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LEADERSHIP IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS IN ASIA

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A movement often emerges through the dreams of a vision of particular pioneers. They entertain a vision of the future, facilitated by a radical analysis of how to change the present and their experience of working with the people. A majority of movements were born and grew in the enthusiasm and vision of such leaders. Even in the absence of conditions adequate to the birth of a movement, the great spirit they possessed enabled them to do a difficult task. We cannot deny that some of the leaders were authoritarian, charismatic and that they emphasised results more than relations. This is understandable given the situation of the past; nevertheless, they are not examples to be followed.

1. Charismatic Pioneer Leaders

There are some benefits as well as major pitfalls in having a charismatic leader even in contexts where a visionary has been leading continuously the movement for a long time. Of course the continuity in leadership provides continuity in the goals, perspectives and approaches, yet it creates a culture similar to that of authoritarian and oligarchic rulers. It also denies the opportunities for the emergence of new leadership. Each new generation brings the need for a leader that suits the specific challenges of the era. A charismatic leader often has a great vision, commitment, dedication and a sense of sacrifice, and most of the time it is hard to find a replacement. The task of the Social Movement is not to find a charismatic leader with the same ability as his predecessors', but to create circumstances where everybody can develop his/her gifts and talents to improve the life of the poor and the marginalised. A charismatic and visionary leadership is not to be copied or repeated.

Some social movements, church organisations and community service institutions face difficulties in replacing their pioneers. The older the organisation gets, the older its leaders and staff, and still older the programmatic devices of the movement; it tends to be harder for renewal and replacement. If the old paradigms and slogans are not modified, they become artificial, rhetoric and dogmatic.

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In many occasions there are crises of spirituality and vision struggling for many years to realise their dream and vision. The spiritual crises these movements face have the potential to destroy and completely root out their ability to provide any meaningful service to people. In some cases, if the pioneers do not want to leave the organisation, their leadership may become a curse more than a blessing.

Working in local social movements for more than twenty-five years has given me a valuable lesson on social movements leadership. I learned much from the experiences of many seniors and ecumenical leaders from various countries, and also from the wisdom contained in books written in various national contexts about the qualities needed by a leader, and the challenges he may face.

2. Requirements for Social Movements Leaders

Based on my experience and observation for this long period, social movement leaders should at least meet the following four (main) requirements:

- *Heart:* they should have an open and humble heart. Spiritual devotion, dedication and commitment are imperative qualities as well as a means to strengthen a pure heart. An ability to see all human beings as equal irrespective of the religious class, or other differences is an expression of a spiritual heart. Every leader must have commitment to the vision of the movement;
- *Organising ability/brain:* it includes the intellectual ability to comprehend the complex realities of the world as well as a systematic knowledge allowing him/her to organise his/her work;
- *Mouth:* being eloquent in communicating with others, developing an articulated style to capture the imagination of the listeners are important qualities; and
- *Organs:* the leader must possess a healthy body and strong muscles to do the difficult task. Leaders must have good health.

Those four words, if abbreviated, become HOMO. Without HOMO, it is hard to become a leader of integrity in the church and social movements.

3. A Challenge to the Future of Leadership

In entering the 21st century, a leader must be able to keep up with the developments and fast changes in science and technology, as well as the changes in socio-economic, political, and cultural contexts. A

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leader is expected to be a good shepherd and to work productively and efficiently. S/he must be able to lead the organisation in comprehending the changing context and shall show an ability to redefine the programmes and strategies corresponding to such changes.

Some of the requirements to be met are the following:

1. a leader must seek opportunities and identify the right moment for action. These opportunities often do not come twice. Therefore, a leader must train his/her intuition to apply properly;
2. a leader must generate new ideas and initiate programmes to translate those ideas into reality. It is the responsibility of a leader to make dreams come true, thus, to create change. A good quality change is often the expression of the creative mind of a good leadership. Changes in strategy and work system are crucial in facing the changes around the movement. This means that a leader must listen and read without any limits, and be able to filter and get the best yield of all information creatively;
3. a leader must find ways of working more productively and efficiently. 'To kill seven flies in a clap of hands; to drink while diving', as the Indonesian proverbs say;
4. a leader must strengthen his/her organisation and be a good shepherd to his/her sheep;
5. a leader must be able to predict changes, anticipate those changes and give appropriate responses;
6. a leader must eliminate racist practices, gender injustice, injustice and discrimination based on religious differences. A person who is fanatic and fundamentalist cannot be accepted as a leader;
7. a leader will spur and motivate his/her staff, and should be open to the creative suggestions of the colleagues;
8. a leader does not dwell in her/his past successes, but continues to create new successes.

To be a leader is not merely a matter of having a ruling position, but of being a good shepherd and a good steward. A good shepherd and steward is expected to inspire others, build self-confidence, fight hopelessness and anxiety among people, overcome fear, initiate productive and life oriented actions, provide new light, define goals and provide a foundation for the future.

4. Born or Made?

Is a leader born or made? This is a perennial debate. Not everyone who is educated and trained has the ability or opportunity to become

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a leader. On the other hand, there is no leader who does not have to go through training. If a person has a natural ability for leadership, then what is the use of leadership capacity building? Moreover, leadership capacity building does not guarantee anybody to be a good leader. Some people will become leaders; others will not. Some people will become 'Peter' and some others 'Thomas', and still others will become 'Judas' in their own history. In reality, there is a fusion of both these factors, being born and being made a leader.

5. Many Leaders but No Leadership

The present-day reality is one of many leaders but no relevant leadership. A leadership that builds and sustains the capacity of a group so that its members mutually support each other instead of letting themselves being fragmented with complex interpersonal differences is far more important than the leader himself/herself. Leadership is a matter of calling, devotion and process. It is not merely a matter of money, position and authority. A good leadership is an art that a person and movement cultivate and blossom in changing a dream into reality; and transcends the perversions of today to a future with full of hope. What we require is not very smart and highly educated leaders, but competent leaders. It does not mean that the quality of education is unimportant, but that education does not guarantee successful leadership. Education, experience, talents and character become factors that cohesively create leaders. Certain types of education and skills can support a person's resolve as a bureaucrat and a technocrat, but it may not help him/her to become a competent leader. Competency is the important aspect of any future leadership.

In the new century, the church and social movements are at a crossroad. Sincere and committed effort should be made to avoid the old pattern of leadership fertilised by power and authority in our resolve to vivify and develop a leadership based on servant-hood spirituality. Many people fight for leadership positions in the church even though they do not have servant-hood spirituality or a life-sharing leadership character. In order to be a true leader, a person should make himself/herself humble and allow the others, especially the poor and the marginalised, to acknowledge and taste his/her fruits of wisdom and commitment.