to the wall until we are ready to enrich the conversation with an alternative view of reality. We cannot go to the wall unless we speak with a new vocabulary. We cannot go to the wall unless we have regained something we may have been estranged from, alienated from, or perhaps even lost.

So you and I gather to continue the conversation regarding leadership and Catholic education which began last summer at the University of San Francisco. It is not just a question or a matter of a changed geographical location—San Francisco, California, to Dayton, Ohio. The whole choreography in which the conversation is to take place has been irrevocably altered. The historical context has been redefined, the paradigm has shifted, and the fabric of the nation and the Catholic Church has become unraveled—all by two horrendous events: 9/11 and a hemorrhaging Church.

They have affected the conversation; they have intensified and reprioritized the agenda, and all that is going to be discussed here in the next few days will have to be considered against the backdrop of these two events.

Markham (1999), in her book *Spiritlinking Leadership*, expresses that to be an effective leader today, we must engage in two things: reflective contemplation and conflictual conversation.

REFLECTIVE CONTEMPLATION: 9/11

So let us begin with reflective contemplation on 9/11. *Time* magazine, in its issue printed three days after 9/11, states:

If you want to humble an empire it makes sense to maim its cathedrals. They are symbols of its faith, and when they crumble and burn, it tells us we are not so powerful and we can’t be safe. The Twin Towers...the Pentagon...are the sanctuaries of money and power that our enemies may imagine define us. (Gibbs, 2001)

One world ended at 8:45 a.m. on [a] Tuesday morning, another was born, one we always trust in but never see, in which normal people become fierce

heroes and everyone takes a test for which they have not studied. (Gibbs, 2001)

9/11 has left us with a terrible sadness and a quiet underlying anger. We are no longer impregnable, no longer safe, no longer a trusting people. We are a different country, it is a different world, and our educational institutions must respond to and reflect these new realities. 9/11—a teachable moment for leadership.

Certainly, we saw leadership at its finest moments: firemen, police, rescue workers, medical personnel, clergy, and so forth. Mayor Rudolph Giuliani embodied some of the most splendid and enviable qualities of a good leader:

1. Courage—he risked danger to himself in organizing a command center.
2. Presence—he was there; he was visible; he was with his people, in the streets, leading his people, giving directions in a calm, determined, decisive way...the pictures of him in this situation say more than any textbook can on the role of a leader.
3. Caring, consoling, comforting
4. Information—constantly giving out information, communicating with everyone. He was behind the microphone every night, consulting with all the agencies, sharing every piece of information he had acquired. He was accountable.
5. Gratitude—always praising everyone for their efforts, thanking everyone for each task that was accomplished.
6. Hope—he exuded hope (a true leader brings hope to a dying culture); “we New Yorkers are down but not out,” “we New Yorkers will survive this,” “we New Yorkers will endure this grief and survive.”

It was indeed a teachable moment for leadership. In our parish church we have been praying for leadership, and the prayer asks for “leadership that serves and service that leads.” We saw that in Mayor Giuliani. 9/11 has something else to say to us as Catholic educators. A new world is being born, a global entity, a place where the old rules no longer apply. *Newsweek* carried an article that graded us Americans with an F in global education. Yet, after 9/11, we were confronted with names and places like Osama bin Laden, the Taliban, al-Qaeda, jihad, *Koran*, burqa, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. Our history and geography teachers had to check their maps for location and spelling. Our religion classes began to look at the three great religions of the world: Christianity, Judaism, and Islam...and teach that all three are monotheistic and claim Abrahamic roots. What does the *Koran* teach and how do Mohammad and Jesus Christ differ? How does our curriculum reflect the globalized world that our children will live in? What are the advantages and disadvantages of a globalized world? *America* magazine (Locatelli, 2002) quoted the Jesuit superior general, Father Kolvenbach, who asserts that we

must “educate the whole person for the real world” (p. 8). We can no longer ask “How should I live in this world?” (p. 9), but we must ask, “How should all of us live together in this time and place?” (p. 9). This kind of global reflection and contemplation will undoubtedly lead to conflictual conversation. How wonderful for our educational curriculum.

REFLECTIVE CONTEMPLATION: A HEMORRHAGING CATHOLIC CHURCH

Some people called our sexual abuse scandal our 9/11, our Watergate, our Good Friday. Whatever the name, there is no doubt that we are a wounded, bleeding, grieving Church. The pervasive sexual scandals, the unprecedented trip to Rome, the depositions of our hierarchy, the pain of the victims, the secrecy, and silence have been devastating to our Church, to our leadership, and to the faithful.

So much has been written, but I always return to the article in *National Catholic Reporter*, written by Eugene Kennedy (2002). The clerical culture had already begun to crumble years ago, but it was left unnoticed by bishops who felt compelled to defend the institution, protect the priest, settle the case, and tell the victims to be quiet for “the good of the Church” (p. 15). “Here, in this tragic shadow world of gospel and priesthood, were found the fields ripe for the harvest by men,” (p. 15) endowed with a presumed and illusionary set of virtues, men honored, pampered, and protected. What we witness today is the collapse of a great ecclesiastical structure that began generations ago.

A number of years ago, when addressing a clerical conference, I referred to Barbara Tuchman’s great book *The March of Folly*, in which she devoted a couple of chapters to the “folly” of the Catholic Church. She focused her attention on six very corrupt popes: Sixtus IV, Innocent VII, Alexander VI, Julius II, Leo X, and Clement VII, dating from 1471 to 1534. She believed that these popes had carried the papacy into excesses of amorality, avarice, and power politics. They had ignored all protests and warnings and had left unanswered all cries for reform. In fact, they regarded protests and questions as a form of dissent that had to be suppressed. Alas, then came the Protestant Revolt, which resulted in a downsized and disgraced Catholic Church. Tuchman laments the folly of the Church leaders that stripped them of almost half of Europe. Tuchman believes that there are three seeds of death in every institution which, if left unattended, will cause the eventual demise of that institution. To paraphrase, these seeds are: (1) when leaders do not heed the voices of their people; (2) when people within the institution use it for their own self-aggrandizement; and (3) when leaders have the illusion of invulnerable status. No wonder Martin Luther nailed 95 theses on the cathedral door at Wittenberg.

The pedophile issue is the tip of the iceberg. Other issues lurk beneath the surface: accountability of leadership, credibility, celibacy, women's ordination, the role of the laity, the appointment of bishops, parish councils, and financial disclosure. The world is calling us to account for our embarrassing abuse of spiritual power.

Reflection on the current events of our Church leads to some conflictual conversation. Surely we can wonder how historians will look back at our time and judge our actions. What has been our folly because we have ignored certain signposts or because we have pursued certain signposts? What will be the price of our folly upon our Church in the 21st century?

There remains the belief that conflictual dialogue can lead to a creative, hopeful conversation. Years ago, we used to sing, *Come, Holy Ghost*. Well, guess what? The Holy Ghost came and we are really disturbed at her arrival. This time, I believe, is really a graced moment in our Church, a Second Pentecost, if we would only seize the day—*carpe diem*. This reminds me of the famous lines of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*:

There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which, taken at the flood,
Leads on to fortune
Omitted, all the voyage of their life,
Is bound in shallows and in miseries. (Wilson, 1981, p. 817)

What have been the teachable moments for leadership in this crisis? To be effective, leadership must be credible, trustworthy, and accountable. Leadership must listen to its people. Leadership is not about personal power but about empowering others. Leadership is consultative and collegial, embracing the gifts of others in an open, caring, comforting way. Above all, in our Catholic institutions, leadership must be true to the voice of the spirit—the call to holiness and a witness to the *sacra*. We have learned from this scandal what not to do, that arrogance and personal power are not the qualities that define good leadership. We weep together at the failure of our leadership to lead. We pray for a return to the biblical concept of leadership, when the people cry out to Zechariah: We will grab you by your sleeve, we will follow you...because we know "that God is with you" (Zechariah 8:23).

Reflective contemplation of an event can lead to conflictual conversation. How are our schools handling the crisis in our Church when questioned by parents and students? What has been the financial impact upon teachers' salaries and educational resources as dioceses begin paying the victims of sexual abuse?

In 1999, the Baker-Riordan report, funded by the Lilly Foundation, ended its critique of Catholic education with a very interesting question: "Is the [Catholic] school system that the church is getting the one that it really wants

and needs in the dynamic and complex religious marketplace of American culture?" (Baker & Riordan, 1998, p. 22).

What the Church wants and needs take on an entirely different meaning in 2002. What a topic for conflictual conversation: whatever the response is to these needs and wants. They must find their way into our educational institutions where they are to be prayed about, reflected upon, discussed, responded to, and hopefully resolved in some way. It is with great pleasure that I note here that Boston College, under the leadership of Father William Leahy, S.J., has already declared that the college or university is the appropriate forum for discussions on the Church, faith, and God and is planning for such seminars and workshops to take place at Boston College in the fall.

The questions for reflective contemplation and conflictual conversation are many:

1. What impact has the scandal within our Church had on the attempts to attract applications for leadership positions in our schools?
2. How do we attract, sustain, and support leadership in our schools?
3. How do we redefine and redesign the role of a leader so that the position is not so overwhelming, burdensome, and draining to those who wish to assume it?
4. In light of the events in the Church today, what is the laity's thinking and redefinition of Catholic identity and the Catholic culture of our schools?
5. What resources are we to draw upon to prepare our leadership for the spiritual, theological, and professional demands made upon them today?
6. What is the quality of the teachers we hire, in view of the aggressive public school recruitment efforts?
7. Is the vocabulary of the religious model of Catholic education—charism, mission, ministry, community—applicable and meaningful to our lay leadership? Do we need a new model; do we need to speak a new vocabulary?

So much more could be added for our continued conversation here at the University of Dayton. Our presence here bespeaks our willingness to engage in reflective contemplation and conflictual conversation. We will certainly find our comfort zones here as we pray and socialize together and share wisdom and wit with one another. This is what keeps us all on the journey.

In closing, I will return to *Time* magazine and its closing words about 9/11:

Once the dump trucks and bulldozers have cleared away the rubble and a thousand funeral Masses have been said, once the streets are swept clean of ash and glass and the stores and monuments and airports reopen, once we have begun to explain this to our children and to ourselves, what will we do? What else but build new cathedrals and if they are bombed, build some more. Because the faith is in the act of building, not the building itself and no amount of terror can keep us from scraping the sky. (Gibbs, 2001)

And what about our beloved, bereaved Church? I would like to think that this quote from Christopher Fry's *A Sleep of Prisoners* will provide some consolation:

The human heart can go the lengths of God.
 Dark and cold we may be, but this
 Is no winter now. The frozen misery
 Of centuries breaks, cracks, begins to move;
 The thunder is the thunder of the floes,
 The thaw, the flood, the upstart Spring.
 Thank God our time is now when wrong
 Comes up to face us everywhere,
 Never to leave us till we take
 The longest stride of soul men ever took.
 Affairs are now soul size.
 The enterprise is exploration into God.
 Where are you making for?
 It takes so many thousand years to wake,
 But will you wake, for pity's sake? (p. 49)

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