

Intuition: The Missing Piece

BY BR. THOMAS D. MADDIX, CSC

"Who says you have a corner on compassionate caring and justice? You do the same things we do, so why call yourself Catholic? After all, we have ethics departments, provide pastoral and spiritual care, and serve the poor. So what is unique about you?"

If you are like me, you find that answering questions about Catholic identity demands a great deal of soul-searching. This can be uncomfortable, but such questions do often arise, asked by people outside faith-based organizations and also by people inside them. "What is unique about you?" is a question that won't go away. Nor should it.

I—like many others, I suspect—have found trying to answer this question stimulating as well as frustrating. We want to find an answer, but when we get too "close to the bone," too personal, we shy away. But, in truth, that is where the answer lies: deep in our individual and collective souls. We only have to uncover our layers of resistance, doubt, and hesitancy.

When we try to articulate our Catholic identity, we often name values that shape our organizations but falter when we seek to marry the language of business and contemporary culture to our stated mission. Why is that? Are we more comfortable with the words and slogans of business than our calling and mission? Has life changed so much that a faith-based existence in society is impossible? Or do we find ourselves personally in new territory in terms of our relationship with God, faith-based organizations, and contemporary culture?

What makes us different lies in why we do what we do. Catholic organizations come alive when people feel compelled to make tangible an often distant God through care, compassion, and attentiveness to the events of daily life. Our identity cannot be expressed in intriguing language; it finds its expression in our integrity, congruence, and attentiveness to our calling.



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THE KEY IS CARING

Maybe a conversation I had with Aaron, an employee in a favorite coffee shop of mine, Caf La Gare, will reveal the essence of our task. Aaron came over to my table one day and said, "This is the best place I have ever worked." I asked him why, and he said, "Because people care here. They care for each other and the customers, and they care about what they do and how they do it." I agreed with him. When I go into other coffee shops, I often feel the difference: Caring is gone, the smiles falter, and behavior is mechanical. In his poem "Healing," D. H. Lawrence wrote, "I am not a mechanism, an assembly of various sections." Yet we often work mechanically, although we know what happens to the soul of an organization and person when this happens: sterility, disinterest, boredom, and self-interest reign.

There is no way around our task. Faith moves us. It is the reason we have Catholic and other faith-based organizations. It is a collective way for kindred spirits to be about a shared mission. Whether it be the faith of a Gandhi or a Mother Teresa, our faith gives shape, meaning, and integrity to our personal and corporate lives.

But living our faith through our business is not always easy. The closing words of *Murder in the Cathedral*, by T. S. Eliot, summarize the challenge and the fear we face in naming who we are without apology. Eliot says, "Men fear fire and men fear flood and men fear pestilence; but more than anything else they fear the love of God." But the love of God is exactly what we are asked to reveal through our actions, decisions, and financial plans, although God's love for us often frightens us and makes us vulnerable. Although taking refuge in the comfortable language of business is easier, we must learn to always speak, and act, from our hearts.

LIVING BETWEEN DREAMS

Part of our discomfort flows from the changes affecting our society, church, and culture. We find ourselves in a period of disruption and polar-

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ization. People are confused about what constitutes a just society and what defines participation in a faith community. Seeking to live with this confusion and yet be grounded in a deepening experience of God's love demands strength of character and an ability to live with mystery, in sharp contrast to culture's gods of rationality, control, and managed outcomes.

Like the prophet Jeremiah, we need to be personally rooted in a strong sense of God's call. Furthermore, as Jeremiah did, we need to ask ourselves if we are willing to be engaged in the issues of the day in a way that breaks through sterile, superficial language and reveals language rooted in poetry, intuition, and experience.

In Christian Orthodox spirituality, the phrase "living between dreams" captures such a time of transition, with all its uncertainties. This time "between dreams" is fertile. Images and language that have served us well over the years are dying, and new life and energy are struggling to be born. Our role is to ask ourselves where we are on this journey to new meaning and identity. Are we holding on to images, language, and experiences that no longer feed the souls of individuals and organizations? Or are we wandering in a metaphoric desert in search of God's call and promise for today? How we answer these questions reveals the current state of Catholic and faith-based identity.

THE INNER PROCESS

Our ethical directives and core values are some of the ingredients of Catholic identity, but they make no sense if the intention of participating in the healing of Jesus does not flow from the depths of our individual souls. Unfortunately, inner attentiveness to soul and meaning, spirituality and depth, is not part of our professional training.

I say "unfortunately" because such

attentiveness is essential. Only through the inner exploration of our lives and our willingness to "struggle with our demons" and be vulnerable to God's call, will the framework for our renewed identity as faith-based leaders and organizations emerge. If we avoid this struggle, on both the individual and collective levels, we will disappear as a credible voice.

A number of years ago, while giving a presentation to Catholic health care leaders, I said that if we were to be about faith-based health care, we needed to attract women and men of faith to leadership positions. The healing ministry of Jesus cannot continue if the people who shape it are not comfortable with themselves, the world of the spirit, and the unique presence we offer society. They must believe in a living God who continues to engage us, tug at us, and shape us. Organizations are embodied in the people who work there, and what we bring to the organization defines the spirit of the place.

A STRONG SPIRITUALITY

Spirituality, when freely entered and experienced, is about the stripping away of personal and collective illusions about self, others, God, and society and beginning a journey of trust, uncertainty, and vulnerability. It is not soft or easy. Instead, it is learning to walk the "road less taken" and surrender our egos to be about God's work.

In a leadership program for leaders in Catholic health, education, and social ministries sponsored by the University of St. Michael's College in Toronto, we focus on areas of leadership that would not be part of ordinary professional training. We help leaders articulate, deepen, and integrate their spirituality in all aspects of their life. Skills and programs for leaders abound, but how many work on the faith that holds us together as leaders in faith-based organizations and helps us find our unique voice as leaders of faith-based organizations?

TRUSTING OUR INTUITION

Several years ago, while facilitating a workshop for a Catholic school board in Yellowknife in the Northwest Territories, I asked the question, Why Catholic? Then I played a government official and asked, What is the value of Catholic education here? Whether we ask the value of Catholic education or health care, we all struggle with the question, Why?

I sense that we have lost the ability to trust our intuitions about why we do what we do. We have almost trained ourselves *not* to trust our intuitions, and we rely upon consultants and other so-called experts. Recovering a sense of Catholic identity starts with valuing our intuitions about how God works through us as individuals and organizations and making the time to honor our mandate. I use the phrase "*making* the time" intentionally, because most of us will not simply *find* the time. Our choice is deliberate.

Catholic organizations are an outgrowth of personal and collective response to God's call in people's lives. Throughout history, people have trusted again and again their intuition that God beckoned them to be about revealing God's presence. God's call has not ceased. In fact, the current struggle to articulate the meaning of our identity and find ways to live it with integrity reveals the power of God to stir our hearts and souls and push us to find answers for today's world.

As I finished writing this article, a man slipped onto my table at Caf' La Gare a business card bearing this motto: "Solution through knowledge." The key to our solution is there: knowledge. Knowledge of the heart and a trust in its integrity will bring renewed vigor to our search for Catholic identity, both in us and in our place of work. □