



# **AUTHORITY AND LEADERSHIP**

## **VALUES, RELIGION, MEDIA**

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# “Redemptive Leading” – Barriers and Opportunities in a Digital World

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When I read the subject of the Conference “Religious/Theological Authority in a Digital World,” two prospects came to mind:

The first was my experience in facilitating interreligious groups in different parts of the world, especially in India. What does religious authority mean in this digitalized media context?

The second was a reflection on a qualitative empirical study on leadership that I did with two colleagues on the responsible authorities in the diocese of Tyrol.

I decided to focus on the second one because the first one was too hot for me: In January 2015 in Bangalore, I was sent back to Austria by the Indian Immigration Authorities on the same flight I had arrived on.

So, here, I want to re-read our research on leadership from the perspective of the subject of the 2015 conference. We published our research in the book *Redemptive Leadership*, edited by Johannes Panhofer, a pastoral theologian, Roman Siebenrock, a systematic theologian, and myself.

## PRELIMINARIES

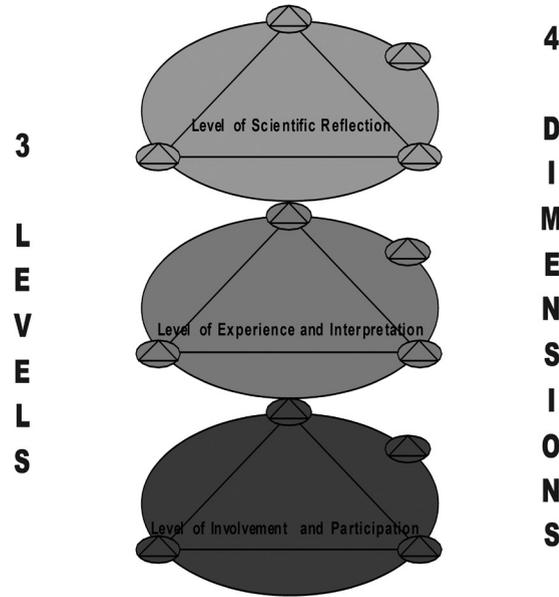
You know that Germans like preliminaries. So I will give two: Let me make clear what “Redemptive Leadership” means and how we understand our empirical research method based on Communicative Theology (CT).

### Redemptive Leadership

With the title “Redemptive Leadership,” we highlight that leadership in the perspective of CT (Scharer & Hilberath, 2012; Hilberath & Scharer, 2012) is not simply finding building skills which one can get from leadership concepts just anywhere. Leadership skills and concepts are not neutral. They include specific worldviews and philosophies. If you manage a parish or diocese like you would manage a big factory, you would introduce aspects of the neoliberal economic system and its world view in ecclesiastical contexts. In this sense, leadership of a parish or diocese needs a theological reflection on their relevance or irrelevance as a sign of the upcoming Kingdom of God. We can understand “Redemptive Leadership” as a metaphor to

the theological relevance of every leadership concept, especially when it comes to the question of Authority.

## 1.2. Empirical Research in C T



The second preliminary remark is related to the method of empirical research in C T. Some of you will remember this graph. As you can see here, C T works on three levels with four factors on each level. The levels of encounter and experience are so close together with the level of research that you can't separate them. Also, the factor of I, the We, and the Globe is deeply connected with the subject of the research project. Like you do in Grounded Theory, Action Research, and some other similar empirical methods you understand yourself not as a distanced researcher who has to research on an object. You deeply respect the others who are partners in the research program. You welcome them as "experts in praxis" on the same level as we are "experts in theory." It does not imply any separation of the two expert views. They remain, in fact, close together. They form two aspects of the same insight.

These research requirements hinder us from doing quantitative research on an anonymous basis. We could see how the kind of research that we do influences the research partners in our study of leadership: We editors wanted to summarize and anonymize the texts we got from our partners; however, they protested against our proposal and wanted to come out in the book with their original texts and with their names. At a two-day conference, the "experts in theory" such as collea-

gues from Biblical Studies, Systematic Theology, Church Law, and Systematic and Practical Theology met the "experts in praxis." It was very impressive to see how the insights of the "experts in praxis" changed the concepts of the researchers on the meaning of leadership and authority in church and religion. The openness of the "experts in praxis" makes me free to introduce them with a photo.

### THE PARTNERS IN OUR RESEARCH AND SOME KEY QUESTIONS

As you can see in the photo, all relevant authorities of the Diocese participated in the research. The 23 testimonies of understanding leadership came from all sectors of pastoral work:

- It starts with the bishop and the woman responsible for personal and pastoral care.
- It goes on to parish pastoral in which priests and laypeople have leading positions.
- After this comes the domain of Caritas and Diaconie.
- School and education follow.
- After this, we asked the Superiors in monasteries.
- At last we took a view into the worldwide church.

We gave some questions to the "experts in praxis." We asked not for a stationary grid but for an open proposal to describe their understanding of leadership. Some found it helpful; others neglected our proposal.

The Proposal Questions included:

- What is the leading metaphor for your understanding of leading?
- In what context is your leading experience and how does this context influence your understanding and practicing of leading?
- Where and when do you encounter yourself most intensively as a leader (please give examples)?
- Where do you most experience your passion for leading and where do you most experience your burden of leading?
- Where are typical conflict areas and borders of your leadership?
- What are the (spiritual, theological, practical....) resources in your leadership?
- What future prospects do you see in your own leadership and in that of the church?
- What for me is important in the future?

### RE-READING OUR STUDY IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF "RELIGIOUS/THEOLOGICAL AUTHORITY IN A DIGITAL WORLD"

Before I point out some specific statements, I will briefly reflect on the relationship between leadership and religious/theological authority in a digital world in general.

Within this, I relate to the concept of Participatory Leadership as a possible mode to deal with Authority in a specific way.

### Authority between ministry, leadership, power and role

The relationship between authority and leadership is apparent. It depends on every leading situation, especially in churches and religions. Here authority and leadership connect mostly with special powers legitimized at last by the transcendence.

The higher the role in the hierarchy, the more powered authority connects with the role of leadership. Particularly in information- and communication-based societies (with their flat or nonexistent hierarchies), powerful authorization in specific roles like we have in the Catholic hierarchy seems archaic. But if we have a look at the "System Theory" of Luhmann (2004; Luhmann & Kieserling, 2012), which is already used in church connections like parish counseling, the power of roles is apparent. Luhmann argues that a system is viewable by the communication of decisions made by the decision makers, instead of seeing the person in that role as an individual. For Luhmann, religions form a specific kind of system, characterized by the decision-making authorities operating in their specific roles.

In the manner of leadership of Pope Francis, we can see how someone who represents in his role the highest authority, power, and leadership in the Catholic Church irritates the system, especially of the Vatican administration. Does Pope Francis represent the traditional role of the pope—how we read it in *Christus Dominus* (no. 2) or Canon 332? The authentic and communicative leadership of Pope Francis, in which some commentators see the real power of this pope, shows us how ambivalent the connection of ministry, authority, power, and leadership is. This ambivalence rises enormously in a digital world.

### Participatory leadership—a way to deal with authority and power in Churches and Religions?

In our book we differentiate three kinds of leadership. They are not totally separated from each other; however they do have specific characteristics:

- leading in front of
- leading for
- leading within (Hilberath, Scharer, & Haslinger, 2000, pp. 494–510)

In churches and religions, leadership sometimes appears as a kind of "leading in front of the people." One has the power, authority, and competence to speak authentically; the others occupy the role to obtain, to believe, and at the best to ask. Apart from liturgy this kind of leadership rarely appears in our research.

The most frequently mentioned type of leadership is "leading for." This style became familiar after the Second Vatican Council, especially in pastoral contexts of the Catholic Church. "Leading for" seems to be fully sympathetic to all the people. Leaders will do everything for the people. They help them to grow up and live well. What problem should exist with this leading style? As you can see on the graph

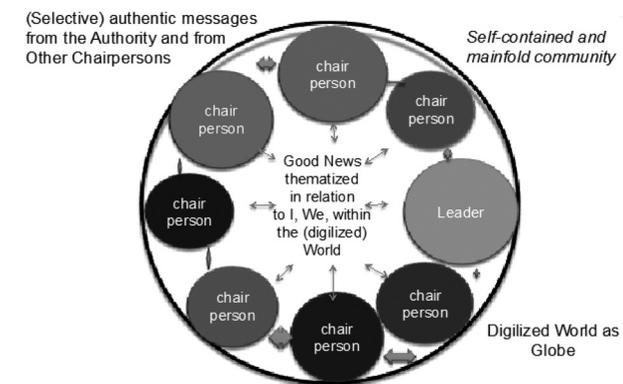
<<ED: WHICH GRAPH?>>, all depends on the charity and sensitivity of the leader. Participants can't grow for themselves under this style of leadership. If the leader goes away, there would be no responsibility within the people.

Connected to Theme-Centred-Interaction (TCI) of Ruth C. Cohn, in CT we know and use a participatory leadership. I experienced examples of this type of leadership in *Comunidades Christianas* in Peru and Brazil. Participatory (or participative) leadership is a style of leadership that involves everyone in identifying essential goals and developing procedures to reach those goals. It also means that each person exists as a part of the whole group and cannot take up a position on the outside of the group.

One of the main benefits of participatory leadership is that the process allows for the development of additional leaders who can serve the organization at a later date. Because leaders who favor this style encourage active involvement on the part of everyone on the team, people can often express their creativity and demonstrate abilities and talents that would not otherwise become apparent. The discovery of these hidden assets helps to benefit the work of the current team, but also alerts the organization to people within the team who should be provided with opportunities to further develop some skill or ability for future use. Real "leading within" is rarely something we encounter in our study. Mostly you can find this type of leadership in the practice of small groups within a parish or within a diocese.

What might it mean if ecclesiastical authorities were to adopt the principles of participative leadership in a digital world?

### The participatory leadership of ecclesiastical and religious authorities in a digital world: Where are the risks and where are the opportunities?



Participatory leadership has close connections with the authenticity of leaders and participants. For Cohn selective authenticity of "chairpersons" is one of the main fruits of participatory leadership. Everyone should come to her/his chairperson. Participatory leadership is also familiar with disturbances and passionate involvements. Participatory leaders are not the big bosses or the untouchable masters. They

appear with very touchable and vulnerable faces and also with some fragilities that a leader normally may not show.

As long as you try this in small Christian communities it seems to be no problem, and people become responsible for the community. In a publicity-seeking digital world in which every weakness of a leader is communicated very quickly and few people are ready to take responsibility without transferring it to authorities, it seems to be very risky to live a participatory leadership outside of small groups. This seems the biggest risk for Pope Francis as the leader of the universal Catholic Church.

If I am right, Pope Francis respects that this kind of leadership does not primarily come from effort or special skills, rather it comes out of a deep theological conviction that the truth of Christianity manifests itself in practicing it. To practice redemptive leading in the role of the pope is the self-evident consequence of such a theological position.

As dangerous as an authentic and participatory leadership may be, we can also see a big desire for it; the credibility of churches and religions seems to depend on it. Whether it is Pope Francis or the Dalai Lama or other authentic leaders within and authentic leaders outside of religions (for example, Nelson Mandela), for many people they serve as symbols of hope. In the "inaugural homily" of Pope Francis, which took place on the feast of St. Joseph, in view of 136 political leaders and the most leaders of churches and religions, Pope Francis got in line with the protectors of humankind. In the Encyclical Letter "Laudato si" Pope Francis writes:

"In my Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), I wrote to all the members of the Church with the aim of encouraging ongoing missionary renewal. In this Encyclical, I would like to enter into dialogue with all people about our common home" (2015, no. 3).

In both documents Pope Francis shows himself as an affected, invested man with emotions, not as a cool, observing outsider who speaks above.

### **The awareness on "Religious/Theological Authority in a Digital World": Conscious within the leading persons of the Diocese of Innsbruck**

Coming back to the re-reading of our qualitative study regarding leadership, the awareness of the "experts in praxis" on "authority in a digital world" is very poor, but this is also a result. Analyzing the texts we have to consider that nearly all lay people, except one priest working in Kenya, mention authority in the context of leadership. Some of the lay people like the pastoral worker or the leader of crisis intervention see a lack of authority qua office. The leader of Integration-house mentions the kind of pre-Vatican II authority qua office, which hindered the trust in the church and hindered a lot of chances, especially in youth work. The Comboni Missionary from Kenya reflects upon the natural authority that missionaries already have in this country.

Instead of authority the question on power is very virulent in the texts of the "experts in praxis." It starts with the bishop who sees himself swaying between the acceptance of conflict of the people and using his power to say "a definitive word." Some Catholics are looking for this. The person responsible for pastoral and personal care (she is theologian and historian) articulates the big problem of the clerical

claim to power in history and sometimes nowadays with a lack of objectivity and authenticity. She mentions that power in the Church is not power coming out from itself; it is derived power—ultimately from the Transcendence. One of the ministers mentions the powerful persons in the parish: without one of them you can't do anything. Another priest mentions the ambivalence of powerful leadership because only power based in love is a legitimate power in Church. Another aspect, especially mentioned from some priests and one leader of a monastery, is to empower and authorize people in the parish.

If it comes to the awareness on leadership and the digital world the result is very poor. Only the bishop sees the problem as how the "Laws of Media" characterize "language, symbols, spaces, times, and leadership."

### **CONCLUSION**

Authority in churches and religions is deeply connected with the kind of leadership which leaders practice.

A differentiation between "leading in front of," "leading for," and "leading with" can help us to differentiate styles of leadership within churches and religions. All three styles are represented in the study on leadership in the Diocese of Innsbruck.

To speak about "redemptive leadership" highlights the theological impact of every leading practice of authorities.

Practicing a participatory leadership, as a kind of "leading with," has deep connections with (selective) authenticity; it is aware of the precedence of resistance and deep involvements.

Participatory leadership corresponds with "redemptive leadership." It presents a big risk in a digital world, and it evokes a great desire for the benefits of participatory leadership, as we can see in leaders within and outside of churches and religions.

In re-reading the qualitative empirical study that was done on the understanding of leadership in the Diocese Innsbruck, we can see a lack of awareness on "religious/theological authority in a digital world" and its implications.

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