

Leadership and Love

By Fr. Michael Barrett

CALL Conference, Denver, CO August 12-14, 2011

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Some of you are probably wondering what this Irish guy from New York is doing at the podium this evening addressing Catholic Latino leaders. Good question.

As it turns out, I have a few things in common with you. My grandparents were immigrants to America, coming from a poor country with no money and few skills. They wanted a better life for their family, and they wanted to be able to practice their Catholic faith freely. All of us who come from immigrant families have stories to tell, but the Irish and Hispanics have some shared experiences. My grandparents, like many of yours, were grateful to have a new life here.

The first Irish arrived before the American Revolution. They were Scots-Irish, and they were protestant. Eight of them—protestants and Catholics—signed the Declaration of Independence and six others participated in the Constitutional Convention. Then the potato famine struck Ireland in the 1840s, the first wave of Irish Catholics came to America. Most of them were unskilled and they did the backbreaking work of construction in their new country. (Any of this sound familiar?) Some of the Irish immigrants worked in lumbering while others worked on the Erie Canal project.

But despite their hard work, the Irish were not always well loved in their new country. Signs were posted on businesses saying “No Irish Need Apply.” But the Irish Catholics rose in the Church, both in numbers and in authority. The Archbishop of New York City in the early 1800s was an Irish immigrant (sounds like Los

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Angeles) and by 1890 many of the bishops were Irish. Irish influence continued to grow, and by the 1970s more than 50% of the bishops, 35% of the priests and 17% of all American Catholics were Irish, as were many presidents of Catholic universities and hospitals.

Look around you if you right now at the C.A.L.L. members and you see the fastest growing demographic group in the U.S. today. In the past decade, 56% of the growth in the U.S. population was Hispanic. And as you can also see by looking around you, Hispanics are rising to positions of authority in the Catholic church. The 2008 Census tells us that just over 13% of Americans have Irish ancestry, while 16.3% are Hispanic, the largest number from Mexico, followed by Puerto Rico and Cuba.

The Irish and Mexicans have a particular bond, forged by the San Patricio Battalion during the Mexican-American War in the 1840s. Irish Catholic soldiers were singled out for mistreatment in the American army, denied Holy Mass, and were unable to practice their religion. They had escaped the potato famine in Ireland, but their new country was hostile to their faith. When these Irish soldiers found themselves shooting at Catholic brothers in faith from Mexico, they concluded they were on the wrong side of the conflict. Several hundred of them left the U.S. Army to join the Mexicans. They called themselves the St. Patrick's brigade, and fought valiantly along side the Mexicans. They paid a heavy price when the Americans captured

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them. Forty-six of the St. Patrick's Brigade were hanged, and the others were given 50 lashes. The leader, Jon Riley, was branded on his face with a D for deserter.

Vicente Fox has noted this "affinity between Ireland and Mexico," embodied in the San Patricio Brigade, as has Ernesto Zedillo, who praised their bravery with these words: "In the name of the people of Mexico, I salute today the people of Ireland and express my eternal gratitude."

Despite their initial rejection, Irish Americans have become significant leaders in this country. Many of our nation's presidents have Irish ancestry. Probably the most famous Irishman whose portrait can be found on the walls of many Irish homes is John F. Kennedy (right next to the Pope). After Kennedy became President, many of my relatives and friends noted that in their companies and professions a number of glass ceilings began to disappear. Leaders could rise to their capabilities, no longer hindered by their ethnicity or their faith.

Leadership

We are here to talk about leadership among Catholic Latino leaders. I want to reflect with you on what it takes to be a leader, who is excellent at work and deep in faith, and talk about the spiritual fitness regime that's necessary. Then I want to

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look at how to make prudent decisions. And finally, I want to consider leadership in terms of friendship and love.

What does it mean to be a leader in the world? We want to see what the Church is asking us to do as Hispanics in this country who are in leadership now. I am going to base many of my remarks on a book called *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, published by the Vatican in 2004, which I highly recommend to you to read. Here we learn that the laity have a particular calling as apostles, sent into the secular world. I quote: "The essential characteristic of the lay faithful who work in the Lord's vineyard is the secular nature of their Christian discipleship, which is carried out precisely in the world."¹ "It belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God's will."² So the first call on leaders is to consciously become a disciple, growing in faith, and to be an apostle, carrying Christ's will right onto the streets and into the office suites.

The *Compendium* goes on to say: "*It is the proper duty of the lay faithful to proclaim the Gospel with an exemplary witness of life rooted in Christ and lived in temporal realities: the family; professional commitment in the world of work, culture, science*

¹ *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 541.

² *Lumen Gentium*, 31.

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and research; the exercise of social, economic and political responsibilities.³ Let me emphasize *temporal realities*: this means being in the middle of the world, not in the middle of the Church. Notice, nothing here is mentioned of Church activities. Lay leaders serve the Church by proclaiming the Gospel with exemplary witness in the secular realm.

Where is the middle of the world? It answers: "Work, culture, science and research; the exercise of social, economic and political responsibilities. All secular human realities...are the context in which the lay Christian lives and works."⁴ Lay leaders are called to exercise their professions with the highest standards of excellence. Receiving additional training, earning degrees, aspiring to high levels of responsibility are all a part of authentic witness for lay leaders to earn professional respect. For future Latino Leaders we must encourage these same goals in the education and work of young people.

*"The lay faithful are called to cultivate an authentic lay spirituality by which they are reborn as new men and women, both sanctified and sanctifiers, immersed in the mystery of God and inserted in society."*⁵ Lay spirituality is a unique spirituality, a means of equipping lay people to carry out their God-given professional vocation in

³ *Compendium of Social Doctrine*, 543.

⁴ *Compendium of Social Doctrine*, 545.

⁵ *Compendium of Social Doctrine*, 545.

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the world. It is not a “Third Order” kind of spirituality, but it has its own robust character.

In the process of doing outstanding work in the secular world with an unwavering focus on Christ, it becomes possible to sanctify our work, sanctify ourselves through our work, and sanctify others through our work. As the Compendium states: “It will make people capable of...cultivating a passionate love for God without looking away from their brothers and sisters, whom they are able to see as the Lord sees them and love as the Lord loves them. Prompted by such a spirituality, ‘the lay faithful serve as leaven to sanctify the world from within, by fulfilling their duties and manifesting Christ to others.’”⁶

If sanctifying the world by your witness seems a little steep as an aspiration, take a moment to think about how you could do it. No one can do it with human power alone. It requires followers of Christ to fuse faith and life together into one single identity that illuminates the world. As John Paul II told us, “there cannot be two parallel lives in their existence: on the one hand, the so-called ‘spiritual’ life, with its values and demands; and on the other, the so-called ‘secular’ life, that is, life in a family, at work, in social relationships, in the responsibilities of public life and in culture.”⁷ For so many years, modern men and women have lived with a split

⁶ *Compendium of Social Doctrine*, 545; *Lumen Gentium*, 31.

⁷ *Christifidelis Laici*, 59.

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spirituality, with one silo for Sunday and another silo for the rest of the week. The tragic result is a fragmentation of our person, our work, and the culture around us.

How can we fuse a split spirituality? By making a conscious choice to live a life of faith every day, in every decision, rooting our soul as deeply in Christ as we can, asking for the Holy Spirit to help us hour by hour, and by asking for the intercession of Our Lady of Guadalupe. Fusing a unity of faith within our heart requires repeated exercises, a spiritual workout you might say. It is every bit as hard as training muscles for a marathon. But it is absolutely necessary to grow into maturity as a disciple and step into the world as an apostle.

Many of you have had a workout plan to get into better physical shape. Well, this is the workout plan to get into better spiritual shape. We have to pray every day – every single day, including mental prayer. Prayer is our lifeline to God. You can't grow in faith if you don't spend time in conversation with him, and it has to be a real conversation between friends. As St. Josemaría Escrivá wrote: "If you are not a man of prayer, I don't believe in the sincerity of your intentions when you say that you work for Christ." ⁸

Our soul needs food –you should read either Scripture or good spiritual books every day for 10 or 15 minutes. (And if you are already protesting that you don't have

⁸ *The Way*, 109

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time, spend 15 fewer minutes on the internet or watching television and see if that helps.) I had to have my laptop screen repaired and it is the only computer I use for work and home, twice. For four days it was in the shop and I could not use it. What a change in my life to suddenly discover all the time I had once there was no computer beckoning me. I had to think about what to do with all the extra time! Pray the Rosary, daily if you can. Commute time in a car is a great time to work in a Rosary. Go to Mass more often than Sunday – at least once during the week. It will change your life. Go to confession at least once a month. Each time you go you make a good examination of your life and then begin again. Those are the basics. If you can master those exercises, you are on your way to spiritual fitness.

Making Prudent Decisions

The next aspect of leadership I would like to reflect on with you is making prudent decisions. The Compendium recommends that: *“The lay faithful should act according to the dictates of prudence, the virtue that makes it possible to discern the true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means for achieving it. Thanks to this virtue, moral principles are applied correctly to particular cases.”*⁹ Prudence “offers assistance in deciding with wisdom and courage the course of action that should be followed... [I]t is a virtue that requires the mature exercise of thought and

⁹ *Compendium of Social Doctrine*, 547

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responsibility in an objective understanding of a specific situation and in making decisions according to a correct will.”¹⁰

We make better decisions when we think through the ramifications our decisions will have, looking at the issues through the lens of faith, guided by prudence.

Sometimes talking through the issues with other like-minded people helps to sharpen the mind and give moral clarity. The Business Ethics Forum in Houston is a group that allows Catholics to do just that, looking at actual business cases together and discussing the possible solutions on a regular basis. Not long ago one of our members was in a meeting at his company, where the leadership was debating what to do. The CEO was in the room, turned to him and said, “Rob, what do you think?” As it turned out, they had just done a case study in the Business Ethics Forum on exactly that question. He laid out the options, presented them clearly, and made the case. The decision that company made was more ethical because Rob was there and he could explain why they should do it.

We need to have people like Rob in all professions—leaders who have thought about the moral and ethical decisions of their fields, whether they are doctors, lawyers, research scientists, professors, or corporate leaders. We need to understand the bio-ethical ramifications of medical decisions, the intellectual ramifications of academic decisions, and the moral ramifications of business

¹⁰ *Compendium of Social Doctrine*, 548

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decisions. What is the role of profit in a business? How might profit be good or bad?

These are the kinds of questions that leaders are called to wrestle with in light of our Catholic faith, and then be capable of explaining the answers to peers, in the classroom, and in the board room.

The Business Ethics Forum is an opportunity for leaders to come together in any city and discuss these kinds of issues. We have looked at nearly 50 cases in our group in Houston, and a number of them are on-line at www.businessethicsforum.net for anyone to take for their own discussions. The Business Ethics Forum would be an excellent means to gather Latino leaders to strengthen each other, as you make your own decisions.

What happens when we start to look at these issues through prayer is that our focus shifts to consideration of the whole human person. Fostering the dignity of each person is one of the highest callings we have, and as John Paul II told us, it is the “central and unifying task of service which the Church, and the lay faithful in her, are called to render to the human family.”¹¹

The kind of mindset that emerges from that way of seeing the whole person changes the way we hire and fire, the way we structure benefits, and the way we interact with co-workers and employees. Michael Cordúa immigrated to the US from

¹¹ *Christifidelis Laici*, 37.

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Nicaragua and started his own restaurant business in Houston. He built it up from a single Churrasco's Steak House to now six flourishing restaurants throughout Houston. He employs more than 350 people, most of them immigrants. Michael Cordúa says he judges his own success by the well-being of his lowest employee. Unlike many people who try to squeeze as much work out of employees for the least amount of money, he shepherds the people who work for him, investing both time and money in helping them. The result is devoted and motivated employees, as well as excellent and successful restaurants.

In an interesting way, by shifting the emphasis from getting what we can from employees, or from a business, to looking at what we can do to promote the well-being and dignity of each human person, we can transform not only them, but ourselves, and our work as well.

Leadership and Friendship

One of the most powerful means of transformation any of us can exercise is that of friendship. When genuine relationships bond people together, especially when they are rooted in faith, the potential for genuine good is enormous. Unfortunately, authentic relationships are rare when economic activity is the engine driving interaction. But Pope Benedict XVI tells us in *Charity in Truth*, "Economic activity cannot solve all social problems through the simple application of commercial

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logic.”¹² He goes on to say that “authentically human social relationships of friendship, solidarity, and reciprocity can also be conducted within economic activity, and not only outside it or ‘after’ it.”¹³ In light of the economic and financial crisis, “in commercial relationships the principle of gratuitousness and the logic of gift as an expression of fraternity can and must find their place within normal economic activity....It is a demand of both charity and truth.”¹⁴

What is he saying here? The Holy Father is telling us that in order to live as an authentic human being, our focus must be not merely on material gain, but on relationships based on trust, honesty, and genuine mutual concern. We need to be able to trust people in order to work with them in a free society, and we have to be trustworthy ourselves. The “logic of gift” entails an appreciation of the gifts from God, given to us freely, not by our merit. In our gratitude, our hearts enlarge to embrace the concerns of others, whom he has entrusted to us. If we truly understand who we are in Christ, we can see who other people truly are, or are becoming, in Christ. And from that understanding flows friendship, solidarity, and authentic relationship.

This can have profound ramifications for transforming the Latino culture around us.

Guillermo Torre is an accomplished cardiologist and immunologist from Monterrey

¹² Ibid.

¹³ *Caritas in Veritate*, 36.

¹⁴ Ibid.

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who worked with the world- renowned cardiac surgeon, Michael DeBakey, at Methodist Hospital in Houston. He has a real love for the people of Mexico, and he has spent a great deal of time and energy building a counterpart to the Texas Medical Center in Mexico. He has discovered daunting challenges in trying to work in a system that is corrupt in so many ways. He believes the only way to change things is through upright men and women who do things differently. He has formed an institute and a foundation, “Cambio yo, Cambia Mexico.” He is committed to changing himself, and to changing others, one heart at a time. He now has doctors and students in Mexico who are becoming agents of change themselves, through the apostolate of friendship.

What Guillermo Torre is doing is exactly what the Holy Father tells us about development in *Charity and Truth*. “Development is impossible without upright men and women, without financiers and politicians whose consciences are finely attuned to the requirements of the common good. Both professional competence and moral consistency are necessary.”¹⁵

Authentic human development concerns the whole person in every domain, our worldly activities, our colleagues, our employees, our professional decisions, our families and our friendships. Our full development, and that of the people whose lives we touch, requires a transcendent vision. Pope Benedict writes that: “Only

¹⁵ *Caritas in Veritate*, 71.

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through an encounter with God are we able to see in the other something more than just another creature, to recognize the divine image in the other, thus truly coming to discover him and her and to mature in a love that ‘becomes concern and care for the other.’”¹⁶

Pope Benedict reminds us that friendship, love, and justice are intertwined. “On the one hand, charity demands justice: recognition and respect for the legitimate rights of individuals and peoples. It strives to build the earthly city according to law and justice. On the other hand, charity transcends justice and completes it in the logic of giving and forgiving. It reminds me of a joke I told a Mexican friend of mine about Irish Alzheimers where the Irishman forgets everything—except the grudges. He told me he has used the same joke among Mexicans. We must learn to give and forgive. The earthly city is promoted not merely by relationships of rights and duties, but to an even greater and more fundamental extent by relationships of gratuitousness, mercy, and communion. Charity always manifests God’s love in human relationships as well; it gives theological and salvific value to all commitment for justice in the world.”¹⁷

¹⁶ *Caritas in Veritate*, 11. Cf. Benedict XVI, *Christmas Address to the Roman Curia*, 22, December 2005)

¹⁷ *Caritas in Veritate*, 6.

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In Conclusion

It may seem a huge task to be a Latino leader at a time when there are so many enormous problems surrounding us. But each of you has been called by God for such a time as this. We need upright men and women to rise up and become agents of transformation to create the “civilization of love” that John Paul II called for, by living with integrity as leaders. You are called to be lay apostles, the sent ones, to go into your business, your laboratory, or your classroom, and be the most competent you can possibly become, doing all things with excellence. Through your witness, your prudent decisions, and through authentic friendships, you have the potential to affect the lives of untold numbers of people especially young people. Do not underestimate the power of one upright person, whose character blazes with Christ’s light and love in an otherwise dark landscape.

You can be the one person in the board room who speaks the truth, and brings about a good decision. You can be the scientist whose discovery changes the course of modern medicine. You may be the one business owner whose policies inspire others to change the way your profession operates. Christ tells us that he is the vine and we are the branches, and through him all things are possible. If you can truly live that, you will fulfill Christ’s hope for you, “that you may become blameless and

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pure, children of God without of fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life.” (Phil 2:15-16)