

**THE SPIRITUALITY OF LEADERSHIP
IN THE ORDER OF MALTA:
A SPIRITUALITY OF SERVICE**

“Whoever wishes to be the first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many.”¹ ‘Service’ is at the heart of Christ’s teaching and ‘service’ has always been at the heart of our Order since its origins in the 11th century. In his *Rule*, Fra’ Raymond du Puy, the 2nd Master of the Order, calls himself the ‘serf of the poor of Christ’. This was uncompromising language to express the kind of service expected of new knights: “It was not unusual, of course, for a Christian institution to insist that each of those it cared for represented the person of Christ, but the Hospitallers went further. Their admission rite made use of the unusual phrase ‘serf and slave’. A candidate promised to be the ‘serf and slave’ of his ‘lords’ the sick.”²

¹ Mt 20:27.

² *The St John Idea* an unpublished paper by Professor Jonathan Riley-Smith.

This would imply that the knights were to regard themselves at the absolute service of the poor, indeed were 'owned' by the poor. In the 2nd regulation of his *Rule*, Fra' Raymond says that the brethren should dress humbly "*because our Lords the poor, whose serfs we declare ourselves to be, go forth naked and foul with dirt. And it is a shameful thing for a serf that he should be proud and his Lord humble.*"³ In this way, members of the Order have always responded to what Christ meant when He said, "*In so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me*".⁴ 'Service' also inspires the 'tuitio fidei' of the Order, and together with the 'obsequium pauperum', our twin charisms give us the very reason for the Order's existence: "*The purpose of the Order is the promotion of the glory of God through the sanctification of its Members, service to the faith and to the Holy Father, and assistance to one's neighbour.*"⁵

³ *The Rule of Raymond du Puy* New English translation by Fra' John Eidinow.

⁴ Mt 25:40.

⁵ *Constitutional Charter* Art 2 §1 (*Purpose*).

It is therefore not surprising that in considering the spirituality of leadership in the Order of Malta, the spirit of ‘service’ should be at its heart. This is completely consistent with the Church’s teaching and tradition on the kind of authority to be exercised by those who are its leaders, at whatever level. The *Code* of our Order states that the “*Grand Master as religious Superior and Sovereign, is to devote himself entirely to the growth of the Order’s works and serve as an example in religious observance.*”⁶ In 2008, the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life issued an instructional document entitled ‘*The Service of Authority and Obedience*’⁷. The members of the First Class, that is the Professed Knights of Justice and professed Chaplains, are recognised in Canon Law as being in the category of ‘Institutes of Consecrated Life’, and therefore what is written in this document is of particular relevance to them. However, as is made clear in the Regulations

⁶ *Code* Art. 134 (*Duties*).

⁷ *The Service of Authority and Obedience* Instruction, May 11th, 2008 from The Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life.

and Commentary, members in Obedience and of the Third Class are also members of the Order, even though not as 'religious' having taken the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, but in different ways and degrees.⁸ So key points made in the '*The Service of Authority and Obedience*' (SAO) about authority can be applied in various ways to all in the Order who have positions of leadership.

"In consecrated life authority is first of all a spiritual authority." (SAO 13a) "Persons in authority are called to guarantee to the community the time for and the quality of prayer. (SAO 13b) The authority of leadership should be at the service of obedience to the Will of God. As faithful members of the Church, we are fulfilling the universal calling of all God's people to holiness through our particular membership of the Order, and should be doing all that we can to fulfil its mission. Leadership in a religious order is not primarily a matter of simply ensuring that its aims, structures and procedures are organised and followed as effectively as possible, as in the leadership and manage-

⁸ See the 'Preamble' in '*Regulations and Commentary*', 2011.

ment of some secular business concern, important though these things are. For it is a matter of seeing these things in a spiritual context. It is therefore firstly a *spiritual* leadership. All our leaders, at whatever level, should realise that they are called to serve an ideal that is much greater than themselves, and they should place themselves at the service of what the Holy Spirit wants to bring to fruition through the particular charisms of our Order. “*This ideal can only be achieved in an atmosphere of prayer and humble seeking, which allows (those in authority) to grasp the action of the same Spirit in the heart of every brother and sister.*”⁹ Leaders are in the position of assisting the promotion of the spiritual life, and this will include the ability to listen to others and to the signs of the times through prayer, attentiveness to the Word of God, and the ‘rule’ of our Order, as contained in *Constitutional Charter* and *Code*, and the Regulations and Commentary. Priors, Regents and Presidents, the leaders who are the ‘Superiors’ of their respective Priors, Subpriors and Associations, must ensure

⁹ SOA Section 13.

that they promote the sanctification of themselves and the members “*by furthering their participation in the spiritual life, and works of the Order, and to instil the consciousness of belonging, and fidelity to a world-wide Order under the leadership of the Grand Master.*”¹⁰ There must ensure that there are proper programmes of formation, which really do help candidates to understand the true nature of the religious order they aspire to join, and always in absolute fidelity to Order’s *vade mecum*, the ‘*Regulations and Commentary*’. As circumstances permit, there should be regular occasions organised for spiritual life to be intensified, for example in the liturgical celebration of the Order’s feasts, in retreats and days of spiritual recollection, in the participation in local, national and international pilgrimages. An obvious duty is to see that projects and programmes are established in which members can fulfil their duties of service to the sick and poor, encouraging all members to participate.

¹⁰ *Regulations and Commentary*, Section VII.

“Persons in authority are called to promote the dignity of the person.” (SAO 13c) Superiors should have respect for the dignity of all members in their Pories and Associations. This can be done by getting to know them, giving them appropriate appreciation and positive consideration, respecting confidences and helping them to grow in their membership of the Order. They should also do all they can to ensure that the dignity of the sick and the poor whom we serve is fully respected. Superiors should have a good relationship with those who are officers in their Pories and Associations.

“Persons in authority are called to inspire courage and hope in the midst of difficulties.” (SAO 13d) *“We must undergo many trials if we are to enter into the reign of God.”*¹¹ Superiors must realise that they may have to deal with difficult situations arising both inside and outside their communities. They must not retreat from these, but involve themselves personally, being ready to help whilst humbly recognising their own

¹¹ Acts 14:22

limits and the need for help from others. Of course, a superior is entitled to obedience from those under his charge, but as the Code of Canon Law makes clear, the superior is the first one who must be obedient: to the law of God from whom all authority comes and to whom he will have to render an account in conscience, to the teaching and laws of the Church, and to the proper law of the Order. The *Code of Canon Law* also says that

“by their reverence for the human person, (superiors) are to promote voluntary obedience. They are to listen willingly to their subjects and foster their cooperation for the good of the institute and the Church, without prejudice however to their authority to decide and command what is to be done.”¹²

“Persons in authority are called to keep the charism of their own religious family alive.” (SAO 13e) “Persons in authority are called to accompany the journey of ongoing formation.” (SAO 13g) The exercise of a superior’s

¹² Canon 618 ‘*Code of Canon Law*’ Vatican City, 1983

leadership must include being at the service of distinctive character of the Order, and therefore having a thorough personal understanding of it. Many problems which arise within the Order find their origin in a failure of members individually or collectively to have understood the true nature of the Order, and it would be disastrous if superiors were in anyway guilty of not understanding this themselves. The Order is not a 'social club for wealthy Catholics which engages in a few charitable activities and occasionally some religious ones'. Neither is it a 'Catholic' version of the 'International Red Cross', though of course much can be learnt from the excellence of that organisation. It is a religious order of the Catholic Church, its fourth oldest, and was solemnly recognised as such 900 years ago by Pope Paschal II in *Pie Postulatio Voluntatis*. Now that the *Membership in the Order of Malta: Regulations and Commentary* has been published and promulgated, superiors must do everything in their power to ensure that it is read, understood and implemented. As the Grand Master has stated, "*Members of religious Orders are required to read and re-read the Rule of their Order on a frequent basis...I commend the use of this document to all members of the Order. Please*

*refer to it often – rather in the way of the monasteries of the Benedictine tradition where an extract from the Rule of St Benedict is read every day in choir... Please use it to help you achieve perfection in your lives as Christians and as members of the Order of Malta.*¹³ It would be a mistake to think that ‘formation’ is something which is only needed when candidates are preparing to enter the Order, or when the professed are pursuing their journey towards taking Solemn Vows. Superiors should ensure that all members are enabled to grow in their membership of the Order, and this does not exclude themselves. The recently created ‘Institute of Spirituality’ and its associated ‘Centre for Formation and Training’ are being established precisely to provide ‘in-service training’ for those who are assuming positions of leadership, or are already in them.¹⁴

“Persons in authority are called to keep alive the ‘sentire cum Ecclesia.’” (SOA 13f): The phrase ‘sentire cum Ecclesia’ essentially means ‘thinking with the

¹³ *‘Regulations and Commentary’*: The Grand Master’s introductory letter.

¹⁴ By Decree of HMEH the Grand Master, the ‘Institute of Spirituality of the SMOM’ was created. It is defined as the “*cornerstone of a larger Training centre where some training courses will be carried out for*

Church'. All members must remain in communion with the Church by being faithful to the teaching of the Magisterium of the Church, as expressed, for example in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, in the decrees of Church Councils and in Papal Encyclicals, and acting upon it. Article 9, paragraph 3 of the *Constitutional Charter*, obliges members of the Order to “conduct their lives in an exemplary manner in conformity with the teachings and precepts of the Church and devote themselves to the charitable activities of the Order, according to the provisions of the Code.” Superiors must do all that they can to encourage their members to live in accordance with their obligations as members of the Order, and in section VII of the ‘Regulations and Commentary’ they are reminded of this important duty. Where necessary members should be reminded of the commitments they accept-

members of the Order and for the different groups of person that have particular responsibilities within the Order.” The Institute is entrusted with the task of “making texts on doctrine and training, organising courses on fundamental topics of spirituality, on the nature of the religious life and specific training, in the light of the charisma and the history of the Order.”

ed when joining the Order. The failures of individual members to live their lives in an ‘exemplary manner in conformity with the teachings and precepts of the Church’ can cause great scandal and damage to the reputation of the Order. Those who are known to be members of the Order, and yet publically criticise the teachings of the Church, or fail to live their lives in conformity with the Church’s moral teaching would be examples of this. Superiors must handle such cases with great sensitivity, but also where necessary have recourse to the disciplinary procedures envisaged by the *Code* in articles 119 to 129.

“Persons in authority encourage the taking up of responsibilities and respect them when taken up.” (SAO 25a): Superiors should convey the strength that comes from Christ and the courage to overcome difficulties and attitudes of ‘giving up’ to those with whom they collaborate. Although they have the ultimate responsibility for everything that happens within their Priory or Association, they obviously cannot themselves do everything, and indeed should not. Superiors need to be present when they should be, to foster a spirit of interdependence and collaboration, and not believe that everything depends on their own

efforts. We have a structured organisation which aims to fulfil the mission of the Order, with particular members having their own defined responsibilities and the authority to fulfil them. Superiors should seek to promote a genuine spirit of communion, based on prayer and a shared desire to further the aims of the Order. They are the guarantors of the Order's rule, and should promote an understanding that even when acting alone, each member is doing so in the name of the Order and must work within its ethos, established guidelines and procedures.

"Persons in authority have a merciful heart and a sense of justice". (SAO 25d,e): Superiors should be willing to show forgiveness and mercy to those who have caused difficulties. They should be able to correct and give another chance to those who have made mistakes and want to be forgiven, remembering that without hope of forgiveness a member will find it difficult to get back 'on track' and may inevitably add wrong to wrong and failings to failings. However, if it is necessary to have understanding for the wrongdoing of individuals, it is also necessary to have a rigorous sense of responsibility for the good of the Order as a whole, and for those who may have been damaged by the wrong actions.

Understanding for our confreres cannot exclude justice for those who have been wronged. Superiors should not ignore the failings of those members who spread gossip, calumny and detraction, and if necessary appropriate action must be taken against them, as such behaviour has no place in the fraternity of a religious order, and can cause great damage. As St James says, “*The tongue is a little member and boasts of great things. How great a fire is set ablaze by a small fire! And the tongue is a great fire.*”¹⁵ It will also be well to remember what the *Rule of Raymond du Puy* says, “*And let no brother accuse another brother unless he would be able to prove the accusation properly; if he has made an accusation he cannot prove, he is not a good brother, and should suffer the same penalty the accused would suffer, if the accusation could be proved.*”¹⁶

“*Persons in authority promote collaboration with the laity*”. (SAO 25e): As far as our Order is concerned, we can interpret this as our collaboration with those who are not members of the Order. We are blessed with a large number of volunteers throughout the world who

¹⁵ *Epistle of St James* 3:5-6.

¹⁶ *Rule of Raymond du Puy*, 18

assist us, and many projects simply could not happen without their invaluable assistance. It is a duty of superiors to play their part in ensuring the clear transmission of the charism and mission of the Order to those who wish to receive it and work with it, ensuring that appropriate encouragement, training and support is available. “True to the divine precepts and to the admonitions of our Lord Jesus Christ, guided by the teachings of the Church, the Order affirms and propagates the Christian virtues of charity and brotherhood.”¹⁷ In this collaboration with non-members, we are contribution to the building up of the Body of Christ which is the Church.

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The spirituality of leadership in the Order of Malta is indeed a spirituality of service. If leaders in the Order were to see their positions simply as means of becoming greater or ‘affirming’ themselves, having themselves served or making others serve them, they would clearly place themselves outside the Gospel model of authority and leadership. St Bernard of Clairvaux’s words to his disciple who became a Pope are worth some attention:

¹⁷ *Constitutional Charter*, Art. 2 §2 (*Purpose*)

*“Consider if you have made progress on the way of virtue, of wisdom, of intelligence, of goodness. Are you more arrogant or more humble? More benevolent or haughty? More indulgent or more intransigent? What has developed in you: the fear of God or a dangerous effrontery?”*¹⁸ A spirituality of leadership is above all one of humility. Whatever kind of leadership is being exercised within the Order, no better summary of its proper characteristics could be given than to finish with a quote from the Conciliar Decree *Perfectae Caritatis*: *“Superiors, as those who are to give an account of the souls entrusted to them, should fulfil their office in a way responsive to God’s will. They should exercise their authority out of a spirit of service to the brethren, expressing in this way the love with which God loves their subjects. They should govern these as sons of God, respecting their human dignity.”*¹⁹

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¹⁸ St Bernard of Clairvaux, *De Consideratione*, II, X, 20.

¹⁹ II° VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree *Perfectae Caritatis* on the Adaptation and Renewal of Religious Life, 14.