

On the Road to Emmaus

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Luke 24:13-35 provides a perfect vantage point from which to view the two, interrelated crises now facing the Catholic Church in the United States—the sexual abuse crisis and a crisis of confidence and credibility in leadership caused by the set of leadership and management practices that permitted, then covered up, the abuse. At the start of Luke’s account, the two apostles were dejected, confused, and ambling toward nowhere special. The crucifixion of Christ had shattered them, leaving them feeling abandoned. Their leaders, they believed, betrayed them: “our chief priests and rulers delivered him [Christ] up to be condemned to death, and crucified him.” Even the report of Jesus’ resurrection did not seem to register. Their world was rocked, and their own identities in question. The twin crises have left many of us Catholics feeling the same way.

By the end of the story, however, their lives had been transformed, their hearts burning. They came to realize that the resurrection was real and that its reality gave meaning to the suffering Christ they had witnessed. Their shattered faith was restored. How did this happen? It was the work of the Spirit and the personal encounter the apostles had with the Risen Lord. Their transformation was not only personal, but also communal. Luke’s story ends with the two sharing their encounter with the other apostles and, in doing so, helping to transform their community. The two apostles in Luke’s gospel moved from where they were at the start of the story to where they ought to have been by the end.

How should we pray at a time like this? Perhaps a worthwhile prayer might be for a Catholic Church in the U.S. transformed and reinvigorated as a result of facing the two, interrelated crises straight in the eye and coming to grips with what’s necessary to resolve them. Such a transformation will give meaning to the suffering caused by the twin crises. That is, we might pray for the personal and communal transformation that happens when we open our hearts and encounter Christ in our lives.

The journey that the Catholic Church in the U.S. must take—a journey from where it is to where it ought to be—must be securely founded on a spiritual component, but it must also have a leadership and managerial component. Someone, or some set of people, must lead the Church in the space between “is” and “ought.” Christ is certainly our primary leader, but equally certain is that he will act through us—the lay and ordained members of Christ’s body. How should we act together?

I have an insight concerning the answer to that question, one gained from my experience in the Army. I was a general officer for over 11 of my 38 years of service, I learned something about leadership within deferential hierarchies and large institutions—although I do understand the Catholic Church is significantly and relevantly different from a military hierarchy. I also learned something about leadership under pressure. I led American and multinational soldiers as a colonel in the invasion to reinstate the elected government of Haiti in 1994; as a brigadier general in Bosnia in 1998 implementing the Dayton Accords and the Brcko Arbitration Decision; and as a lieutenant general accelerating the growth of the Iraqi Security Forces in size, confidence, and capability during the 2007-8 surge in Iraq.

And I know something about institutional transformation: how a large institution moves from where it is to where it ought to be. When I was a young colonel, I was hired by General (now retired) Gordon Sullivan, then the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, to write about how the conjunction of the end of the Cold War and the emerging Information Age could affect the Army. We sketched out a possible future in a series of monographs that were published by the U.S. Army command and General Staff College Press in 1995 as *Envisioning Future Warfare*. General Sullivan intended to use these publications as a way to stimulate a conversation among the senior Army generals and within the Army at large. He did just that, for these monographs birthed a broad conversation, some in support of and others criticizing, the general’s ideas. The result was the creation of a common understanding—a vision—of the overall direction the Army should go in the face of the two, unfolding strategic trends.

The Army captured this common understanding in an official document that was used to guide what can only be described as a “campaign of learning our way forward.” General Sullivan and Colonel (Retired) Michael V. Harper published an account of this campaign in their book, *Hope is Not a Method: What Business Leaders Can Learn from America’s Army*, published in 1996 by Random House. In the book, the authors describe how the Army was going to discover, collaboratively, the right ways to adapt to a still-unfolding and fast-changing future. The description includes the roles that senior leaders played, the organizations needed to manage the learning campaign over time,

and the methodologies that would permit feedback from the youngest private to the senior commanding generals. These roles, managerial functions, and inclusive methodologies provided the direction the Army would follow for about 20 years—between the end of the first Gulf War to the wars initiated by the attacks of September 11, 2001 and beyond. This journey of discovery transformed the U.S. Army. The last key task that General Sullivan and the several subsequent Army Chiefs of Staffs who provided the continuity of leadership necessary to move the Army from “is” to “ought” was this: inspiration. The senior leaders of the Army, through what they said and more so in what they did, inspired a generation of officers. The words and actions of these senior leaders demonstrated that they were committed to transformational change. That established the leadership credibility needed to sustain transformational change for over a decade.

I was lucky to have participated in this journey and in the discussions and adaptations that emanated from it in several small, yet substantive, ways. First, I helped craft a vision of a possible future that stimulated broader discussions and consensus. Then I helped conduct one of the experiments used to elicit feedback from soldiers, sergeants, and officers. Eight years after this journey began, I ended up as the Deputy Commanding General (DCG) for Transformation of the Army’s Training and Doctrine Command. As the DCG, I was responsible for creating the Army’s first combat formation formed around information and the internet that facilitated faster use of that information. It was an incredible, near decade-long experience.

The Catholic Church in the United States can do the same. Certainly, how the Church goes about its transformational change will be quite different from what the senior Army leaders did, because leadership in the Church must match its ecclesiology, as well as canon law. Equally certain, however, is this: the work must be done. Transformation, or moving an institution from where it is to where it ought to be is hard—but hard does not mean impossible.

Church leaders, lay and ordained, must face the two, interrelated crises together and commit to fixing not only the short-term problems but also the long-term leadership decisions and managerial practices that helped create those problems. Church leaders, lay and ordained, can construct a vision, provide and communicate direction, and inspire the Catholic Community in the United States as it moves along the path between “is” and “ought.”

Vision

The vision the Church needs will come from answering two basic questions. First, where have we failed in reflecting God's face and how can we correct these failures to prevent them from ever returning? Second, how must we grow and transform so that we answer the twin crises within the larger context—the context that then Pope Benedict XVI describes in *Light of the World: The Pope, the Church, and the Signs of the Times* published by Ignatius Press in 2010 as the problems of church, faith, and society and reiterated in Pope Francis's *The Joy of the Gospel: Evangelii Gaudium* published in 2013 by Veritas as the problem of communal commitment? Love for the gospel and the Church must drive our answers to these questions and all subsequent questions.

And we must answer as a community. The twin crises we face are not isolated problems of a particular parish, dioceses, or religious community. They are problems of the Catholic community in the U.S.. Certainly, the bishop of each diocese will lead the transformational process in his diocese—providing vision, direction, and inspiration. Equally certain, however, is that he cannot lead in isolation; he must remain connected to the Spirit that works in and through each of us individually and all of us communally. He must also remain connected to the laity and the ordained ministers of his diocese, and he must remain connected to his brother bishops. The crises the Church faces cross dioceses, as do the effects of those crises; the solutions, therefore, must cross dioceses.

Finally, whatever vision emerges from the involvement of the laity and ordained members of the Body of Christ in answering the two basic questions, it must reflect the understanding that the world is undergoing a tectonic shift, and the Church is part of that shift. This shift, and the Church's reaction to it, are part of what both Pope Benedict's and Francis's writing are telling the faithful. The shift will demand that the Church identify not only what it must continue, but also what it must change. Life in the Spirit is dynamic, as are our responses—individual and communal.

Direction

While the apostles on the road to Emmaus were transformed overnight, the institutional transformation of the leadership models and managerial processes of the Catholic Church in the United States will take place over years. Transformations of this magnitude will require that the Church and its leaders remain in ambiguity for some time. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin reminds us in a prayer in *Hearts on Fire: Praying with the Jesuits* published in 1993 by the Institute for Advanced Jesuit Studies that we must “trust in the slow work of God. We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay. We should like to skip the intermediate

stages. We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new. And yet it is the law of all progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability—and that it may take a very long time.”

Given the length of time involved in a transformational journey of this kind, whatever bishop begins the process in his diocese, likely that bishop will not end it. Thoughtful leadership expressed in public guidance and backed up by sound, transparent managerial forums will lend stability to an inherently dynamic process.

Similar to the issue of vision, direction will emerge from answering some fundamental questions. First, how will the Catholic Church leaders in the United States—lay and ordained—discern their way forward, then act iteratively on the decisions resulting from that discernment? Second, how will the process of discernment, decision, and action be communicated across dioceses? Third, how will the long-term transformation of the leadership and management practices that permitted then covered up the sexual abuse be executed with sufficient uniformity across dioceses and over time? Last, how will the process of discernment, decision, and action avoid the confrontational, binary, directive, and secretive practices and emphasize the contemplative, inclusive, participative, and transparent? That is, how will the process reflect the gospel?

These are non-trivial questions, and the answers will matter, for they will either increase or decrease the credibility of Church leaders. Thereby, they will either increase or decrease the leadership necessary to inspire.

Inspiration

Any human community is complex, no less so the community of the Body of Christ. The fact that such a spiritual community exists is a miracle. What keeps us together as the Body of Christ is our faith in Jesus' Word, in his death, and in his resurrection. Inspiring that community, therefore, will require staying true to the compass of our soul—individual and communal—and to the message of the gospel. The examples of Bishop Lawrence Persico of the Erie Diocese and of Bishop Steven Bigler of the Cheyenne Diocese are two examples of inspirational leadership; there are more. The questions lay and ordained Church leaders must answer, with respect to inspiration, are these: First, how can we inspire today's Body of Christ—staying true to our core beliefs but also adapting to the tectonic shifts that both Pope Benedict XVI and Pope Francis describe? Second, how can we discern, decide, and act so as to tap into inspiration that every day motivates the laity and

ordained members of the Body of Christ? Third, how can we, lay and ordained leaders of the U.S. Catholic community, spread that motivation more broadly across the church and sustain it throughout the transformational process?

Whatever answers emerge to the questions of vision, direction, and inspiration, they must be ones that are consistent with the gospel. And they must be consistent with our Church's ecclesiology and canon law—both dynamic in themselves, if one looks at them historically. They must also resonate with the lay and ordained leaders of the Catholic Church in the United States and show that, as a community of committed Catholics, lay and ordained leaders are acting together to create a new culture of leadership and healthy management that is transparent, accountable, competent, and grounded in justice in order to advance the essential mission and future of the Catholic Church.

Since I've retired, my ministry for the Church has been with the Leadership Roundtable, a national network of senior executives from all walks of life. We formed ourselves in the early 2000s in reaction to the scandals rocking the Church then. We began with a conversation between senior Catholic lay executives and Church leaders over what to do. We understood that the Church is not "Catholic Church, INC.," nor is it a "military-style hierarchy." That's why we have been laser-focused on being a trusted partner in helping Church leaders first discover then apply best practices in leadership and management that are properly aligned with ecclesiology and canon law. The practices and methods we have found together, practices that we call the "Mission Management Model," work. They improve accountability and transparency, and they increase the credibility of the leaders implementing them. They can provide a starting point from which the Church can begin the long, transformational journey moving from where the Catholic Church is, to where it ought to be.

I never would have thought that my experience as a transformational leader in the U.S. Army might be useful to the Church. But as a member of the Leadership Roundtable, I have come to see first-hand what St. Paul describes in 1 COR: 12, "There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit." Now is not the time to just point to problems and sit on the sidelines. Rather, now is the time to offer our gifts and experiences to our Church in the spirit of St. Paul. Transformational journeys are never about what a person or organization prefers to do, but of what must be done in movement toward a larger, common good. In the Army, that common

good was assuring the defense of the nation. In the Church, it's assuring the health of the Body of Christ and the possibility of new evangelization.