RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP - A COMPOSITE PICTURE

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Any subject that is explored from the perspectives of multiple religions will yield similarities and differences. Religions will turn out to be similar to others on one score, and to still others on another. The interreligious enterprise is founded upon some balance of similarity and difference. It is because religions are similar in fundamental ways that it is possible and worthwhile to talk to one another. And it is because they are different from one another that such talk is interesting and a source of learning, maybe of inspiration.

In relation to the topic of Religious Leadership, what unites us is far more than what divides us

When we first started working on the theme of "Religious Leadership for the Future", I had assumed that the overall balance of similarity and difference will be similar to the dozen or so topics that have been explored over years in various fora set up by the Elijah Interfaith Institute. As I look at what has been accomplished in this project, I am struck by how fundamental the similarities are. I would go as far as to argue that in relation to the topic of Religious Leadership, what unites us is far more than what divides us.

Of course, there are the fundamental differences that make each religion what it is. In terms of leadership, we have noted that almost every religion sets up the ideal model, identified with its founder, as the archetype for religious leadership. Respective appeals to Jesus, Moses, Muhammad, Guru Nanak and the Buddha are obviously distinct from one another. Similarly, the goals of the different religions may be stated in ways that emphasize their difference. Removal of ignorance leading to union with God provides a different emphasis from service to God and humanity, which in turn is different from the compassionate removal of suffering. And yet, the similarities are very striking. Some of the formulations found in one paper might resonate with the faithful of another tradition, even if their own tradition is not represented in this collection of essays in precisely this way. We must not forget that each of our essays is a personal statement as much as it is an attempt to faithfully represent the tradition and its concerns, both in terms of historical presentation and as theological construction. But even when we make room for divergence of theological understanding, the five theistic traditions all emphasize the centrality of God and His knowledge as goals of the tradition. We do note meaningful differences concerning attitudes to society and the obligation to love and serve the other. Indeed, we note that the Eastern traditions are called upon by our authors or some of the figures cited in the papers to broaden their spiritual mandate to include more seriously society as a whole and various concrete manifestations of the other. But certainly from the perspective

of our authors, who seek an integrated vision of the applied spirituality of their tradition in society, the commonalities between our traditions by far outweigh their differences, even as far as the ideals and goals of the tradition are concerned.

It is meaningful to talk about religious leadership in today's world as though it were of a block. We may overlook our differences, in order to highlight the common lessons and common challenges that we face. Above all, we have what to learn from one another.

The commonalities are even more powerful when we move from the theology of the religions to the phenomenology of leadership. In many ways, we move here from similarity to identity. What it means to be a religious leader, how a religious leader operates, what are some of the perennial challenges to leadership and how future leadership must be formed - on all these issues we find our authors speaking time and again with one common voice, regardless of the differences in the theology of their tradition and in the identification of the great teacher or model that each religion follows.

This recognition has huge implications. It is much more than merely interesting to know that our six religions manifest a similar, even identical, phenomenology of religious leadership, as it comes to expression in the understanding of the tasks of the religious leader and his or her interaction with the community. This recognition is significant because it allows us to draw a composite picture of the religious leader and of the state of religious leadership in today's world. It allows us to draw lessons and to derive benefits from the experience of one religious tradition for another. It suggests that when a group of leaders, such as the Elijah Board of World Religious Leaders, come together, they indeed come together in the name of a unifying reality to which they all belong and that they all seek to serve. What emerges from our studies is therefore that it is indeed meaningful to talk about religious leadership in today's world as though it cut from one cloth, and that in important ways we may overlook our differences, in order to highlight the common lessons and common challenges that we face. Above all, we have what to learn from one another. One tradition's teachings may therefore be applied to another tradition and serve as a resource for future reflection. While this is obviously true of any spiritual teaching, concerning any topic, the close similarity in the phenomenology of religious leadership that emerges from our project makes such inspiration across the lines of religions both meaningful and legitimate. In short, we can support each other as we face up to the contemporary challenges of religious leadership.

Let me illustrate some of the dimensions of commonality and identity that I see emerging from our papers. I have already referred to the fact that with one notable exception, all our traditions look to a founding figure as a model of leadership. As suggested, this is the source of division in our

respective visions. But it can also be a source of commonality in our respective processes. To be a leader means to belong to something greater than yourself and to strive to emulate and follow the example of old. This has significant consequences for character formation, making religious leaders of different traditions much closer to one another than one often considers. Religious leaders constantly seek to transcend themselves by emulating, perhaps even uniting with, the representation of perfection that is known to them through their tradition.

It is striking to realize how central service is to the vocation of the religious leader

This fundamental attitude of self transcendence has been captured in some of our papers in terms of service. It is striking to realize how central service is to the vocation of the religious leader. Service makes us think of service to the community, but each act of teaching, even within the master-disciple relationship is also an act of service. Rambachan shows us how the master-disciple relationship is driven, among other factors, by service. That religious leaders are servants emerges as a universal conclusion from our study, valid for all our traditions. This recognition has consequences for character formation, for discernment in making choices in entering the field of religious leadership, for the purification of tradition from ills and imperfections that may creep into it and finally for the possibility of drawing inspiration across the boundaries of religions. We are all here to serve.

When thinking whom we are serving, we might encounter different formulations. The most obvious response is that we are serving those who are immediately before us, our disciples or our congregants. But we are also serving the tradition itself, caring for it, protecting it and ensuring its preservation, integrity and continuity. Finally, for the theistic traditions, any act of service is also an act of service of God, even if its recipient is another human being. Service is thus an interior movement, a disposition of heart and a way of being. This disposition cuts across and unifies the various recipients. In important ways, cultivating this disposition and keeping it alive is as important, if not more important, than the specific answer to the question of whom we are serving. And it is the common cultivation of this interior disposition that is the foundation of the deeper commonality and affinity that we uncover between our different religions.

A further major component of a composite picture of religious leadership is being driven by compassion. Clearly, different religions will feature this notion in different ways. For the Buddhist, compassion is the ultimate telos of the religion. For others it may simply be a driving force, that informs the work of the religious leader. But all seem to concur on the importance of compassion to the vocation of the religious leader. It is also worth recalling that while the notion has figured in almost all our papers (its absence in the Sikh paper is an accident of its composition, rather than something indicative of a difference in the nature of Sikh religious

leadership. I have been assured of that much by the author who affirms the centrality of compassion to Sikh leadership), it may indeed have figured even more heavily, had we made a point of featuring compassion. Let me illustrate this from a quote from the Jewish tradition, taken from the works of R. Nachman of Breslav, who offers various worthwhile reflections on leadership. R. Nachman writes: " For the compassionate one will be their leader (Isa.49) - this suggests that only someone possessing compassion can be a leader...And such a compassionate one is found only in Moses our teacher, who was the leader of Israel and is its future leader" (Likutey Moharan 2,7,1-2). I bring this quote not in order to augment or suggest a different portrait of leadership than the one offered by Meir Sendor. I wish to suggest simply that whereas compassion already comes up in his, as well as in all our papers in various ways, further attempts to highlight compassion as a feature of leadership will probably yield an even stronger nexus between leadership and compassion, thereby establishing it as a constitutive feature of all religious leadership. The example taken from the Jewish sources, with which I am most familiar, suggests that our papers provide the initial insights and intuitions that will become better established through further study and reflection.

All seem to concur on the importance of compassion to the vocation of the religious leader

A third component of a composite image of leadership is humility. I think without exception all our traditions highlight the virtue of humility as a key virtue in the vocation of a religious leader. Humility is closely related to service, but it is also an important complement to service. Service could function as a way of bolstering the ego and the sense of self worth of the servant. Our traditions all teach us that the service of the leader must be carried out in humility. And many of the ills that plague our traditions come about when humility and the spirit of service are lost. The most fundamental challenges to religious leadership are thus to keep alive the basic character of what it is to be a religious leader. In this sense, proper motivation is the key to successful leadership in all our traditions. Leadership carries with it the temptations of power, recognition and at times other illicit benefits that leadership makes possible. True religious leadership is empowered to overcome these temptations, because it grows out of a motivation of service and is informed by humility and the character virtues that make the religious leader open to what is beyond him or her. While love has not emerged from our papers as nearly as central as service, humility and compassion, I suspect that were we to give additional thought to the composite character of the religious leader, love would not be wanting. In fact, while love as a virtue was featured most prominently in the Christian view of religious leadership, I imagine that some of what is meant by love is already covered by other terms by which the other traditions describe the interior disposition of the religious leader, including the reference to compassion.

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All this may be said in another way. Some traditions might have an easier time affirming the following statement than others, but it seems to me based on our papers that all traditions contain teachings that allow them to resonate with the following formulation. I would like to propose that one of the hallmarks of true religious leadership is the leader's awareness that ultimately it is not he or she who is the leader. Rather, he or she is the instrument for the true leader. Such instrumentality is of course a hallmark of the prophetic traditions, and therefore informs the image of the religious leader in all traditions that emulate the prophet to some degree. But also the wisdom traditions can be construed so as to highlight the instrumentality of the teacher and the recognition that ultimately it is the truth or reality itself that is doing the guiding. The balance between the teaching and the teacher, that each tradition captures in its own way, is suggestive of that. For the Buddhist, there is anyway great ambivalence regarding the role of the teacher. At the end of the day, it is the teaching and the true nature of reality that really count. Similarly, the Guru is an instrument in making reality known. Significantly, his job is to remove ignorance. The rest follows. Thus, while there may differences of nuance in how this is expressed and while some traditions may contain multiple and even conflicting voices on this point, it seems appropriate to suggest that in the composite image of the religious leader, drawn from the resources of all our traditions, ultimately the leader is not operating on his or her own power but is pointing beyond. Following Volf we may say that for some formulations the leader is a model, while for others he or she is an icon. But even for the weaker understandings, in the final analysis, whatever power the leader has is not his or her own power. Rather, the power uses him as an instrument to make the truth, the reality, or the presence of God known to the student and that that it is the power that forms the broader community, and ultimately all of humanity, according to the vision of truth and reality for which the leaders is an instrument.

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Leadership, it appears, is more than a series of skills and activities that are performed within a socially defined setting in accordance with the conventions, traditions and norms of a given religion. In fact, authentic leadership cannot be exhausted in terms of what the leader does. Rather, as emerges clearly from some of our papers, leadership involves the being of the leader. Authentic leadership is thus both about what the leader does and what the leader is. This is apparent in the wisdom traditions. One cannot impart a wisdom of which one does

not truly partake. All that would be imparted then are the words, the external forms, the shells. If leadership is understood as teaching leading to illumination, this requires a leader who has attained something in his or her own being. The point is just as valid for the prophetic traditions. If the leader is to emulate the prophet, the original founder or role model of the religion, such emulation cannot be external only. He must manifest and represent the same qualities, at least to some degree. And if the ultimate leader is God, it is incumbent upon leaders to exercise a style of leadership that is transparent to divinity, and that does not block it with the leader's own ego. What we learn concerning translucency of the Christian leader is appropriate for other traditions, whether they are able to fully conceptualize it or not. This is why we find in several of our papers reference to the need for the leader to remove his ego, or to get his own self out of the way, so that God can work through him or her. God's being must radiate through the being of the leader, allowing him to lead on behalf and in collaboration with God. No skill set can exhaust such a requirement. It is a fundamental requirement that goes to the depth of the being of the leader.

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If leadership is a matter of being, as well as of doing, we understand better the need for the twofold process by means of which leaders attune themselves to their deeper calling or vocation. Volf and Andemicael refer to it with the help of the metaphor of ascent and descent to God's mountain. The Buddhist texts refer to it in terms of "Thus gone" and "Thus come", a movement away from the world and a return to it. These two papers offer the most explicit conceptualization of the need to attain some kind of spiritual state as a condition for effective leadership. It may be these traditions have conceptualized the matter more clearly. But even if other traditions have not been as sharp in their description of the task and of the process, this does not make the specific dynamic of moving away and returning to any less relevant for the leadership of other traditions. Let us recall how for Sendor the Rabbi is situated slightly apart from the community. Surely more is involved in this positioning than social distancing. Being apart implies dwelling in a state of being that provides some kind of distance, based on the higher vision, clearer priorities and spiritual orientation that the rabbi is ideally to have. If the rabbinate is a continuation of the prophetic vocation, in a meaningful sense other than its problematic contemporary application, then the attainment of higher and clearer vision, indicative of the state of being of the leader, would seem to justify such continued appeal to the prophetic office. In fact, without highlighting the explicit conceptualization of climbing up the mountain and coming down again, one of the texts that Sendor shares with us provides an illustration of just that. The spiritual struggles of Rabbi Hayyim of Zanz illustrate the tension between the internal world of the leader and the outward demands of care for

the community. Rabbi Hayyim is taught patience and acceptance of the needs of his community, even when they are at tension with his own personal spiritual time, through the metaphor of Moses ascending and descending Mt. Sinai. This twofold process seems to me a universal of religious experience and hence of religious leadership. With minimal effort, we should be able to multiply examples from all traditions.

Our papers have all touched in some way or another on the need for spirituality and the problem of loss of spirituality in our traditions. Issues of corruption, abuse of power and various ills can be found in each of our traditions. It is striking how often such problems occur in religion overall and to what extent our papers point to the many manifestations of human imperfection seizing hold of religion and dragging it down. While battling these ills is necessary and while it is important to affirm that there is no room for corrupt leadership, such corruption is itself a byproduct of a deeper ailment. If leaders are not able to be agents of another order of reality, then all the weaknesses associated with human nature and the material order are bound to creep into the field of religion. This is why several of our writers offer as the solution to the various problems that leadership faces a return to the source of the vocation of the leader, its original calling and its existential depth. Even if we were to successfully implement any number of changes and adaptations to the curriculum used in leadership formation, the core issue lies beyond the quantitative regulation of the knowledge and information assimilated by future leaders. It relates to the leader's being and therefore requires another kind of attention.

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Recognizing the depth dimension of leadership allows us to revisit some additional questions that we encountered throughout the different presentations and to find further common ground between the traditions. We have noted that in almost all cases there has been reflection on the relationship between the leader and the community. Even if the leader stands at some remove from the community, the divide is temporary and instrumental, never final. The leader grows out of the community, is a part of it and his leadership functions are intended to aid others follow suit. While variety exists within different Christian understandings concerning the relationship of clergy to community and while some traditions look with suspicion upon the very fact of religious leadership, in both practical and theoretical terms leadership always strikes a balance between its being a part of the community and apart from it. This special situation leads us to reflect on what it is that makes a leader a leader? The obvious answer would be the responsibilities and the service he or she undertakes. That is obviously true, but not necessarily adequate. One might also offer knowledge as the answer. In fact,

the most important activity that is common to leadership across the traditions is teaching. If so, what makes a leader such is the knowledge he or she possesses. Again, this is a correct observation, but it does not yet capture the full understanding of the uniqueness of the leader's role within the community. What I would like to suggest is that in addition to the various practical, administrative and educational responsibilities that characterize the work of the leader, the true leader is also someone who has gone ahead, to some degree, in the realization of the ultimate goal of the tradition, someone who has tasted the spiritual reality of which it speaks, someone who can therefore model not only what one must do, but also what one must be. In this sense, the leader is simply one step ahead of others, treading a common path. The leader is not privileged, nor does he or she possess knowledge that is destined to remain exclusive to him. Indeed, the calling of the leader is to make others as he or she is. But in order to achieve that he has to have realized something within his being. True leadership is therefore more than the successful application of all the tradition's exterior norms, be they based in piety, knowledge, ritual excellence or communal service. True leadership involves having touched or tasted the spiritual and experiential foundation that makes a tradition what it is and that informs its ultimate purpose. Having tasted this reality, the leader can then invite or facilitate similar processes within others in the community.

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One cannot avoid the conclusion that true leaders are not as numerous as those we refer to by such designation. Most of what passes by the name of religious leadership today, in all our traditions, is based on the exterior mastering of the norms of the tradition. How many in each tradition can boast having gone beyond the externals by means of which leadership is usually conferred? But as scary as this thought may be, it is also greatly comforting. We are experiencing a crisis of leadership in all our traditions. The crisis of leadership is part of the composite of the "Crisis of the Holy". We find fundamental flaws in the leadership style and in how leadership is applied by many, perhaps most, of the leaders affiliated with our own tradition. In many traditions we find broad disenchantment with the functioning of religious leaders. By the time this essay is read we hope to publish the result of the international survey conducted by the Elijah Interfaith Institute, regarding religious leadership, in a global perspective. The survey will confirm to what degree today's world is proud of its religious leaders or whether it feels let down by them. Whatever the statistics and their breakdown may be, we may be forced to reflect on whether every religious leader is indeed a religious leader in the full sense of the term, and if not, what is it that

makes an authentic religious leader. The question could of course be answered by each tradition individually, in accordance with its own expectations. It seems to me, however, that the broader comparative and interreligious perspective, offered here, could be particularly useful in discerning what might be called true religious leadership. A true religious leader is able to go beyond the formal expressions of knowledge and religious excellence commonly mandated by his or her tradition. The added value he brings to his community is the experiential dimension that grounds his religious vocation in the depth dimension of the tradition, integrating the two moments of moving from the community and returning to it with the depth of insight and wisdom gained, to be shared with others.

If, then, we are forced to admit that in fact we have very few religious leaders among us who qualify, this could be a valuable recognition. It would liberate us from the expectations we are unable to meet. It would allow us to contain the damage done by leaders whose leadership style leads to failure and provides a counter testimony to the tradition's highest values. And above all, it would force us to consider how we might go about training our leaders in such a way as to make the tradition's foundational spiritual experiences the basis upon which they construct their leadership.

With this much said we may be able to offer a definition of what makes a true religious leader. This definition ought to be valid for our various traditions, and thereby feed into the composite picture that we seek to draw. It will not do to simply describe the religious leader in terms of the community functions she fulfills or the knowledge he imparts, either to seekers or to the community. Leadership has to be defined both in terms of the community that is being served and in terms of its ultimate goal, or as suggested above, in terms of the God, or the higher ideals, that the leader points to. Therefore, while it may be helpful to describe leadership in terms of the various offices and functions of the leader - teaching, community building, performance of rituals - none of these touches the heart of leadership. I would like to suggest that the core definition of what a religious leader truly is is a role model. In the same way that the founders of the faith are role models that are emulated by later generations, so the religious leader is a role model for others. As role model he or she obviously models behavioral and cognitive excellence. But for such modeling to be effective, he or she must also model the traditions's deepest aspirations, that is the way the tradition points to God or the ultimate, and how the taste of that dimension is transformative to the ongoing life of the community. Differently put, the true religious leader is one who embodies the faith in his or her person. In so embodying the faith, the leader functions as the in between ground between God (or the ultimate understanding of reality) and the community. The community is invited toward God through the leader, who in some way represents the knowledge of God, the reality of God and the experience of God to the community.

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With this understanding in place, we may revisit some of the works of religious leaders, as they have come across the different traditions. Our authors have posed at various points the question of who the leader is responsible to, God or the community. Positioning the leader in the space between the two means that there is no simple answer to the question and that the leader must continually negotiate this question. Perhaps a better way to phrase the answer is that the leader is responsible to the community, as it marches toward God and to God as He seeks to shape the life of the community. It is up to the religious leader to identify the strategies, perhaps even to hear the voices, that will allow for successful integration of these potentially competing concerns. This he or she can only do from the depth dimension of leadership. How can one discern the divine will or intention if one has no ongoing deep relation with the divine? Even where it is understood that leadership must be exercised in human terms, as in Sendor's discussion of the case of Judaism where prophecy is supplanted in favor of the vocation of the sage, this does not make the quest for discerning the divine will superfluous. Teaching and the application of law can never be a mechanistic automatic process, divorced from the designs of God. The ultimate charge of religious leadership of all religions is to discern where their tradition must be led today. Without the depth dimension described here the question cannot even be posed, let alone answered.

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Related to this is the question of the function of the religious leader to preserve or transform the tradition. We notice throughout our papers that religious leaders do both things. In some way they preserve the tradition, that is the body of teaching that is particular to the community. In another, they invest their efforts in preserving the community itself, guiding it as it moves through daily life and marches through history. But preservation cannot be separated from realization of the tradition, its possible transformation, and the transformation of the community that has to be brought in line with the tradition's higher vision. Leadership that focuses only on preservation is dead and a tradition that is engaged exclusively in preservation has no future. Successful leadership calls for a balance between these two dimensions of the leader's work. It seems to me that the constructive tension between preservation and transformation of the tradition mirrors closely the different levels through which leadership is exercised: the external skill and knowledge based expression of leadership and the interior dimension that at the very least seeks to discern the divine design for the community and the tradition as

they move from one historic moment to the next. The local Imam on the prairie, as Gianotti called him at one point, may indeed not be equipped to discern where a tradition might grow, within the tension of preservation and transformation. Perhaps most so called religious leaders, on the local communal level can only apply themselves to such questions in a very limited way. But then perhaps we should reserve the term "religious leaders", certainly in the fuller sense of the term, to those figures who attempt to articulate a vision for the tradition, not merely to apply someone else's vision to their daily lives. And such a vision can only grow from the depth of the tradition's fundamental experiences.

Recognizing that all leadership does not tap into the depths of religious leadership might allow us to revisit the question of integrated leadership that has come up several times in our papers, that is the extent to which religious leadership should extend to a broad range of life's spheres, or whether it should be contained within the purely religious domain. In most traditions, we notice a move away from integrated leadership, or its bifurcation into different functions and different institutions, due to the inability to maintain a primary synthesis associated with the founder or with the religious ideal. The history of religious leadership, within the traditions, is therefore to a certain extent, a story of failure. While we may celebrate the forms of religious leadership that are current and while we are called to respect our own as well as those of others, we cannot escape the conclusion that probably in all our traditions the way religious leadership is practiced today falls short of the tradition's own ideals. This is a truly humbling thought.

Falling short of the ideal and the varying forms that religious leadership has taken in each of the traditions are a consequence of the compromise between the spiritual ideals and the realities of human nature. Power play, greed, ego and other vices enter the domain of religious leadership almost as soon as the religion is established. Gianotti has shown this to be the case in relation to Islam. Others can tell the story when they have the opportunity to recount the history of religious leadership in their community. No religion is exempt.

It may be then that we have all had to compromise the high ideals of what religious leadership meant to the models upon whom our traditions are founded. Sikhism has inevitably moved away from the integrated vision of the Sikh Gurus, Judaism's ideal image of Moses the leader suggests a much broader range of leadership than that practiced by any religious leader in Judaism and Islam longingly recalls the ideal integrated leadership of the Prophet Muhammad. Even if Hinduism does not have a founder, the story repeats itself on a smaller scale in relation to individual teaching traditions, and regardless of what the Buddha himself may have thought of leadership, once established, it has fallen prey to the weaknesses of human nature, as Reis-Habito's paper amply demonstrates. Religious leadership is inevitably imperfect.

What to do then? The first step must be to recognize the fact with humility. It does us well to recognize that the profound predicaments of leadership are not exclusive

to any one tradition. The broader comparative perspective has allowed us to come to the recognition that all our traditions suffer in similar ways. While perennial challenges may vary slightly from one tradition to another, due to specific social circumstances such as the caste system in the case of Hinduism, or due to authority claims like in the case of Judaism, the fundamental challenges that emerge from our collection of papers are almost identical. They point to the problematic point of interface, where the human person becomes an agent and a representative of ultimate reality. On the one hand, he must continue to do so with full faith and conviction. On the other, corruption is inevitable.

The true religious leader is one who embodies the faith in his or her person

The response that most of our authors have offered is based, first and foremost, on a return to the roots of the faith, primarily to the spiritual and experiential ground that continues to inform it. Because our predicament is common, growing out of essentially the same dynamics that operate across religious traditions, one tradition's attempts at dealing with the perennial challenges are of great interest and of potential help to another. Our authors have struggled in their own ways with how to conceptualize the return to the depth of tradition. Volf and Andemicael speak of the reorientation of the being of Christian leaders to the love of God. Gianotti speaks of the recovery of the resource of forgiveness, a resource that can only be reclaimed from the experiential depths of living in God's presence and transcending the human interest in vengeance, and even in justice. Others speak more broadly of spirituality and theology. The common ground, however, is the return to the roots of the faith as a means of addressing the fundamental challenges. And the implications of the fact that we all participate in fundamentally identical dynamics in the exercise of our leadership means that the proposals made from within one tradition are fully relevant to another. They all grow on the same spiritual soil.

Perhaps we should reserve the term "religious leaders" to those figures who attempt to articulate a vision for the tradition, not merely to apply someone else's vision to their daily lives

Our individual authors highlight challenges, both systemic and perennial, that are relevant to all our traditions, and that call us all to the profound orienting of our being in service and humility to God, to the beyond. Meir Sendor points to a problem that can be traced back to the religious leader's positioning between the community and God. He places the challenge that he calls "The Danger of Confidence" at the very top of his list of systemic challenges, thereby suggesting it might be the most fundamental concern of a religious leader. It is certainly a major concern today and one that cuts across

traditions. The concern touches upon how genuine confidence in God's reality, born of close and humble contact with Him, may degenerate into self assertion, founded on the narrowness of one's ideas, supported by the force of ego. Under such conditions religious violence is born, be it the violence of forcing ideas or the way that religious ideas can lead to actual violent behavior. The violence of terrorism, of sexual predation or of rigidly imposing one's values to crush the otherness of the other - all these are expressions of a leadership that has not succeeded in being a vehicle to the beyond, a leadership that has succumbed to ego. Perhaps it has also succumbed to the voice of community and its tendency to assert itself, rather than to God and the higher vision that true contact with Him brings. This is a perennial challenge for all our traditions. Constant mindfulness to the pitfalls of leadership and the continuing attempt to reorient our being to the ultimate reality seem to be the only answer.

We have all had to compromise the high ideals of what religious leadership meant to the models upon whom our traditions are founded

Such constant reorientation, a continual returning to the source, is the key to the continuing viability of the tradition, every tradition, and a resource for facing the common threats that all our religions face. For Volf and Andemicael, our greatest challenge today is not the competition between religions, but the alternative vision of what life is about, offered by the consumer society and its idolatrous upholding of the satisfaction of desire as the ultimate expression of the good life and of human flourishing. This vision is clearly at odds with the vision of religious traditions.

While there may be nuances in how to integrate the elements of pleasure and of financial success within a religious worldview, all our traditions share the conviction that the meaning of life lies beyond this life and beyond the satisfaction of desires. All our religions are jointly challenged. But the challenge cannot be met simply by affirming the importance of identity and history. As the papers on Sikhism, Hinduism, and Islam note, and as others would concur, our traditions cannot survive on mere affirmation of the values of the past and our attempt to preserve the religious identities forged in earlier eras. If our traditions are to offer a meaningful response to today's most burning issues, they must be able to uphold the counter vision, that has informed them since their foundation. We noted already that the answer to desire is found in the domain or the state that takes one beyond desire, so according to Hindu teaching. So too, according to any considered understanding of how religion takes the individual and society beyond their basic material drives. But such alternative satisfaction and the realization of an alternative vision of human flourishing is only possible if the spiritual dimension of religion is real, if it is grounded in an experience that is arguably rooted in God or in the ultimate vision of the tradition.

Thus, our religions are challenged to reaffirm their ultimate message today and they can only do so if they are able to provide

those role models who will provide an alternative testimony to what proper living means to the one broadly propagated by mass culture. Here is the task of our religious leaders. If leaders are, as suggested above, role models, people who embody the faith, it falls upon them to provide such alternative testimony. We have come then to one important articulation of what it might mean to be a religious leader in the world today and of what is the testimony that a religious leader must give. Because our religions share common challenges, this expectation applies equally to leaders of all faith traditions. We are all called to offer testimony to our tradition's highest ideals in our very being.

Our greatest challenge today is not the competition between religions, but the alternative vision of what life is about, offered by the consumer society, upholding satisfaction of desire as the ultimate expression of the good life and of human flourishing

I have been struck by the similar dynamics operating in each of our traditions, and as I have tried to argue, this has led me to the idea of a composite picture of leadership, a vision of religious leadership that cuts across religious traditions and that allows us to share in vision, just as we share in weakness: to share in strategy and practical counsel, just as we share in common challenges. Further support for such commonality across religious traditions is found in the various practical suggestions our scholars have made concerning individual traditions and what they require. Some suggestions are, of course, tradition specific. Discussions of competing models of the rabbinate and their contemporary adequacy or of the need to uproot the caste system are specific to Judaism and Hinduism, respectively. But on most issues, one could almost conduct an experiment, in which a suggestion or recommendation would be lifted out of the context of the individual paper and we, the readers, would be asked to guess what tradition was addressed through this recommendation. In most cases the recommendation that is made is as valid for one tradition as it is for the other. This is true for issues relating to the definition of the community and its leadership. Here we note how all our authors have highlighted the need to go beyond patriarchy as an essential requirement of future religious leadership. It is also true for the common affirmation of the need for greater knowledge of other religious traditions and continuing engagement in interfaith relations as components of the knowledge and the practice of religious leaders.

But the greatest similarity between our traditions emerges when we examine the twofold nature of the practice of leadership, as it emerges without exception in all traditions, regardless of how they were conceived and classically understood . What we see in all the papers is a dual focus of the work of a contemporary religious leader - care for the community and care for the teaching. Care for the community involves more than caring on the social level. It involves care for the maintaining of communal identity but

even more importantly of the unity within the community. The challenge of unity was highlighted by some of our authors, but is in fact a challenge for all our traditions. That leaders of all traditions must confront similar challenges suggests, once again, how similar the work of religious leaders is and how all our communities are affected by similar forces. Strategies for maintaining community unity could therefore be a point of common reflection and something for us to learn from one another.

Genuine confidence in God's reality, born of close and humble contact with Him, may degenerate into self assertion, founded on the narrowness of one's ideas, supported by the force of ego. Under such conditions religious violence is born

The second focus of religious leadership is the teaching of the tradition. Here we note how recommendations made with reference to one tradition are perfectly applicable to another. What is called for, beyond the experiential identification with the core of the tradition, is broad and comprehensive knowledge of the tradition. Such broad knowledge implies an understanding of the tradition as whole, thereby maintaining awareness of its ultimate goal and purpose. It also implies developing a critical engagement with the tradition, such that might allow us to better cope with its application in contemporary reality. The deeper understanding of tradition must be complemented by better equipping future leaders for the challenges of today by providing them with the various tools needed to negotiate tradition in relation to contemporary reality. Whether these are psychological, communicational, philosophical or other tools, leadership training holds an important key to how successfully future leaders will be able to not only model the ideals of the tradition but also carry them forth into contemporary situations. In concluding this point, I would like to return to a term that was used in several of our papers to describe how religious leaders must negotiate complex dynamics. The term is wisdom. Much like the depth of faith, or the power of compassion, it cannot be given over in a quick course, yet it holds the key to successful leadership. The situations that leaders manage, increasingly so as they move up the rungs of the leadership ladder, require negotiating complexities and finding balances between competing claims. One can only attempt to handle these through wisdom.

How is wisdom acquired? This is a perennial question that all our traditions have struggled with for centuries and millennia. One way of suggesting an answer, as it emerges from our collected papers, is to see wisdom as the fruit of the coming together of two currents. The first is the drive to the depths of the tradition, a reowning of its fundamental experiences. The other is the acquisition of knowledge, in all its forms. Traditional knowledge, historical knowledge, critical and academic knowledge, practical knowledge - all these are required for fulfilling the leader's vocation. What happens when these two currents come together?

Perhaps here wisdom is born. If we are able to train leaders whose knowledge is fed by the experiential depths of the tradition and who are driven by their studies to seek out in deeper ways the spiritual reality that is the ground of the tradition and its highest purpose, we may be able to produce what today's world requires. Such a coming together of aptitudes and currents may hold the key to the wisdom required for the training of religious leaders who are not only committed and faithful but also possess that gift that perhaps more than any other makes for and real spiritual leaders - the gift of wisdom.

The situations that leaders manage, require negotiating complexities and finding balances between competing claims. One can only attempt to handle these through wisdom

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Each of our essays has concluded with a prayer. Some of the prayers expressed the vision of leadership that was developed in the paper; others offered a prayer that encapsulates the highest goals of the tradition. It seems appropriate that my own attempt at synthesizing the project and offering a composite image of what a religious leader is, across different religious traditions, should also conclude with a prayer, one that religious leaders of all traditions could indentify with. If such a prayer strikes an echo in the hearts of the faithful of different religions, this will lend credence to my claims that in religious leadership we find much commonality, both in terms of ultimate vision and in terms of present day challenges. Perhaps this prayer might even be adopted by members of the Elijah Board of World Religious Leaders as "The Leaders' Prayer". While the substance and practice of leadership unites us, the language of prayer may be divisive, especially if God is invoked, in a framework in which non theistic religions are full and equal members. Aware of this challenge, I propose to not shape the prayer in light of the most common abstract denominator (the religious equivalent of a lowest common denominator). Rather, I prefer to retain the theistic expression that I am accustomed to, and to invite those who prefer to not appeal to God to freely substitute an expression they feel most comfortable with. I am told, by Maria Maria Reis Habito, that Buddhists can use the term "Lord", understanding it in their own way. I have framed the prayer accordingly.

The Leaders' Prayer

Our Lord
We stand before you not merely as individuals but as members of communities, and as children of a common humanity.
We recognize that in truth we are no better than those we seek to serve and who have appointed us to our offices.
We, as leaders, and our communities are making our way towards greater understanding, fuller love and deeper humility. We are making our way towards You.
As we advance, we recognize that we have a special role to play, for the benefit of others.
We are called to remind others of the goal, but for this we must remember it ourselves.
We are called to embody the faith, but for this we must ourselves be filled with faith.
We are called to model the highest ideals, but for this we must not lose sight of them.

We therefore ask you:
Make us worthy instruments in the service of a higher truth.
Let us remember that whatever we are able to accomplish, we do so not by our own power, but by yours.
Help us to keep our sights on the highest goals and not to compromise them in our weakness.
Protect us and help us not succumb to the temptations of power, greed and ego
Let us embody a spirit of true service to all
Let our hearts be full of compassion to all
Let the spirit of true humility inform all our actions

Oh Lord,
May we be instruments of unity, within our individual religions and between our diverse traditions
May we be inspired by divine wisdom, as we navigate and guide our faiths and our faithful
May we be beacons of useful, effective and living knowledge, that nourishes the souls of the faithful and guides them in their spiritual lives.
May we be fully transparent to you, recalling at every step that it is not we who are guiding our traditions, but it is you, our Lord.