

## PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

It is commonplace to say that there is a crisis of authority in the American Church. This means, among other things, that there is a crisis of leadership in the American Church. Where leadership is concerned, we need it, crave it; but we sense that we lack it. In preparing these remarks, I asked several theologian-colleagues the question: "What is the greatest need in the American Church?" The answers were immediate and unanimous: leadership.

The following remarks might be entitled "a theological reflection on leadership." Or perhaps more accurately and less presumptuously, "reflections on leadership by one struggling to be a theologian." It must be clear that a few brief sentences cannot and do not pretend to build a theology of leadership. For that, our time is too limited, the subject too ranging, complicated and in flux, and the author too sharply acquainted with his own limitations. But if a single point can be made, perhaps others will be encouraged to pursue the matter further.

I will center my reflections around the notions of authority and leadership because I believe these notions could well border on the heart of our crisis. And specifically I will limit myself to the relationship of the two notions. It is obvious that the two concepts are very closely related, both theoretically and practically. But here I should like to highlight the distinction between them. Let us accept a working description of authority as the right to speak for, to decide for a particular group, to bind its members to the goals and methods of the group. It is the right to command and order.

Leadership we can describe for the present as the capacity to influence the behavior of others in a given situation toward some goal or objective. This influence can be exercised in many ways. We are most familiar with the following forms of leadership: charismatic, administrative, executive. What type of leadership will best meet the needs of a group will vary according to culture, circumstances, and places. What is clear, however, is that leadership is a much broader notion than that of juridical authority. In other

words, there are many other ways to influence conduct than by commands issued by reason of office.

However, we are constantly tempted to identify the two notions. There are many reasons for this. First of all, in the past the technical or juridical authority was expected to be and often was the factual leader. Secondly, because two forms of leadership are executive and administrative, and because the ability to influence behavior administratively and executively is very generally tied to position or office, there is a strong tendency simply to reduce leadership to authoritative position, to formal authority. This would be especially true, I would think, in the Catholic Church where, traditionally, position has been accepted as the basis of certain teaching and shepherding prerogatives. And this tendency would be intensified in times and situations where these prerogatives are conceived along highly juridical lines. The tendency becomes almost irresistible in a society overwhelmed by fear of crime and assault. In such a society law and order (and therefore the juridical positions behind them) shift from implemental to consummatory values. We then see a strange phenomenon: a policeman makes what promises to be a successful run for the mayor's office.

When leadership gets simply identified with authoritative position in a group's day to day structures, procedures, institutions, and expectations, a strange paradox appears. A factual separation of genuine leadership and formal authority begins to occur. True leadership, in other words, begins to shift *locus* or disappear altogether. The explanation of this is rather obvious: the more one relies on mere authority, the less he does those things that are essential to real leadership. The steps that then follow are both predictable and quite human. First of all, actual authority wanes and as it does so authority figures appeal all the more loudly to their position, office, authority. Secondly, as the actual authority wanes and grows progressively weaker, the protest against authoritarianism grows. James Hitchcock sees this latter phenomenon as a paradox.<sup>1</sup> It is not really that, not at all; for the protest is really not basically a protest. It is a hope. Men accept authority in the

<sup>1</sup> James Hitchcock, "The State of Authority in the Church," *Cross Currents*, 20 (Fall, 1970), 369-381.

hope that it will become leadership. Authoritarianism bespeaks an authority which has rather clearly ceased to struggle to be leadership, or so misconceives the direction of this development that the struggle is pathetically uneven. Our deep resentment of *mere* authority is transparent of our desire and respect for authority which struggles to grow to leadership.

But there is a paradox in all this. It could be put as follows. The more authority is *factually* separate from leadership, the more do authority figures confuse and identify them by treating formal authority and position as if it were leadership. Because they are not leaders, they cling more tenaciously to what they are—bearers of juridical authority. Conversely, the more true leadership and authority positions are factually combined, the more they are clearly distinguished and the less appeal is there to sheer formal authority to get things done. Because persons in authority are genuine leaders, their hold on formal authority is more relaxed.

It might be added here that the more authority is factually separate from leadership, the more do authority figures experience an actual shift in leadership as a threat to their office and prerogatives. This happened in the wake of the Second Vatican Council with regard to the relationship of bishops and theologians. Hitchcock has observed that the council altered remarkably the relationship of intellectuals to the Church and "catapulted them, for the first time in centuries, into crucial positions of influence and authority."<sup>2</sup> This was a manifestation in the Church of a much broader phenomenon—the emergence of learned authority, of the specialist-intellectual, as a power in contemporary affairs. There were and still are bishops who resent and fear this development.

The phenomenon we are discussing—the very human tendency simply to identify leadership with juridical authority—is a phenomenon we experience at all levels of contemporary life. People in responsible positions appeal too exclusively to their position or office in one form or other as they attempt to lead. Why this happens is buried deep in the mystery of human recoil before challenge, the dread of loneliness, the intolerance of insecurity—all

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 372.

experiences the true leader must survive. But happen it does. Parents too often face the exciting if often frustrating developmental challenges and inconsistencies of their children by appeal to their authority. Yet it remains true that a man is not fully a father (that is a leader for his children) merely by his biological status, his office, so to speak. Too many priests narrow their ministerial credentials to the oils of their ordination. But is it not true that ordination is much more a challenge to the ordained to grow into the fullness of his anointing, to become what he is? A teacher is not an effective teacher, a leader, by rank or tenure. Yet do not too many teachers find themselves gaveling down a question or disagreement by more or less subtle appeals to their experience, their position? Perhaps little need be said about bishops here. I simply take it for granted that too often their actions and reactions betray a nervous preoccupation with their authority, a tendency to identify their official position with leadership. But something does need to be said about theologians. A theologian is not a leader by virtue of a degree (honorary or other), recognition, accreditation, or even membership in the CTSA. Even more subtly, he is not a leader by virtue of his brute academic competence. In past decades American theologians have had to fight for recognition of their special competence in the university community and their indispensability in episcopal deliberations. The battle is far from won. This can trap us into a one-sided view of our competence. Exaltation of this competence is a theologian's way of confusing authority with leadership. It is not his mere tools or training which give him leadership, but his ability to use these tools in the service of the gospel in a way which liberates men. If he thinks or acts otherwise, the theologian is making his office, so to speak, the equivalent of leadership.

The careless identification of leadership and mere office (or formal authority) in the Church leads to two important results. First of all, an *independent* value is attributed to office, formal authority, or its equivalent. Actually, formal authority is a subordinate value. When it becomes independent, instead of being in the service of the gospel, it tends to become that which is served, preserved, maintained, maximized. There is a dominant concern for the prerogatives of office and a corresponding blindness to or disregard

of the goods and goals authority is meant to serve. Threats to authority are seen as threats to the faith itself. Something very similar can be said of Catholic institutions such as schools and hospitals. When an independent value is attributed to them, their possible disappearance is viewed as something close to the disappearance of the faith. The same can be said of customs, decrees, laws, and even moral norms.

To say that institution, office, and all things of human making or formulation are subordinate to the purity and claims of the gospel is not to deny their importance. If the integrity of an idea or event is threatened by institutionalization, it remains true that it cannot survive at all in human affairs unless it is somehow or other institutionalized. Indeed, it is the very importance of institutions that tempts us constantly to absolutize their value and derive our self-identity as Christians from them rather than from the truth they attempt to incarnate and serve. All institutions in the Church—office, rules, decrees, structures, theological expertise—are servants of the Christian gospel. When they obscure this fact or operate as if they deserved an independent value, they are Christianly useless, even harmful.

The second result follows directly from the first. When formal authority receives an independent value, we experience the *controlled* individual or group. We see parents not loving their children but controlling them. We see teachers not educating their students but controlling them. We see bishops not maximizing the apostolic effectiveness of their priests but controlling them. We see priests controlling, not releasing their congregations. We see theologians controlling those dependent on their expertise, not aiding them. Now in human terms, the merely controlled individual or group is the enslaved individual or group.

We are quite familiar with the symptoms of control and of the controlled group. In teaching there is the dominance of the negative, the condemnatory and an intolerance of pluralism. In administering there is oppressive centralization. In deciding there is avoidance of risk, conformism, "don't-rock-the-boatism." In theologizing there is fear of the fresh issue, enslavement to the traditional phrase, and contentment at being derivative. The use of power is secretive. Dis-



cussion is closed, and draws upon very limited competence. The controlled are told what they may and may not do, not what they can achieve. They are reminded of the importance of a structure, not of their own importance. They are constrained, not challenged; they are forbidden, not stimulated.

The controller—and eventually the controlled individual or group—has his own subtle vocabulary. We hear, for example, of “the good of the Church,” “a loyal churchman,” “the disturbance of the faithful,” “a centrist theological position,” “our pastoral responsibilities,” “a balanced view.” All of these phrases are capable of a legitimate rendering and embody a discernible value. But on the lips of the controller or the controlled they only thinly disguise the priority of existing ways and structures over the Christian goals they serve.

The controller and the controlled group also have their own set of personality traits: fear, anxiety, joyless security, rejection of creative risk, growing apathy. The root of it all, of course, is a lack of self-knowledge and self-esteem which generates the need to find something to lean on, to be secure with, to identify with. This may be a caricature but I believe there is enough truth in it for us to discern and accept the broader outlines.

Attributing an independent value to authority, office or anything subordinate is a constant human temptation. St. Paul was familiar with it in the Galatian community. The Galatians turned back, or rather, fell back into the observance of the law and sought a sense of religious security from it. As Quentin Quesnell, S.J., has observed:

Religion has always offered this possibility to men to some extent. All organization and institution does it in some measure. But true Christianity, with its frightening message of faith and its constant demand for free faith given daily, given almost from moment to moment, deprives men of this support. A basic craving remains unsatisfied. An instinctive tendency of religious psychology continues to exert its drive; and the little flock of Christians begins to fall into the system of order, of law, of obedience, of institutionalization against which Paul warns so vigorously here.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Quentin Quesnell, *The Gospel of Christian Freedom* (Herder and Herder, 1969), p. 63.

In the same vein St. Paul insisted that his credentials were not in a position, an appointment, an office. The gospel was his authority. Nothing else. Paul inveighed against the law precisely because it was the easy way out. It removed the agony of a constant faith recovery and renewal. It transferred this to something else—a law, an institution, an office, a rule. This is the human temptation with which Christians must contend at all times. The factual separation of authority and leadership with all the results we have noted is a contemporary form of this temptation. An independent value attributed to office, authority, institution is the twentieth century form of the "law" against which Paul fought so desperately. It is the religious circumcision of our times.

In still other words, in the contemporary American Church we are all tempted to become Galatians. Ecclesiastical superiors who give priority to position, office, institution are contemporary Galatians. So are those who go along with such institutionalism. The theologian who identifies leadership with work already done, articles published, prestigious lectureships or degrees, has slipped back into the securities of a structure and into his own form of Galatianism. He has identified leadership and authority and thereby contributed to their factual separation.

It is regrettable that this phenomenon occurs in the Church. For we have in our Christian roots and traditions an unmistakable picture of the basic element in true leadership. What is that element? We have said that leadership can assume any number of forms: administrative, executive, charismatic. But beneath all of them and common to all of them (in so far as they are leadership and not control) is a single element: the release, stimulation, evocation, maximization of the potential of the individual. True leadership, in whatever form it is found, calls forth the best in those led. It liberates them into the fullness of their potential as individuals and as a group.

If this were not clear from human reflection, it should be from the person of Christ, the leader *par excellence*. Christ confronts all of us only to tell us in his own person what we may become, to enlarge our humanity, to expand our ability to love and care, to deepen our capacity for the Godlife. He confronts us to mirror to

us (and by mirroring, to confer) our true potential. His mirroring to us our deepest potential liberates us from those cultural, hereditary, and personal hangups and deformities which drain self-respect and stifle our growth as free persons. True leadership, therefore, if it would build on the example of Christ, does not control. It liberates.

I do not believe it is an exercise in biblical fundamentalism to see this confirmed in Luke 22 and Mark 10. "A dispute also arose among them, which of them was to be regarded as the greatest. And he said to them, 'The Kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. But not so with you; rather let the greatest among you become as the youngest, and the leader as one who serves.'" Or in Mark's rendering: "But it shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

How do we serve others? If we take seriously the example of Christ, it is precisely by liberating them into the fullness of their potential in Christ. It means aiding them in the move from self-distrust to self-esteem, from anxiety to peace, from emptiness and alienation to joyful hope, from the slavery of secular value-judgments to fearless Christian value-judgments, from cringing securityism to the adventure of risk.

We can see this basic ingredient of leadership in the notion of theological leadership. A man is a theological leader because of the depths of his insights into the faith and the power of his communication of these. Now depth of insight and power of communication constitute leadership precisely because they liberate us from the confinements of our own imaginations and formulations, from our own ignorance, doubts, and confusions. They aid us to take fuller possession of our faith individually and corporately, and therefore to become more fully what we are.

Similarly, if to serve the Church, to serve others is to liberate them into the fullness of their potential in Christ, then every office, institution, custom, rule exists for this purpose. That is why the motto of the Christian leader could well be: "He must increase, I must decrease." To the extent that offices, positions, authorities—



whether episcopal, theological, religious, secular—hinder this unfolding, they are Christianly useless, even destructive.

If the liberating mentality and atmosphere dominate us as Christians, we will begin to experience their delightful results. We will know security amidst confusion, peace amidst disagreement, unity amidst pluralism, freedom amidst regulation and law, loyalty amidst dissent—briefly, hope in a broken world. In this atmosphere we would have the parent who can punish because it is clear that the punishment is an extension of his loving. In this atmosphere we would have the bishop who can command, admonish, and demand because it will be clear that he is only seeking the Christian good and freedom of his people. And in this atmosphere we would have the theologian who can disagree and even perhaps rebuke a bishop (as Paul rebuked Peter) without attacking or undermining his office.

I have spoken of the factual separation of office and leadership as the paradoxical result of simply identifying the two in thought and outlook. We have also mentioned the tendency of this factual separation to become a contemporary Galatianism—the attribution of an independent value to formal authority and its various analogates. This all suggests that office and leadership, when properly distinguished, should be factually conjoined, or should constantly be moving toward union.

I believe this is true if we are careful not to succumb to a single notion of leadership. Our tendency is to speak of leadership as if it meant one particular form of leadership, *charismatic* leadership. And this shapes our expectancies and structures our criticism. All this is understandable, and for several reasons. We are a hero-worshipping culture and such a culture tends to single out the charismatic personality for its *Time* covers. Furthermore, we live in an institutionalized and bureaucratized world. Charismatic personalities provide a refreshing relief from the sheer hugeness, facelessness, and impersonality of structures and systems, and confer on us a warm and welcome sense of the value of being human, distinct, and of worth. Therefore, charismatic leadership, by contrast to the world in which it appears, tends to be more appealing than less spectacular forms. One thinks of a John XXIII, a John F. Kennedy, a Martin Luther King, a Helder Camara, a Daniel Berrigan. Finally, in

earlier days of non-specialization, authority figures were expected to be—and sometimes even were—“omnicompetent” in a way their subjects were not. Such omnicompetence is closely associated with the notion of charisma.

But times have changed. There is still a necessary place for the charismatic leader. But we dare not limit leadership to the charismatic type. If we do we miss the day-to-day chance to be leaders in a different but thoroughly legitimate sense. We live in an era of specialization, of diversification of competence. Authoritative position is no longer the *locus* of many competences. Competence has been cut up and spread around. Real competences have emerged and been recognized as essential to the life and growth of the Church. If the Christian message is to be communicated, if Christian value judgments are to have an impact on the world, it is no longer simply enough for an authority figure to speak out. In fact, this can be counterproductive. There are, of course, times when it is appropriate and effective. But it is much clearer now that the whole Church must give public witness to its faith and values—at all levels—and by witnessing to them, grow in them.

It is precisely here, I suggest, that authority finds its contemporary challenge to become leadership. Authority will begin to coincide factually with leadership in our times if it makes its overriding concern the releasing of the potential of the group, the liberation of others to be leaders in all areas where we recognize a true competence and a Christian concern. As Christians we should know this. If Christian leadership and a theology of leadership must begin with the person of Christ; and if his person and example shout loudly of serving, not being served; and if the service of which he spoke is defined in terms of his own example (calling forth our true potential), then could we not argue, indeed, must we not argue that Christian leadership is present whenever the true potentials of a group are released? Whenever the conditions are created for the emergence and cooperation of the various gifts in the Church?

The bishop who makes it possible for a theologian to be a better theologian, the layman to be a better Christian educator or parent or community organizer, the priest to be a more apostolic instrument, is a true leader. He has conjoined authority and leadership

because he uses authority to maximize the potential of the group. He liberates. The theologian whose work makes it possible for youth—whatever their age—to grow out of the traps of fadism, whose research and writing make it possible for bishops to cut adrift from secular power-models of authority, whose insights free other theologians from the tyranny of a single formulation, has joined competence and leadership because he uses his competence to maximize the true potential of the group. He liberates. The parish priest whose day-to-day activities inspire the layman to see and take up his particular challenge in the world conjoins authority and leadership because he uses his position to maximize the potential of others. He liberates. The parents who trust proportionate responsibility to their children and guide them into gradual self-possession have joined authority and leadership because they have used their position to maximize the potential of their children.

This form of leadership is not easy. It is humble, quiet and painstaking, often dreary and unsensational, full of risks and doubts, lacking in immediate satisfactions, deprived of publicity and kudos, and fairly bristling with sacrificial demands. It is almost wholly unacknowledged by the world as a form of leadership. But that is as it should be, if the notion of leadership is to be rooted in and derived from the person of Jesus Christ. For in the Christian view it is the one who loses his life who will save it. In the Christian view only a departure from self will guarantee a satisfying return to self, for in the Christian view the greatest leader who ever lived was a walking *kenosis*. He devoted his life to establishing the possibility of growth and leadership in others. It is not surprising, then, that Christian leadership will resist the merely flamboyant and most regularly define itself in terms of the hundred and one unspectacular tasks that liberate the brother to grow in the image of that which he is, a follower of Jesus Christ.

In the American Catholic Church we look for leadership. We cannot demand that every pope be a John XXIII, every bishop a Helder Camara. We cannot demand that every theologian be a Rahner, every priest a Daniel Berrigan. But as American Catholic theologians we can and must repeatedly assert, not least by our own example, what we learn from Christ's person: that authority and

leadership will begin to conjoin and that we will begin to experience true leadership in the Church if every office, every authority, every competence is approached exclusively and lived perseveringly as an opportunity to liberate others into the fullness of their Christian potential.

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