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**THE CHARACTER AND THE QUALITIES
OF A CHRISTIAN LEADER.
A BIBLICAL AND PATRISTIC VIEW¹**

A. Introduction

Nowadays leadership is a very important topic because at all levels of human society the institutions, the organisations, the companies, the parties, the trustees, and not least of all the churches need to be led, guided and motivated by the presence of leader.

The aim of this essay is to show how the behaviour of leaders can influence the others members of community, group, team etc. And this is about *character*, about *the traits which characterised the person of a leader helping him/her to maintain virtuous action, emotion and thought* in order that the members of organisation to be motivated and to work for the achievement of common goals.

Firstly, I will try to define the terms of leadership, leader and character in their general understanding. Secondly, I will focus to the reality of leadership in the Christian ministry and the essential role of character/integrity for Christian leaders. Thirdly, I will present the most important qualities necessary for a good leader in a Christian community from the biblical and patristic view. But I have to say that those qualities are available too for each leader who is a Christian and lead any kind of organisation.

The main sources for my meditation will be the Holy Scripture of New Testament and the wise writings, sentences and stories of Holy Fathers who lived in the first centuries in the Egyptian desert.

The Christ's life and ministry as well as the apostolic time of Church

1. Caracterul și calitățile unui conducător creștin. O perspectivă biblică și patristică - studiu alcătuit și prezentat în cadrul cursului "Church Management", Colegiul Crowter Hall, Universitatea Birmingham, Marea Britanie, decembrie 2002.

are endless sources for those who are interested in the issue of leadership. The personality of St. Paul, the Apostle of Nations, is an exemplar one as regards the qualities, skills and enthusiasm asked to every servant of Christ.

Identically, those who are invested with the responsibility to lead/guide God's people can learn very much from the exemplar lives of desert fathers. In studying their writings, one can easily observe a common mind, a common noble spirit, humaneness, an understanding, a wisdom to analyse the motions of souls, the ways in which every human person is tempted by devil, world and his body.

B. The Definition of Terms

1. Leadership/leader

We have many definitions of leadership in literature. Robert Townsend explains the leadership as “*the capacity to compelling and plausible vision and to translate that vision into organizational realities*”². In relationship with management, we have to say that leadership is a constituent part of management. “*Leadership can be seen to be a concept which facilitate change and management a concept which consolidate and embeds the changes once they have been developed*”³. It's not compulsory to make a clear difference between a leader and a manager. They are not at all costs distinct psychological types because a leader are focusing on vision, goals, intension, direction and effectiveness, but at same time he must be interested in the details of daily work, how-to-do to achieve the goals, in building the team and assessing the individuals. “*Management might be seen as the shorter term, routine activities of the manager; whereas leadership constitutes the innovatory, longer-term duties of the manager.*”⁴

2. Character

In accordance with The Oxford Dictionary, character is represented by “*the mental and moral qualities distinctive to an individual*”⁵. This definition helps us to understand that character is foundational for a leader, which is always a model for the people he works with; it is an essential dimension

2. Bennis, Warren & Townsend, Robert, *Reinventing Leadership*, Piatkus Publ., London, 1996, p. 27.

3. Dawson, T., *Principles and Practice of Modern Management*, Eastham: Tudor, 1998, p. 113.

4. *Ibidem*.

5. Judy Pearsall, *Concise Oxford Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 237.

6. Gill, Robin & Burke, Derek, *Strategic Church Leadership*, London: SPCK, 1996, p. 5.

of his success. Character is manifested in three dimensions: will - by *ambition*, reason - by *competence* and behaviour - by *integrity*. For influencing people's behaviour the leaders have to be aware about the necessity of these high personal standards. They communicate not only by words but mostly by acts and people are very interested in seeing an identity between on the one hand the inner conviction, the vision and the principles of the leader and on the other hand his action, his whole life.

C. Leadership and Character in Christian Ministry

Firstly, we have to say that leadership represent one of the three dimensions of church ministry. *Teaching, sanctifying and leading* represent together the main tasks of those who are charged to guide the Christians in the light of God's will and commandments. We cannot discuss about Christian *leadership* without the other ones.

In the book of Acts of the Apostles, which is very concerned with church leadership, "*the decisions and key visions for leadership typically come out of a context of worship. Mission and social action both seem to flow from worship. Before the election of Matthias in the first chapter 'they all joined together constantly in prayer' (1:14). The dramatic second chapter opens with the words: 'When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place' (2:1). Worship then leads them to a revolutionary empowerment. At the end of the same chapter we are told: 'They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer' (2:42). From this worship flowed many wonders and signs as well as their communal giving to those in need. Thus 'they broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people' (2:46-47). And so the pattern continues in the chapters that follow in Acts.*"⁶

a. A Christian leader is submitted to teach the God's word and to make sure that *the message of Gospel is spread and received without errors*. The Great Commission of our Lord Jesus Christ is very clear about the teaching role in pastoral ministry:

"...go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name

7. Hughes, Bryn, *Leadership Tool Kit*, London, Monarch Book, 1998, p. 33.

of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you” (Matthew 28: 19-20).

In his Epistle to Timothy (chapter 4), St. Paul gives a model how a leader should respond to false teaching. He is very concerned about the heresies appeared in the community of Ephesus and instruct his disciple to combat this teaching and to be a godly leader: *“If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed. Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come” (I Timothy 4:6-8).*

In the first centuries the Christian Church had to face of the problem of heresies. At the outpost of this struggle the representatives of monastic life were very consciously with the keeping of *truthfulness of faith*: Abba Theodore said: *‘If you are friendly with someone who happens to fall into the temptation of fornication, offer him your hand, if you can, and deliver him from it. But if he falls into heresy and you cannot persuade him to turn from it, separate yourself quickly from him, in case, if you delay, you too may be dragged down with him into the pit.*

b. Secondly, leadership is seen as a God’s gift which have been given with another ones for the building of the body of Christ: *“Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man’s gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully” (Romans 12:4-8).*

That doesn’t mean that all leaders *“are born not made”*, because we can find in Bible leaders who are not specifically gifted as Gideon, Isaiah the Prophet or Saint Peter.

c. Thirdly, *Christian leadership is radically different than the secular leadership.* There are some common tools, but the goals and aims are not the same. The secular leader wish to get power, influence, money and fame,

while a Christian one has in view to influence people for God's purposes, to "equip others", "to help members express their gifts, and to integrate those contributions for the common good".⁷ In the Christian leadership more important is to help/guide people to "do even greater things" (John 14:12) than they are doing usually. Christian leaders need to follow *the model of servant leadership style*, gave by our Lord Jesus Christ:

*"Instead, whoever wants to become great among you **must be your servant**, and whoever wants to be first **must be slave of all**. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many"* (Mark 10:43-45).

In this perspective, a successful Christian leader is not only one who know what and how to do but one who is simultaneously *a godly person, with a good character*.

Abba Anthony - the founder of Egyptian monasticism - said about the importance of our behaviour/character before our neighbour:

*Our life and our death are with our neighbour. If we gain our brother, we have gained our God; but **if we scandalize our brother, we have sinned against Christ**.*

Amma Theodora said: *A teacher ought to be a stranger to the desire for domination, vain-glory, and pride; one should not be able to fool him by **flattery**, nor blind him by **gifts**, nor conquer him by the **stomach**, nor dominate him by **anger**; but he should be **patient, gentle and humble** as far as possible; he must be tested and without partisanship, **full of concern, and a lover of souls**.*

Leadership development is a life-time process and here we have to add the assertion of Dr. Robert Clinton: "There are many lessons in the development of a leader. None are more crucial in timing or in impact than the early ones which focus on character building."⁸ The emerging leader's character presupposes several qualities which we will present in the next section.

8. Clinton, Dr. J. Robert, *The Making of a Leader*, Colorado Springs (USA): Navpress, 1988, p. 58.

9. *Ibidem*, p. 66.

D. The Qualities of a Christian Leader

The references for the qualities required of Christian leaders are found in the following passages from the Epistles of St. Paul to his disciples Timothy and Titus:

*“Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task. Now the overseer **must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect”** (1 Timothy 3:1-5).*

*“But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue **righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness”** (1 Timothy 6:12).*

*“Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue **righteousness, faith, love and peace**, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. **And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.** Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 22-25).*

*“An priest must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient. Since an overseer (bishop) is entrusted with God's work, he must be **blameless - not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain. Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined.** He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it” (Titus 1: 6-8).*

*“In your teaching show **integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech** that cannot be condemned, so that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us” (Titus 2:7-8).*

In the next paragraphs I will try to define and show how these qualities were understood and practiced in the Apostolic and Early Church time.

1. Faithfulness and Fear of God

Faith involves “*looking to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith*” (Hebrew 12:2), because He is the personification of faith and faithfulness (Gal. 3:23-25; 1Tim. 1:14; 2 Tim. 1:13). In this image, St. Paul said that the leaders in the Church “*as **servants of Christ** and (...) entrusted with the secret things of God (...) must prove **faithful**.*” (1 Corinthians 4:1-2).

This is a fundamental issue in relationship with the God’s Word. Without faithfulness the Christian leader cannot clarify and express clearly the God’s truth to others. “*Godly leaders display love for truth. They study the written Word to feed their own souls as well as to help others. God teaches a leader to appreciate truth, cultivate habits for the intake of truth, and respond in obedience to truth, so he or she may be quick to discern God’s truth in everyday life and through other people’s ministry.*”⁹

In connection with faithfulness is the good fear, the fear of the Lord who is the beginning of wisdom (Proverbs 1:7). To fear God is to revere Him and give Him due respect and honour (Genesis 20:11). For the Desert Fathers the fear of God has a special meaning and role in the inner life growth phase of man: *Abba James* said, “*Just as a lamp lights up a dark room, so the **fear of God** when it penetrates the heart of a man illuminates him, teaching him all the virtues and commandments of God.*”

As it is said in Deuteronomy, fear of God is linked to love of God. When the virtues and godly life are achieved, the love for God takes the place of fear: *Abba Antony* said: “*I no longer **fear God**, because I love Him; for love casts out fear.*”

2. Trust in God’s Providence

God is present in our life and He knows better than us what we need to achieve His commandments and to live in communion with Him. God sustains the world that He has created and directs it to its appointed destiny: “*Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet **not one of them is forgotten by God**. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows*” (Luke 12:6-7).

Abba Doulas, the disciple of Abba Bessarion said, “*One day when we were walking beside the sea I was thirsty and I said to Abba Bessarion, “Father, I am very thirsty.” He said a prayer and said to me, “Drink some*

10. *Ibidem*, p. 64.

11 Atkinson, David J., Field, David H., *New Dictionary of Christian Ethics and Pastoral*

*of the sea water.” The water proved sweet when I drank some. I even poured some into a leather bottle for fear of being thirsty later on. Seeing this, the old man asked me why I was taking some. I said to him, “Forgive me, it is for fear of being thirsty later on.” Then the old man said, “**God is here, God is everywhere.**”*

For Christian leaders one of the most important things is the ability to generate and maintain in their and other people’s souls the trust in God’s presence and guidance. “*I will put my trust in Him*” (Hebrew 2:13) and “*I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself*” (Philippians 2:24) was often saying St. Paul to his disciples. And this is the correct perspective for each Christian leader: not trust in our things, plans, deeds, structures, but in God’s will and purpose for our lives.

3. Obedience

A leader must learn obedience of God’s commandments in order to influence others towards obedience (Romans 5:19). At same time good leader has to be a good follower. If he doesn’t obey the rules, he can’t be a good example for others. In Christian context, leaders should listen the God’s will and to live under His commandments: “*Therefore do not be foolish, but **understand what the Lord’s will is***” (Ephesians 5:17).

*“For this reason, since the day we heard about you, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you **with the knowledge of His will** through all spiritual wisdom and understanding” (Colossians 1:9).*

*Abba Mios of Belos said: “Obedience responds to obedience. **When someone obeys God, then God obeys his request.**”*

In the spiritual fatherhood, obedience was and is valued as a great virtue: *The holy Syncretia said, “I think that for those living in community **obedience is a greater virtue than chastity**, however perfect. Chastity carries within it the danger of pride, but obedience has within it the promise of humility.”*

It was said of Abba John the Dwarf that he withdrew and lived in the desert at Scetis (the most famous place in the Egyptian monastic communities - my note, G.A.) with an old man of Thebes. His abba, taking a piece of dry wood, planted it and said to him, ‘Water it every day with a bottle of water, until it bears fruit.’ Now the water was so far away that he had to leave in the evening and return the following morning. At the end of three years the wood came to life and bore fruit. Then the old man took some of

the fruit and carried it to the church saying to the brethren, ‘Take and eat the fruit of obedience.’

It was said of Abba Silvanus that at Scetis he had a disciple called Mark whose obedience was great. He was a scribe. The old man loved him because of his obedience. He had eleven other disciples who were hurt because he loved him more than them. When they knew this, the elders were sorry about it and they came one day to him to reproach him about it. Taking them with him, he went to knock at each cell, saying, ‘Brother so and so, come here; I need you,’ but none of them came immediately. Coming to Mark’s cell, he knocked and said, ‘Mark.’ Hearing the old man’s voice, he jumped up immediately and the old man sent him off to serve and said to the elders, ‘Fathers, where are the other brothers?’ Then he went into Mark’s cell and picked up his book and noticed that he had begun to write the letter ‘omega’ [“w”] but when he had heard the old man, he had not finished writing it. Then the elders said, ‘Truly, abba, he whom you love, we love too and God loves him.’

Some time it is happening that we can’t understand the events in our lives, or when we are called to make something that doesn’t make sense. In the story of Abraham and Isaac (Genesis 22; Hebrew 11:17-19) we see how the patriarch obeyed God even to kill Isaac didn’t make sense. “*Abraham’s complex experience shows the pattern for a successful obedience check. God requires unconditional obedience. We are to obey and He is responsible for the results.*”¹⁰

4. Prayer Life

Jesus prayed constantly throughout His earthly ministry, particularly at its high points (Luke 3:21; 6:12; 9:18,28; 11:1; 22:32,41-45). He prayed for His disciples, for those crucified Him and He taught his disciples to pray in ‘Lord’s Prayer’. And also St. Paul prayed fervently for others (Romans 1:9-10; Ephesians 1:15-17): “*For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom His whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide*

Theology, Leicester: Inter Varsity Press, 1995, p. 443.

12. *Ibidem*, p. 469.

and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:14-19).

The prayer is the breathing of soul. Without prayer we can't be in communion with God, to receive His grace, and consequently to have the power to defend ourselves from evil spirits/temptations which can cause our failures: *Abba John said, 'I am like a man sitting under a great tree, who sees wild beasts and snakes coming against him in great numbers. When he cannot withstand them any longer, he runs to climb the tree and is saved. It is just the same with me; I sit in my cell and I am aware of evil thoughts coming against me, and when I have no more strength against them, I take refuge in God by prayer and I am saved from the enemy.*

Leaders in Christian ministry have to pray more than ordinary people. They have the responsibility to pray for all members of community, they have to begin every act, to take every decision, to explain every task with and by prayer: *Abba Lot went to see abba Joseph and he said to him, "Abba, as far as I can, I say my little office, I fast a little, I pray and meditate, I live in peace and as far as I can I purify my thoughts. What else can I do?" Then the old man stood up and stretched his hands toward heaven; his fingers became like ten lamps of fire and he said to him, "If you will, you can become all flame."*

5. Holiness/Praxis

The holiness of life is a fundamental commandment of God: *"Be holy, because I, the Lord your God, am holy"* (Leviticus 19:2). St. Paul describes Jesus Christ as our righteousness, holiness and redemption (1 Corinthians 1:30). Christian people are called to be holy because they belong to the holy body of Church of which Christ is the head (1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 5:26; 1 Peter 2:9; 2 Peter 3:11). The correct and regular worship of God, generosity and care for the poor and oppressed are essential elements of holiness, summed up in the command: *"Love your neighbour as yourself"* (Matthew 22:39).

*"Those who are involved in the service of a majestic leader dress and behave in ways that indicate respect and add to the splendour of the occasion"*¹¹. St. Paul mention in his second epistle to the Corinthians about the necessity of holiness in the lifestyle of a Christian leader: *"Now this is*

*our boast: Our conscience testifies that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the **holiness and sincerity** that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace" (2 Corinthians 1:12).*

The importance of holiness in the life of those who are leading in the Church is stressed moreover by desert fathers' sentences. They show how the practice of what they are teaching is essential "*in building the house of another*": *For someone to teach another, he must be **healthy in his soul and free of passions**,*" says Abba Poimen. "*There is no use in building the house of another, your own being destroyed.*"

"*He who teaches others, without **putting to practice any of that which he teaches**,*" the same Father further says, "*is like a spring which irrigates and flows over all that is around it, while it is filled with every sort of dirt.*"

"*Truly wise*", said Abba Iperechios, "*is **he who teaches, not with words, but with deeds.***"

Another wise father compares one who teaches only with words, without doing works, with trees which have leaves, but bear no fruit: *Abba James said, 'We do not need words only, for, at the present time, there are many words among men, but **we need works**, for this is what is required, not words which do not bear fruit.'*

The holiness of life is the incarnation of Christ who lives and spread His light in all life of godly persons. Living with and in Christ the saints can confess not only by words, but merely by their presence, attitude, behaviour: *Three elders customarily went three times a year to the mountain of Abba Antonios to be taught by the Great Saint. Two of them would ask various questions concerning spiritual and bodily exercises. In this way they provided the occasion for the Saint to pour forth the river of wisdom flowing within him. The third elder always listened silently, without asking anything. Once the Saint asked him: "So many years you have visited me, brother, without making the slightest inquiry. **Do you not wish to learn anything?" "It is enough for me to see you, Abba. Indeed, this has taught me much!"*** the elder answered reverently.

Abba Theophilus, the archbishop, came to Scetis one day. The brethren

13. Bennis, Warren & Townsend, Robert, *Reinventing Leadership*, London: Piatkus Publ., 1996, p. 16.

who were assembled said to Abba Pambo, 'Say something to the Archbishop, so that he may be edified.' The old man said to them, **'If he is not edified by my silence, he will not be edified by my speech.'**

6. Humility

In the list of virtues, humility has the first place. "No grace of the Christian life better illustrates the value transformation effected the life and ministry of Jesus than humility."¹² He was among his disciples as one who served and He said: "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and **the servant of all**" (Mark 9:35).

Humility is a hidden condition of the heart (Matthew 6:16-18) and to know one's true position before God (Matthew 5:3-5). St. Paul presents his self-humbling by preaching the Gospel without cost (2 Corinthians 10:1; 11:7) and living with the awareness both of his weaknesses and of the Christ's grace, mercy and patience upon him: "From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church. When they arrived, he said to them: "You know how I lived the whole time I was with you, from the first day I came into the province of Asia. I served the Lord with **great humility** and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews" (Acts 20:17-19).

"I became a servant of this Gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of His power. Although **I am less than the least of all God's people**, this grace was given me: to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:7-8).

"Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save **sinners - of whom I am the worst**. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, **the worst of sinners**, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on Him and receive eternal life" (1 Timothy 1:15-16).

A Christian leader is one who experience the absence of arrogance, who "is servant to his people, making sure that they don't have any reason to fail, that their wants are fulfilled, and they have every resource they need to achieve their targets."¹³

In the Gerontikon, which contains a wide variety of spiritual writings from the desert fathers, it is repeatedly made clear that *“**The humble-minded and lowly in heart is not the one who cheapens himself and talks about humility, but the one who endures joyfully the dishonours which come from his neighbour.**”*

In another place the Gerontikon states that: *“The person honoured more than he deserves is actually harmed, while the person who is not honoured at all by his fellow human beings will be **honoured in heaven by God.**”*

An old man was asked, *“**What is humility?**”* and he said in reply, *“Humility is a great work, and **a work of God.** The way of humility is to undertake bodily labour **and believe yourself a sinner and make yourself subject to all.**”* Then a brother said, *“What does it mean, to be subject to all?”* The old man answered, *“To be subject to all is not to give your attention to the sins of others but **always to give your attention to your own sins and to pray without ceasing to God.**”*

The humility is often linked with the simplicity (which is not ignorance, as many would like to say): *One day Abba Arsenius consulted an old Egyptian monk about his own thoughts. Someone noticed this and said to him, ‘Abba Arsenius, how is it that you with such a good Latin and Greek education, ask this peasant about your thoughts?’ He replied, ‘I have indeed been taught Latin and Greek, but **I do not know even the alphabet of this peasant.**’*

The life of the great Abba John the Dwarf is an model of humility and self-abasement: *One day when Abba John the Dwarf was sitting in front of the church, the brethren were consulting him about their thoughts. One of the old men who saw it became a prey to jealousy and said to him, ‘**John, your vessel is full of passion.**’ Abba John said to him, ‘**That is very true, abba; and you have said that when you only see the outside, but if you were able to see the inside, too, what would you say then?**’*

Abba John the Dwarf said, ‘There was a spiritual old man who lived a secluded life. He was held in high estimation in the city and enjoyed a great reputation. He was told that a certain old man, at the point of death, was calling for him, to embrace him before he fell asleep. He thought to

*himself, if I go by day, men will run after me, giving me great honour, and I shall not be at peace in all that. So I will go in the evening in the darkness and I shall escape everyone's notice. But at that time, two angels were sent by God with lamps to give him light. Then the whole city came out to see his glory. **The more he wished to flee from glory, the more he was glorified.** In this was accomplished that which is written: "He who humbles himself will be exalted." ' (Luke 14:11)*

Abba Isaac tells us that the who makes himself small in everything will be exalted above all. And his discerning voice continues: "**Hate honour and you will be honoured indeed.** He who runs after honours causes honour itself to be banished from him. But if you merely disdain yourself hypocritically in order to appear humble, God will reveal you."

Abba Isaiah, that great mind, notes with particular grace and subtlety: "**He who humbles himself before God is capable of enduring every insult.** The humble person is not concerned about what others say about him. The person who bears the harsh word of a rude and foolish man for the sake of God is worthy of acquiring peace."

Abba Macarius the Great experienced humility in his life in such great measure that the devil was afraid by his spiritual power: *As abba Macarius was returning to his cell from the marsh carrying palm-leaves, the devil met him with a sharp sickle and would have struck him but he could not. He cried out, "Great is the violence I suffer from you, Macarius, for when I want to hurt you, I cannot. But whatever you do, I do and more also. You fast now and then, but I am never refreshed by any food; you often keep vigil, but I never fall asleep. Only in one thing are you better than I am and I acknowledge that."* Macarius said to him, "What is that?" and he replied, "**It is because of your humility alone that I cannot overcome you.**"

The old men used to say, "When we do not experience warfare, we ought so much the more to humiliate ourselves. **For God seeing our weakness, protects us; when we glorify ourselves, he withdraws his protection and we are lost.**"

He also said, '**The heights of humility are great and so are the depths of boasting; I advise you to attend to the first and not to fall into the second.**'

Abba Mark goes on to note the following: "**When you become aware of the thought in your mind dictating human glory, you should know for sure that this thought is preparing you for shame.** And if you discern someone

praising you hypocritically, expect also his accusation some time soon.”

And with the daring precision of a surgeon of the soul, the holy Abba continues: *“When you see someone crying over the many insults he has received, you should know that, because he was overcome by vainglory, he is now unknowingly reaping the crop of evils in his heart. He who loves pleasure is grieved by accusations and abuse. On the other hand, he who loves God is grieved by praises and other superfluous remarks. **The degree of our humility is measured by slander. Don’t think that you have humility when you cannot forbear even the slightest accusation.**”*

*He also said that **neither asceticism, nor vigils nor any kind of suffering are able to save, only true humility can do that.** There was an anachorite who was able to banish the demons; and he asked them, ‘What makes you go away?’ ‘Is it fasting?’ They replied, ‘We do not eat or drink.’ ‘Is it vigils?’ They replied, ‘We do not sleep.’ ‘Is it separation from the world?’ ‘We live in the deserts.’ ‘What power sends you away then?’ They said, **‘Nothing can overcome us, but only humility.’** ‘Do you see how humility is victorious over the demons?’*

Abba Zossima goes even further: *“**Remember the one who has ridiculed you, who has grieved you, who has wronged you, who has done evil to you, as your physician, your healer.** Christ sent him to heal you; don’t remember him with anger.”*

7. Discernment/Self-control

In the process of inner-growth life, the discernment has a primordial place. Discernment is a fruit of the spiritual experience, is the capacity of distinguishing what would be good or bad in our *“thoughts and attitudes of the heart”* (Hebrews 4:12), in our decisions about the spiritual life. And this is very significant for leaders who are confronted always with many kinds of reactions, attitudes and acts from the led. They need this “skill” not only for the personal growth, but also for the leading of the flock.

Discernment was the most valued virtue by abba Anthony the Great: *A hunter in the desert saw **abba Antony enjoying himself with the brothers,** and he was shocked. Wanting to show him that it was necessary sometimes to meet the needs of the brothers, the old man said to him, “Put an arrow in your bow and shoot it.” So he did. And the old man said, “Shoot another,” and he did so. Then the old man said, “Shoot yet again,” and the hunter*

*replied, "If I bend my bow so much, I will break it." Then the old man said to him, "It is the same with the work of God. **If we stretch the brothers beyond measure, they will soon break. Sometimes it is necessary to come down to meet their needs.**"*

Another well-known story from desert fathers illustrate the relationship between humility, discernment and faith: *It was said concerning Abba Agathon that some monks came to find him having heard tell of his great discernment. Wanting to see if he would lose his temper they said to him 'Aren't you that Agathon who is said to be a fornicator and a proud man?' 'Yes, it is very true,' he answered. They resumed, 'Aren't you that Agathon who is always talking nonsense?' 'I am.'" Again they said 'Aren't you Agathon the heretic?' But at that he replied 'I am not a heretic.' So they asked him, 'Tell us why you accepted everything we cast you, but repudiated this last insult.' He replied '**The first accusations I take to myself for that is good for my soul. But heresy is separation from God. Now I have no wish to be separated from God.**' At this saying they were astonished at his **discernment** and returned, edified.*

E. Conclusion

As I said in the beginning the character is essential for a successful leadership. And in Christian ministry field this is true all the more so. Jesus Christ said: "*you are the light of the world (...), the salt of the world and (...) let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven*" (Matthew 5:13,14,16). Therefore, these commandments are for all Christians, but the spiritual leaders in the Church must be the first ones who accomplish it.

I tried to show here some qualities, not all of them, which participate at the formation and development of a good character and consequently of an effective spiritual leader. The most important result, the main idea of this essay is that people accept a leader and follow him only if the principals who are the core values of that organisation, in our case the Church, are incarnate and manifested in his life.

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