Transforming Ministry Training after Leadership Abuses: Toward Authentic Ministry

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ANZATFE Conference

Auckland, 21 November 2019

I.   LEADERSHIP ABUSES

1. Introduction

The Committee asked me to address this conference drawing from my own experience from someone who survived an abusive community that perpetrated physical, psychological, spiritual and sexual abuse. Today I lecture in Systematic Theology at Good Shepherd College training future priests and leaders within the Catholic Church. The title is a small synthesis of my life, in which my experiences have helped me towards a more authentic ministry.

What I will try to do is an "autoethnography" or self-narrative, a qualitative research method that delves into personal experiences and stories of the researcher themselves (Witherestone, 2019, para. 1). I will try to use my personal experiences as a source of data which can support my academic research. At the same time, I will present some testimonies of my research with Prof. Tombs at the Centre for Theology and Public Issues in Otago called "Listening to male-survivors of Church Sexual abuse" (Figueroa

& Tombs, 2016)[1] trying to propose a theology of authentic ministry that comes from victims, in which they become a *locus theologicus* for our reflection towards an authentic ministry.

I come from Peru from a Catholic middle-class family in Lima. My school was run by nuns. Since I was a young girl, I strongly felt God's calling to do something for the world. When I was 15 years old, I came across Sodalicio, a Catholic new movement in Peru that was catching the attention of Lima's high- and middle-class young people.

Sodalicio is a lay movement with a few priests but it is led by lay consecrated men from different countries. The Peruvian, Luis Fernando Figari founded it in 1971. When I joined in 1983 there were no consecrated women at all, just men. When I was 18 years old, five friends and I formed the feminine branch of Sodalicio.

The community responded to the desire of many young people to do something meaningful for the world and to live the Gospel in a radical way. Little by little, the founder and his second in command separated us from our friends and families; they became the only point of reference and the source of value and love. They convinced us that the world was a dangerous and sinister place from which God was absent. The Scriptures and specially Mathew chapter 10 were the "community manifesto" and it was taken in a literal way; The founder defined obedience as the "backbone" of our lives affirming that those who obey never do wrong. This idea of this vertical obedience diminished all our sense of responsibility and erased our own sense of autonomy and identity. Authorities controlled our lives: studies, work and everyday decision; the goal of each member of the community was to become a saint and if we were not already saints something was wrong with us. The goals of Sodalicio were more important than our own lives and if we didn't achieve the founder's objectives, we were criticized,

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[1] See also Figueroa & Tombs (2019, pp. 155-176).

humiliated and shamed publicly. We were subjected to varies types of insults and the style of the community was to mock and ridicule anyone who didn't respond to the community expectations. We had a uniform vision with special terms, and nobody could criticize or have a different opinion from that of the founder. At the same time the founder was a misogynist who continuously said that we women were less intelligent and useless: it was a very patriarchal community. We were spiritual and psychologically abused. We knew it but at the time I didn't have these words which describe it accurately.

Little by little, I became more critical of the treatment of women in the community. I began to complain more to the leaders of the men's branch about our position: we never had any true leadership in the movement, we were treated like second-class citizens.

Because I had become a rebellious voice in Sodalicio, the founder and his second in command decided to move me out of Lima and sent me to create a new foundation in Rome. Rome was the beginning of my liberation. Rome opened my horizons and I became even more conscious of the unhealthy culture within the community. I concluded that the feminine group had to find its independence because we were in an abusive community with abusive leaders.

In 2002, Germán Doig, the second in command died. He had a great reputation for holiness within the community of Sodalicio. Soon after this, the founder asked me to help him work for the cause of Germán Doig's beatification.

In 2006, some victims came to me and I discovered that he was not just an abuser, but had been a serial abuser all his life. I decided to inform the founder that we should cease attempting to beatify Germán Doig. He was not a saint but rather an abuser. During that meeting with Sodalicio's founder, I was accused of instigating a plot against Sodalicio, of being a rebel and a liar. From that confrontation his attitude to me turned 180 degrees.

From being a valued close associate, I was placed at a distance. He became aggressive and began to try to destroy my reputation in every way possible.

Figari began to discredit me. He began to spread the word that I had psychological problems. He forced me to resign from my position in the Vatican where I worked at the desk of the women's section at the Pontifical Council for Laity.

I went to the new vicar of Sodalicio and demanded he tell Figari to quit as superior because he was covering up the crimes of Doig and continuing the cause for his beatification. At the same time, I asked him to investigate the founder. He assured me that Figari was innocent of any wrongdoing.

I contacted a journalist and ex-member of Sodalicio, Pedro Salinas. He publicised Doig's crimes and I began an internal investigation in which I discovered more victims and more perpetrators. Some of them were victims of the founder himself. The trail of victims led all the way to the top. Four of the top leaders of Sodalicio had been abusers. I helped the victims to present their accusations to the ecclesiastical court in Lima and also at the Vatican. During this time, I developed a relationship of trust with the victims. The Vatican and the Church in Lima never responded to our accusations.

When I finished helping the victims, and I saw that the community didn't want to investigate the founder, I left the community.

In 2015, Pedro Salinas' book, *Half Soldiers Half Monks (Mitad monjes, mitad soldados)* about Sodalicio was released. It created a huge impact in Peru. Currently, Sodalicio has recognized 66 victims of physical, psychological, spiritual and sexual abuse and set aside a fund of nearly $ 4 million for reparations.[2] In this talk I will concentrate in the

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[2] For further information, see Figueroa & Tombs, 2016, 157-159.

spiritual abuse that Sodalicio's leaders perpetrated to understand better how to live an authentic leadership.

Here in New Zealand I felt that I had to help victims through my theological formation, and our first research was with male victims of Sodalicio about the spiritual consequences of sexual abuse. But as a lecturer helping in the formation of future leaders, my experience of abusive leadership helped me form a clear view of healthy leadership.

To distinguish between an abusive Christian leader and an authentic leader first I will give a definition of a Christian minister in a very broad sense.

2. What is Christian Minister's mission?

A minister has the mission to lead, promote, encourage and empower people in their **spiritual life** as Christians. And when we talk about spiritual life, we define it as: A life process of personal encounter with Christ who through the Holy Spirit open us to love our Father and commit ourselves to build the Kingdom of God. It is a beautiful adventure that makes us live a meaningful life of integrity and authenticity. The Spirit conforms us to Christ and doing so reveals our identity and our true self. It is a process which encompasses the whole of a person's life: physical, social, spiritual, and professional. In all our relationships we try to be guided by the Spirit of love. Ministers and leaders within the churches, depending on their role (parish priest, counselor, pastor) must promote, lead and encourage the life of Christians.

But how to determine what is a healthy and authentic leadership and when it becomes abusive? What is the difference between giving an advice and abusing someone? What

is the difference between an exhortation and a coercive discourse? What is the difference between exercising authority and abusing others? Can I abuse someone without knowing that I am abusing someone?

3. Definition of spiritual abuse

It is not easy to talk about spiritual abuse. Many consider that it is very dangerous to talk about it because it would be paralyzing for leaders and leadership. Others like the Evangelical Alliance Theology advisory group (2019) consider that the term spiritual abuse is more damaging than helpful. They are concerned about its use in which the term can damage the fundamental freedom of religion.

The term 'spiritual abuse' is relatively contemporary. It entered the literature and discourse about 20 years ago. However, issues around coercive control and misuse of power have a long history of discussion within the Christian context (Baxter, 1956 and Plowman, 1975 as cited in Oackley 2019; Enroth, 1992).

Early research into spiritual abuse concentrated in what authors called "cults" or new religious movements. Ronald Enroth (1992) in his book *Churches that abuse* defined spiritual abuse as control-oriented leadership, but his definition was linked to new religious movements.

Lebacqz defines the spiritual abuse of these movements:

> Control extends to every aspect of life— spiritual, physical, and relational. Followers are often told where they may live, what jobs they may have, whom they may marry, what they may eat, and even with whom they may speak. (…) Correction itself is strict, even painful. Tactics such as public humiliation, separation from families, even physical abuse are not uncommon. Members are often drawn in by promises of love and community, only to find themselves subjected to extreme peer pressure and public scolding. Complete dependency on the church is fostered by ensuring that no friends or family

from "outside" are allowed. The church itself is seen as having the only "true" understanding and being above criticism. Breaking people's spirits is understood to be important in order to help them get closer to God. Enroth concludes that abusive churches are characterized by a perversion of power on the part of the leader (…) The key ingredient is a pastor accountable to no one and therefore beyond confrontation (Lebacqz, 2004 p. 76).

It has been proved that, unfortunately, spiritual abuse can happen in any church. David Johnson and VanVonderen define spiritual abuse without referring to any specific kind of community. They recognize that spiritual abuse can happen in any church in the body of Christ not just in new movements. They affirmed: "Spiritual abuse is the mistreatment of a person who is in need of help, support, or greater spiritual empowerment, with the result of weakening, undermining, or decreasing that person's spiritual empowerment" (Johnson & VanVonderen 1991, p. 20)

A recent definition of spiritual abuse has been given by Oackley & Humphreys:

Spiritual abuse is a form of emotional and psychological abuse. It is characterized by a systematic pattern of coercive and controlling behaviour in a religious context. Spiritual abuse can have a deeply damaging impact on those who experience it. This abuse may include: manipulation and exploitation, enforced accountability, censorship of decision making, requirements for secrecy and silence, coercion to conform, control through the use of sacred texts or teaching, requirement of obedience to the abuser, the suggestion that the abuser has a 'divine' position, isolation as a means of punishment, and superiority and elitism. (2019, p. 828)

Oackley & Humphreys saw merit in defining spiritual abuse as one form of emotional and psychological abuse. I am not convinced about this approach. I think we need to define spiritual abuse itself within the theological realm. While spiritual abuse implies psychological and emotional abuse; psychological or emotional abuse may not be spiritual abuse in every case.

The particular trait of the spiritual abuse is when the leader uses God, or their supposed relationship with God to control the behaviour of people (Diederich, 2017). The key element of this abuse is the use of spiritual power and as the leader represents the divine it can have profound impact on the religious faith of the victims.

Emotional abuse and psychological abuse are similarly characterized by perpetuating patterns of behaviour that include blaming, shaming, intimidation and controlling behaviour. As in all other types of abuse, spiritual abuse will sometimes co-exist with and be used to legitimize other forms of abuse and harmful cultures. As already stated, there will always be an emotional or psychological element. In some more extreme cases, there may also be physical and even sexual abuse occurring allied to the spiritually abusive elements.

That is why I consider it is important to address spiritual abuse in the formation of leaders as part of safeguarding policies, along with those for other types of abuse. Some denominational safeguarding policies already include mention of spiritual abuse. For examples the policy for protecting children in the Church of England (The Archbishops' Council, 2017) and policy for the Methodist Church (2019) [3].

4. **Traits of an Abusive ministry leader**

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[3] In England, the Churches Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS) has worked hard campaign for this type of abuse. They did a survey and received 1591 responses from Christians, 1002 of whom said that they had personally experienced spiritual abuse. One third of respondents stated that their church or Christian organization had a policy that included spiritual abuse, and two-thirds said that they knew where to go to find help or support. But only one quarter of respondents had received any training on the topic of spiritual abuse. The study concludes that clearer policies and greater understanding of the characteristics of spiritual abuse are needed, and that better training should be given to church leaders on the subject. Retrieved from: https://www.spiritualabuseresources.com/e-news-archive/2018-01-07-understanding-spiritual-abuse-in-christian-communities

Abusive leaders undermine one's sense of self using their leadership to dominate others. The leaders present an ideal of spiritual performance without regarding the individual's actual well-being. If the ideal cannot be achieved the abusive leader employs judgment, shame and a sense of unworthiness. Usually abusive leaders operate in a system that enables them to perpetrate these abuses without being accountable. Each church and community must evaluate what structures are unhealthy and enable abuse.

 I will go through the responses of survivors from Sodalicio about their view of the abusive leadership. Doing a qualitative study of their responses I found important traits of how they describe this type of leadership.

   a) ***Control and abuse of spiritual power annulling the will and personality of the disciples.***

Abusive leaders use their "spiritual" power and authority to annul the will and personality of their disciples. At the same time, they become the only source of love and value manipulating their victims to detach them from all other type of relationships:

Jose Enrique

They invaded my will. I gave up my family and detached from my roots. German, Figari and Sodalicio presented themselves as your new family. I gave my entire trust to them, 100%.

When I became submissive I lived in perfect obedience: I loved to accomplish their orders as if they were orders given by myself. I removed any perception of myself but they made you believe the opposite: that you were actually awakening to yourself and that you were discovering who you really were.

Roberto:

He was the guru (the founder) that knew everything and you didn't. I was 40 years old, and I continued depending on the will of the superior. I feel now that I am a childish person. I think that would be the best description of the personality damage that I have suffered. I have remained childlike, but not in a good way. I am still dependent on people. And at 40 years old it is not normal that you depend on your father or your mother for approval in anything.

Nicolas:

The experience in Sodalicio made me construct a new personality over my original personality, which tended invariably to be in favour of SCV. I suffered a major depression just before leaving SCV trying to detach myself from that newly formed enclosed personality. This generated a brutal anxiety within me, and I still have it. I have absurd fears about my life, death and love.

Santiago

I think that our case is the worst thing that they can do. I cannot imagine anything more harmful. It scares me that sort of thing. It scares me when I hear stories about the medieval age, when they placed humans inside ceramic decanters to make their bodies more graceful and then sold them as clowns. And that's what happened with us. I'm writing an article "Figari forest". We were like bonsais.

Matias

> *Effectively, they manipulated us and restricted our freedom. In that moment it was a radical change in our lives, we were defenceless against all that.*

b) ***Public Shame and humiliation***

Unhealthy leaders use the dynamic of shaming their disciples, belittling them, putting-down, comparing one person to another. This generates a very negative view of self (Johnson & VanVonderen, 1991).

Roberto:

Every Monday I had a meeting with my superior and I had to tell him all about my life. I was forced to do that: inside and out. And you had to listen to all the criticism from the community; some of them had good intentions, the others I don't know. That was the modus operandi of community life.

Juan:

Figari publicly humiliated me. I thought this is not for me. And Figari said: "What are you going to do without us? Look at yourself. You are disgusting. Ugly. No one wants to be with you, nobody likes you; nobody loves you. What are you going to do? Run away to your mother's skirts and be a loser like your father?"

c) *Spiritual aspects of abuse:*

Abusive leaders use God's name to coerce and pressure disciples demanding excessive commitment and conformity. These leaders react to wrong doing by using blame and fault-finding. This generates in disciples a lack of self-forgiveness and a continuous feeling of guilt. At the same time this dynamic creates a **distorted image of God:** a punishing God focussed solely on our performance, threatening dire spiritual consequences for misbehaviour.

Roberto:

He rewarded me if I acted as he expected me to be. And he punished me very hard with disapproval if I got bitter, or depressed, or if I didn't answer to his demands, or if I was not astute enough. It was a discipleship of that type. He made me very dependent on authority. If my superior approved me, I felt well. If he censured me I felt like the worst shit in the universe. That didn't change, it deepened.

I had a sense of a punishing-God, and like, an efficient, and concrete God: if you didn't have concrete results you were not accomplishing God's Plan. This interpretation of God's plan was a kind of an institutional plan. And everybody repeated that: "you are ruining God's plan". For example, one day I met Figari at the Pastoral Centre and he asked me: "How are you?" As I was a guilty person I answered: "Well, not so bad". He said: "how can you be not so bad. You have to be good. And he said: "idiot, it cannot

be, you cannot ruin God's plan". He insulted me and he left. So the interpretation that came from Figari was the idea that you couldn't trust in God's grace; you had to respond to the grace as if it were a check account and that you were using the money that have been left for you in a bad way. It is difficult for me to distance myself from this bad theology of grace.

Nicolas:

Sin was in all human beings; sinfulness was in the world in everything that wasn't the community. SCV was like a sanctuary, in which sin was like a virus that we have been vaccinated against, but it was still present; which made us in some way superior. I have a constant feeling of guilt. I would say that is the main thing: not doing everything you should do in every moment of your existence, not giving yourself according to the best of your abilities and possibilities to respond in every moment to God's plan as articulated by Figari.

Roberto:

You could never argue anything with big daddy Figari, at all. And he defined if you were right or if you were wrong.

Juan

Figari was in Rio, and one day he was dictating a conference to me, and the electricity failed, and I lost 4 hours of work. Figari screamed that I was a tool of Satan.

II. TOWARDS AUTHENTIC MINISTRY AND LEADERSHIP

1. **Models of leadership**

Hundreds of books have been written about leadership and what type of skills and practices are needed for a good leader. It is fascinating that despite many years' labour specialists have not been able to provide a single agreed definition of

leadership because it is a complex reality. The literature developed over the past 75 years present several models of leadership.

In the secular world the **skill model** definition of leadership concentrated on the technical, human and conceptual skills for being a leader and suggested that some people are born with these traits (Bass 1990; Zaccaro - Kemp, 2004).

In the 60's the **situational approach** was developed. (Hersey and Blanchard 1969 as cited by Northouse (2015) focused not on the leaders but on the different situations of the followers that demand different kinds of leaders. Leaders need to find out about their followers and adapt their leadership.[4]

During the 80's **the transformational leadership** model was one of the most popular approaches which gave more attention to the charismatic and affective elements of leadership. It considered leadership as a process that changes people in which the leaders are concerned for the collective good and moral uplifting of the group. A person engages with others to raise the level of motivation and morality in both the leader and the follower (Burns 1978 and Bass 1985 as cited by Northouse 2015).

Recently, **the authentic leadership** model (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; Avolio, Walumba & Weber 2009) has been developed. After different public and worldwide failures, they tried to respond to the demand for an authentic leadership considering moral authority as an important feature of leadership.[5]

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[4] Four styles of leaders: S1 is high directive –low supportive, S2 is high directive-high supportive, S3 is low directive-high supportive and S4 is low directive-low supportive. Each of the model applies to followers depending on their competence and commitment. (Northouse, 2015, p. 112).

[5] Walumbwa et al., defined leadership as "a pattern leader behaviour that draws upon and promotes both positive psychological capacities and a positive ethical climate, to foster greater self-awareness, an internalized moral

e) Servant model

The servant leadership model was proposed by Robert Greanleaf and has a religious origin. He himself belongs to the Society of Friends. For him:

> The servant-leader is servant first... It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve *first*. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. That person is sharply different from one who is *leader* first... The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant first to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and the most difficult to administer, is this: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? (Greanleaf, 2002, 265).

2. Christian Leadership

I think that for those like me who work on training future leaders for the church there is always one important question to ask: what makes a leader an authentic Christian leader? From the models quoted above the servant model is an interesting idea that may be helpful for our Christian leadership, but I think it is not enough.

From a Christian perspective so many books have been written about Christian leadership and the traits that are necessary: the importance of virtues, character, service, and spiritual life etc. But for me the question arises: what makes a leader an authentic leader? Is the virtue of service enough? Or being a charismatic leader who meets the expectation of the communities? Or having a spiritual life?

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perspective, balanced processing of information, and relational transparency on the part of leaders working with followers, fostering positive self development" (Walumba et al., 2008, p. 93)

From my experience many abusive leaders have had an attitude of service and have been charismatic and have many human virtues.

Some weeks ago, I went to L.A. invited by Oprah Winfrey. She is producing a documentary about sexual abuse and wanted to know my story. I had the opportunity to be interviewed by her. We talked together for an hour and a half. One of her comments made me think. When we were talking about the perpetrators she said:

"People don't get it. Perpetrators or abusers are not the monsters that you recognize on the streets. They are people who usually have lots of skills, they can be kind, they can be recognized as good leaders and charismatic people by the community and they can also abuse people".[6] And I agree with her. The second in command of Sodalicio, who committed so many abuses, was literally considered a saint by the community and he had an attitude of service towards many people.

This made me think that it is not enough to have a model of leadership based on skills or the virtue of service. It is not enough to have a leader who responds to the needs of many in the community. I think it would be necessary to propose a model of leadership which embraces the core of being Christian and being human within both the intrapersonal and interpersonal dimensions.

There are two dimensions that can define the essence of being human: our own identity of being who we are (authenticity) and the call to love God and others: we are human beings created for love. These two dimensions are revealed in their fullness by Jesus. Jesus reveals to us that God is a communion of love. The Scriptures give two definitions of God's being: "I am who I am" (Ex. 3: 14) which expresses according to Biblical scholars his name not as an abstract being but as a continuous presence of God with his people. He is the God of the ancestors (Ex.

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[6] Oprah Winfrei, Interview with Rocio Figueroa, 11 October 2019, Santa Barbara, California.

3:15) but his name is eternal and signifies the faithfulness of God's action towards Israel. [7] He is also named by John as love: "God is love" (1Jn. 4: 8). Human beings created in the image of God are called to live their identity, being who we are, as God is truthful and called to live in communion of love as the Holy Trinity does. That is why I consider that the essence of Christian ministry must work on these two pillars: humility, that is the Christian name for authenticity in relation to God, and love. An authentic ministry is a humble ministry. I will concentrate on humility.

3. Christian Humility

The word humility comes from the Latin word *humus* which means earth, ground, and it seems to converge with a capacity to face one's limitations and humanity. Within Catholic spirituality, following the classical Greek meaning of humility, this virtue became seen as the virtue of self-abasement.[8]

The biblical approach is different. In the Old Testament and particularly in the prophetic books we find humility linked to the social condition of the poor and oppressed. The prophets are called to defend the victims of oppression (Amos 2:6-7). In the final texts of the prophets we see a change of perspective: humility does not refer just to the social condition but becomes a moral ideal to be reached: "Seek

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[7] "I am who I am" must be considered as a verbal form of the imperfect, 3rd personal singular of the verb "to be" (hwh, or hwy). In the Semitic languages there are only two tenses for verbs: the perfect tense, which expresses action now complete, defined, circumscribed, and the imperfect, which expresses duration, the continuation of the action from the past to the present and the future (B.G. BOSCHI, *Esodo*, 69-70). It is not a conceptual being, but an active being and his Is-ness means Presence with his people for all generations (Durham, 1987) connecting with the other name of Yahwhe as the Father of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. His name signifies that God is faithful towards Israel in the past and towards the future (Dozeman, 2009). For Garret the I am is not his name because he God rejects any name against the pagan context: "is the only being for whom existence is part of his essence. Everything else is contingent on him. In simplest terms, he is the one, eternal, all-powerful, creator God" (2014, 207).

[8] "ṗateinos" to being of low social status or to relative inability to cope, lowly, undistinguished, of no account [Hdt 7,14; Pla., Phd. 257c' Isocr. 3,42ah) (Danker, 2000).

the Lord, all you humble of the land, who do his commands; seek righteousness, seek humility" (Zeph. 2:3). With the psalms this perspective is intensified, and humility is defined as the dependence on God and the consciousness of the need of God. [9]

Recovering the profound sense of the OT, we can define humility as the attitude of the _anawim,_ the poor of Yahweh, who recognize their dependence on God living in gratitude for his blessings. Humility was a fundamental trait of the pious in the OT (Huerga, 1969), and this dependence on God also meant forming a balanced estimate of oneself that didn't mean self-abasement: "my child, honour yourself with humility and give yourself the esteem you deserve" (Sir 10:28).

In the New Testament, Jesus promised the kingdom of God to the poor in spirit. Jesus uses himself as an example to follow, something he rarely does in the Gospels, when he teaches humility: "Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart" (Mt. 11:29). For Jesus humility is a central virtue and his incarnation followed the dynamic of humility. Saint Paul reminds us:

> "Be of the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death- even death on a cross" (Phil. 2: 5-11).

These verses express all the richness of humility: it is an intrapersonal quality based on a relationship of obedience towards the Father, which helps the person to have a

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[9] Cf. Sal 119, 67.71; 37,14; 109,16; 40,18; 25,16-18; 86,1-2.

balanced self-esteem that is externalized in non-self-centred attitudes, looking always for the interest of others.

That is why with profound sharpness the mystic Teresa of Avila concluded that humility is "walking in truth before the Truth" (*Interior Castle*, Sixth Mansion, 7). Humility then has a strong link to authenticity in front of God.

Thomas Aquinas considered that humility, as a virtue, lies in the appetite and in the intellect:

> Essentially [humility] lies in the appetite and restrains its inordinate urge for things which are above us. Yet its rule lies in cognition, namely in a judgment not reckoning ourselves to be above what we are. The principle and root of both is the reverence we bear towards God (S.T., 2ª 2ae, q. 161, a. 6).

Saint Augustine called this virtue, humility, the foundation of all virtues.[10] A modern philosopher Simon Weil defined it as the queen of virtues because it is the refusal to exist outside of God:

> The Pharisees were people who had their own strength to be virtuous. Humility consists in knowing that in what is called "I" there is no source of energy that allows us to rise. Everything that is valuable in me proceeds without exception from beyond me, and comes, not as a gift but as a loan that must be renewed endlessly [Weil (2002) *Gravity and Grace*, 31].

Recently, from a psychological point of view, positive psychology has promoted virtues and especially the virtue of humility. C. Lavelock et al., (2017) reviewed the psychological literature about humility as a master virtue that involves an intrapersonal dimension of an accurate self-appraisal (Samuelson, 2015) and an

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[10] Saint Augustine, *Serm. LXIC, I. Pl* 38, 441.

interpersonal dimension that orients and connects one to others and their needs transcending egotistical concerns. Worthington and Allison (2017) appear to agree that the essence of Paul's Philippians mandate of humility is the characteristic of other-orientation. C. Lavelock et al. (2017) concluded that because this virtue has at its heart this other-orientation it is the core of many Christian virtues and of the Christian life itself.

These psychological studies made me think of the importance of entering into dialogue with practical theology, spiritual formation, theological education and leadership development.

As we could see in the first part of my presentation, the particular trait of spiritual abuse is using God and spiritual power to control people. The opposite of abuse spiritual power is the virtue of humility. I consider that this virtue must become the core of the spiritual life for those in ministry so that they develop an attitude of dependence on God, self-awareness of their own limits and an orientation towards others. This virtue, because it is based in the truth of who we are, helps also as a catalyst to examine our love for God and for the others without falsehood. As I mentioned, for me, an authentic ministry must be based on the two pillars: humility (authenticity and truth about yourself) and love. I am wondering if in our formation programs humility is a core element and if we as formators are using all the advantages that psychological studies are offering to measure it, promote it and evaluate it.

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