



From Skills to Virtues: The Challenge of Leadership

Olivia Núñez Orellana

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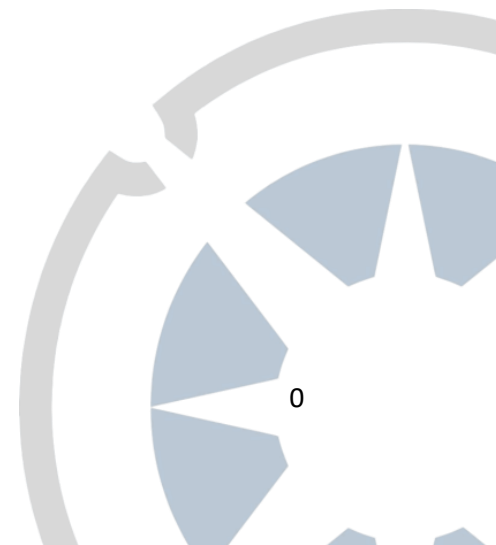
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Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues

University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2TT United Kingdom

T: +44 (0) 121 414 3602 F: +44 (0) 121 414 4875

E: jubileecentre@contacts.bham.ac.uk W: www.jubileecentre.ac.uk



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By Olivia Núñez Orellana

Expanded Reason Institute, Universidad Francisco de Vitoria

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Introduction

In recent years, the Catholic Church has had a difficult time, much of which was due to a failure in leadership that began many decades ago. This has had a massive impact on the Church around the world. It was only until the Papacy of Pope Benedict XVI that action began to be taken in a decisive manner at the highest levels in the Church on these issues.

The late Pope Benedict XVI urged his concern for a proper leadership training of future priests, bishops, and lay people by promoting formation in the practical application of the virtues.

As a response, the Expanded Reason Institute of the University Francisco de Vitoria, Madrid and the Vatican Foundation Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, in collaboration with the Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum, have developed a rigorous university-level Diploma Program called *Leadership: Service through Virtues* (LSTV) based on a virtuous leadership curriculum for future leaders within the

Roman Catholic Church worldwide¹, in support of Sir John Templeton’s vision, and as a response to this need of virtuous formation of actual and future leaders.

Sir John Templeton was always committed to the formation of people and the cultivation of virtues.² He wrote that “leadership by the best minds” has potential “benefits for all of humanity” - but only if the exceptional talent and gifts are allied with good character. Like Pope Benedict XVI, Sir John Templeton was insistent that a humble approach in the quest for truth is essential for religions and societies.³

The Leadership service though virtues diploma aims to promote the development and refinement of the character strengths and virtues necessary for service and leadership.

The diploma program aims to train people capable of exercising leadership based on a virtuous, service-oriented life. We strongly believe that the practice of virtues in personal and professional exercise, especially based on a vision of leadership as service, are a key trigger for the flourishing of society. The type of leadership that can transform the world into a better place is not that of the strongest, nor that of the most powerful, but that of the humblest, the servant of all who does not seek his own benefit but the good of others.

With the encouragement of the Congregation for Catholic Education, the diploma is offered in partnership with the Conference of Rectors of Roman Pontifical Universities and Institutions ([CRUIPRO](#)), its member universities, which include the following pontifical universities in Rome: the Pontifical Lateran University, the Pontifical University Thomas Aquinas (the Angelicum), the Salesian Pontifical University, the Pontifical Athenaeum of San Anselmo and the Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum.

These participating Roman universities provide centuries-old knowledge and expert professors, as well as international prestige that guarantees the quality of the program and facilitate its wider scope. With different sensibilities and diverse approaches of each institution, the participation of the Roman universities provide and develop a multi-faceted view of reality that helps students and teachers in the exercise of their daily activities for this project. The long erudite tradition and the deep philosophical, anthropological, and theological knowledge that these universities embody are a solid base on which to build the formation of the student body which ranges from those studying for priestly or religious vocations to other future lay leaders.

¹ We initially expected the student body to be mostly seminarians, as well as student-priests, and religious sisters, but we also expect lay students from Roman universities. Non-Catholic students would be equally welcome to participate.

² See, for example, *Templeton Plan*, Step 4

³ *The Humble Approach*, 88

Since the Roman Catholic Church is the largest provider of non-governmental education in the world, the impact of this initiative has the strong potential to be significant as it expands internationally. From its starting point in Rome the project aims to reach out to Catholic institutions of higher learning around the world, which number about 1500. Moreover, because our students come from every corner of the world to study in Rome, and often return to their home countries where they are given leadership roles in schools and healthcare institutions, the growing alumni of this diploma program could have a highly impactful influence around the world for years to come.

The Diploma Program rests on three main pillars:

- An anthropological and theological foundation based on the magisterium of Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI in continuity with that of Pope Francis.
- A practical methodology that allows students to put into practice what they learn as the course progresses.
- The development of character virtues necessary for every current and future leader. The methodology we follow includes close and personal mentorship, which enables students to internalize those virtues in their personal lives.

The diploma program offers a solid intellectual foundation. This is important because understanding, reason and intellectual wisdom are not only compatible with a virtuous life, they are great allies. Right reason inspires and feeds the spiritual life and serves as a guide to a life well-lived.

The most prominent aspect of our teaching method is a personalized mentorship for each participating student, which intends to help all students to get to know themselves, make the best of themselves, and to discover their own talents for the good of the community.

The diploma program is especially aimed at all those interested in leadership understood as service for the good of society. In the context of a globalized and multicultural world, which increasingly requires more visibility and exemplary behavior, it is essential for any leader to have a solid formation and a life rooted in the daily exercise of character virtues.

The good in a leader is by nature expansive and inherently communicative, so a good life rightly ordered becomes a type of beacon that guides and encourages others, by word and example, towards a virtuous life. If the virtuous life of a leader is also accompanied by a deep spiritual and human formation, the ability to serve the community and become a point of reference for others will be even greater.

In addition to the goal of cultivating Virtuous Leadership the program also incorporates the development of soft skills, necessary for every good leader, such as the ability to effectively manage

teams, resolve conflicts and manage crises, the ability to empathize, to actively listen, the ability to speak in public and persuade with the truth, etc.

The project's ultimate goal is to generate a profound impact on participants, allowing them to not only understand but experience the importance of the virtues in their exercise of leadership.

The diploma seeks to support students and those who will go on to be leaders in the spiritual world and beyond. It provides the students with the training to put into action this conviction about the virtues at the heart of their present or future work, allowing them, in a sense, to transfer their personal virtuous qualities into virtuous communities within the institutions that they will one day lead.

Objectives

The general objective of the diploma program is to offer a high-quality formation program that will enable participants to be leaders in a way ordered towards the good through the study and practice of virtues.

The specific objectives that students must achieve are the following:

- **Discover** the importance of virtues in the exercise of leadership.
- **Develop** the ability to lead people and projects based on a virtuous life oriented towards the good.
- **Identify** their own strengths and weaknesses in the area of leadership to improve on them.

Methodology:

The teaching and learning methodology combine theoretical and individual study, from experts, texts, and videos. It also includes practical and experiential activities. The theoretical subjects set the theological and anthropological foundation of the entire course, while experiential activities uncover the importance of a virtuous life in the exercise of servant leadership. Furthermore, the practical methodologies allow the development of skills and competences from the beginning.

The project is structured so that it also involves a personalized mentoring program which helps the student identify their principal weaknesses in the scope of leadership, to develop the appropriate character virtues in order to overcome them, and to recognize their strengths to enhance them.

The Diploma Program provides students with a high impact both on their personal life and on the exercise of their professional or vocational functions. This is especially relevant if we consider that students are young and not so young persons who hold or will hold positions of responsibility in their respective areas of activity, so that their growth and improvement as leaders will have an almost immediate multiplier effect on their closest environment.

The online modality of the Diploma Program offers greater international impact and solidarity, reaching the remote and disadvantaged corners of the world. As for Roman university students, our online approach allows for greater flexibility to organize around their ongoing studies.

The teaching-learning methodology used in the Diploma Program has been developed by the team of teachers designated for each of the six modules of the diploma. This professors committee have the shared objective of creating community, and to focus on a different virtue while at the same time offering an overall view, which is proper to the development of the virtues.

In the same way that the virtues are communicating vessels and as one virtue is acquired, another is developed, the modules of the diploma distinguish the perspective of a spirituality proper to a particular charism within the Catholic Church as a whole, but at the same time it is linked to the other modules that bring into play different virtues, all seen as a unity in personal development and oriented to the exercise of leadership as service.

The human person is not an island but a being-in-relationship. We all have many deficiencies that make us need others. At the same time, we have gifts and talents that allow us to help others. That is why the community is the ideal place for mutual enrichment and help that allow participants, all thinking and working as leaders, to grow: receiving and giving, learning and teaching, helping and receiving help. The experience of community *lived*, while studying for the Diploma Program, naturally leads to a fruitful and enriching network of teachers and students. The network will allow the alumni to continue sharing difficulties, joys, good practices, advice, mutual help, and friendship.

The Diploma Program offered to the students at the Roman universities participating in the consortium and to other who are actually living a leadership responsibility, most of the times without any previous formation on this field, a valuable complement to the almost exclusively theoretical training they receive at these universities.

The Diploma has been offered to people from all over the world, especially from the Catholic world, who will be reached through bishops and religious congregations as well as through the Pontifical Universities themselves. It has been an outstanding experience that we have had students who are faced with the need to manage large teams with few resources and often in adverse conditions.

It is indeed a difficult but exciting task to reaffirm and re-educate the exercise of virtuous leadership.

Working together with the pontifical universities and the professors 'committee we have learnt that there are three major formation areas that emerge, three major perspectives that intertwine: one necessary for the other, one almost the premise of the other, one at the basis of the other.

1. The first, which could be summed up with the slogan "*Ad fontes*" also to underline its foundational dimension: it refers to the theological dimension, to the theological conjugation of the virtues; and, within it, of course the biblical vision that turns on essential themes such as: the virtues in the Old Testament, the Jesuit virtues, the catalogue of virtues in Paul; but also, of course, the discourse on virtuous leadership in the great monastic tradition, starting with the Desert Fathers and then with the Fathers (Basil, Gregory the Great, Benedict, etc.).
2. The second area seems to be that which to concern the theme of the contrast and the encounter - to be followed in its chronological development up to the conciliar and post-conciliar contributions - between "Athens", "Jerusalem" and "Rome", between a rational and philosophical and a theological and revealed perspective, with particular attention precisely to its repercussions on the discourse of the foundations of the rule of law and the rule of law.
3. A third area is what could be called "character education", educational humanism, the construction and formation of a virtuous subject called to leadership. Once a participant in the Diploma has understood the falsity of a purely utilitarian perspective in the discourse on virtuous leadership, he or she necessarily asks: how do I concretely become a virtuous subject, to acquire virtues? In this dimension, pedagogical and psychological skills come into play, as well as the dialogue between psychology and theology. This sometimes also includes the discussion of concrete examples of virtuous Christian leaders for whom a beatification process is underway (Robert Schuman, Alcide De Gasperi), or already blessed (Giuseppe Toniolo), but also the venerable Giorgio La Pira, and others.

Naturally, this last area is closely related to personalized "mentoring", the assimilation and application to the individual's life of what has been learned, in order to be able to truly exercise virtuous leadership in one's own life (what virtues do I have, which ones do I lack, what "road map" to follow, in a certain way, to grow on the personal path of virtuous leadership)

Taking up the vision of those who inspired this project, in particular Pierluca Azzaro, the foremost expert on the thought of Joseph Ratzinger, reminds us that, according to Benedict XVI "one of the most important and indispensable tasks of the Church in society is education, in that noble sense in which the Greek thinkers conceived it: is to awaken in man a sensitivity for truth, a sense of God and thus the energy of moral conscience: to impel the courage to live and act truly according to conscience and thus to exercise authentic virtuous leadership.

"In our time, hostility and greed seem to have become the new superpowers, and recently we have witnessed the abuse of power and a misunderstood religiosity to the point of the apotheosis of hatred;

but also, the abuse of reason to the apotheosis of irrationality and inhumanity, as with the invention of the most sophisticated weapons of mass destruction or with the codification of rights aimed at man's self-destruction. This confirms, for Benedict XVI, that the crisis humanity is experiencing today is ultimately an anthropological crisis, even more than a political and economic one: it is a crisis of man who has lost all basic points of reference, a crisis of man who no longer knows who he is: it is a crisis of identity. It is very valuable to walk the exhausting path of reintroducing and reaffirming, at the level of training and education, the Euro-Western synthesis of faith and reason. The project of a diploma in virtuous leadership goes in this direction and finds a precious theological foundation in the theology of Benedict XVI.”⁴

One of the challenges but at the same time, one of the most relevant aspects of this Diploma has been that the academic design has counted on the collaboration of expert professors from each of the participating pontifical universities, who have contributed with an academic vision inspired by a particular charism. All members of the Scientific Committee, who represent the different pontifical universities of this joint Diploma, have done an outstanding contribution by integrating a spiritual perspective for a Christian leader, including philosophical and theological basis about virtues and leadership, as well as integrating teachings from magisterium taking into account the tradition of Catholic Church charisms about character formation and virtuous behavior.

From among the institutions that have been part of the Diploma content teaching and design, the Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum is working on the creation of a chair titled, *Benedict XVI “Fides et Ratio” Chair for Studies in Virtuous Leadership and Character Development*. The Chair's purposes are to promote academic initiatives and teaching activities in order to build bridges between the domain of faith and that of particular sciences. More specifically, the Chair intends to build this synthesis in the area of virtuous leadership and character formation through the study of Benedict XVI on the virtues and working closely with the Diploma Program. The Chair is being created in collaboration with the Expanded Reason Institute and the Vatican Foundation Joseph Ratzinger.

This is based on the conviction that interdisciplinary research, in which the sciences are brought into direct engagement with theology, ethics and spirituality, is today central not only to the life a Catholic university,⁵ but more and more to the life of every university. Only with such a synthesis can universities contribute to solve the great challenges that confront humanity.

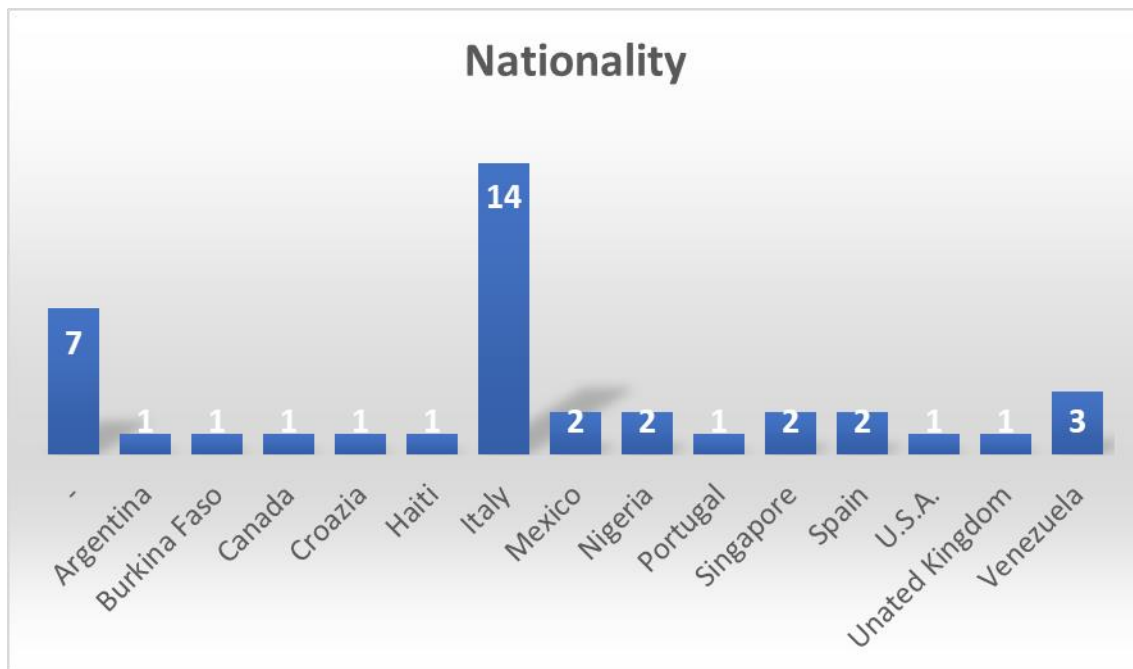
About students

⁴ Azzaro, Pierluca, 2021, Una riflessione preliminare sul tema dell’etica della virtù in Joseph Ratzinger/Benedetto XVI, Comments to de Scientific committee of the Diploma.

⁵ Juan Pablo II, Constitución Apostólica *Ex corde ecclesiae* (15 de agosto de 1990). Num 46

The Diploma has been interesting for students from 14 different countries and three languages working and exchanging experiences and growing together as a community.

It has been very interesting that students are 10% consecrated, 34% priests and 56% lay people. All of whom have leadership responsibility in apostolates, goddesses, congregations or educational settings.



Some students experiences

"I had a wonderful experience on the Diploma and learned a great deal from everyone, from all of you on the faculty, from my coach/mentor and from my fellow students.

The Diploma has been the best and most significant leadership learning and training of my life. It has inspired me to continue service and integrate my practice, faith and profession.

The Diploma has helped me rethink leadership in public and civic life." Jim (Executive director)

“We all agreed in our group discussions this has been the most enjoyable online program we have been a part of, and the content was challenging and substantial but presented in a way that made it accessible and manageable.” Caroline (lay woman).

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your dedication to the diploma courses this academic year. And honestly, it was a great moment of rejuvenation and reflection for me. After attending this course, I realized that if there are all these wars in the world, if my country Haiti is deteriorating day by day, if there are so many divisions between people, it is because there is a lack of virtuous leaders within these structures.

I assure you that I will do my best to pass on to all the priests and parishes in my diocese what I have just learnt in this diploma course. I find this to be a great necessity. And I have already had an initial discussion with my bishop about this project.

Please convey my thanks to the entire diploma team, all the teachers, all the mentors and all those who made this academic year possible. D. Diocese of Haiti

Finally, the Diploma has changed the vision of the imperative need to offer training with the solidity of the magisterium, but with a practical vision, oriented to the personal development of the leader and his commitment to perform that leadership as a service, integrating the virtues with the necessary skills to do good the good we long for.

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