

THE COMMON GOOD AND SERVANT-LEADERSHIP:
ROCKS UPON WHICH GOOD SOCIETIES ARE BUILT

Dung Q. Tran, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Leadership and Organizational Development
School of Business, Arts, and Media
Cabrini University

Larry C. Spears
President and CEO
Larry C. Spears Center for Servant-Leadership, Inc.
Servant-Leadership Scholar
Gonzaga University

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Overview

The concepts undergirding the common good and servant-leadership are ancient, aspirational, abstruse, and enduring. Both theories resonate with various wisdom traditions¹ and have been explored by consequential thought-leaders such as Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Augustine, John Rawls,² Mother Teresa, and Desmond Tutu.³ Among the many key contributors to the development of the common good and servant-leadership were Saint John XXIII and Robert Greenleaf, whose influential ideas in the 1960s and 1970s nourished their vocational discernment and ignited a quiet revolution in worship spaces and workplaces throughout the world. As Greenleaf asserted, “Ideas nurture the human spirit that determines how one comes out of life, and that one chooses, among all the ideas one has access to, which will guide what one does with one’s opportunities. And that choice is crucial”⁴ Time has proven that the choices, life, and work of both John XXIII and Robert Greenleaf related to the common good and servant-leadership have been truly consequential. Though studies about their reflections on the common good and servant-leadership abound, we are unaware of any work to date that has explored the intersection of both ideas and how Pope John XXIII embodied Robert Greenleaf’s vision of servant-leadership in his rhetoric and leadership activity.

To that end, the purpose of this paper is to explore the intersection between the Catholic conception of the common good and the idea of servant-leadership. In particular, we examine how Robert K. Greenleaf’s vision of servant-leadership is embodied in the life and work of Saint John XXIII. This inquiry is guided by Larry Spears’ influential rubric of ten servant-leadership

¹ Kent M. Keith, *The Case for Servant-Leadership* (Westfield, IN: Greenleaf Center for Servant Leadership, 2008), 2.

² Manuel Velasquez et al., “The Common Good,” in *Common Good, Uncommon Questions: Topics in Moral Theology*, eds. Timothy Backous and William C. Graham (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2014), 26.

³ Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (New York, NY: Double Day, 1999).

⁴ Robert K. Greenleaf, *The Servant-Leader Within: A Transformative Path* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2003), 243.

characteristics, “which are generally quoted as the essential elements of servant-leadership.”⁵

Our paper concludes with a brief reflection on how a servant-led vision of the common good can inspire and sustain ethical institutions.

The Common Good and Servant-Leadership: Insights from John XXIII & Robert Greenleaf

Pope John XXIII’s writings on the common good and Robert K. Greenleaf’s work on servant-leadership share a mutual concern for the interconnectedness of people and its significant implications on “the least privileged of society.”⁶ For example, in his first social encyclical *Mater et Magistra*, John XXIII noted the importance of having regard for the whole community⁷ and removing and/or minimizing economic imbalances. Similarly, Robert Greenleaf, who coined the term servant-leadership in his seminal 1970 essay, “The Servant as Leader,” argued that “caring for persons, the more able and the less able serving each other, is the rock upon which a good society is built.”⁸

The resonant themes in both of their writings suggest that the points of convergence between the Catholic notion of the common good and the concept of servant-leadership are many. At the heart of the common good and servant-leadership is an ethical overtone that stresses mutuality and the dignity of human persons. Both ideas share a common concern for overcoming self-indulgence in order to serve other individuals and communities, thereby

⁵ Dirk van Dierendonck, “Servant-Leadership: A Review and Synthesis,” *Journal of Management* 37, no. 4 (2011): 1231.

⁶ Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant-leadership: A Journey into the Nature of Legitimate Power and Greatness* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2002), 27.

⁷ John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, encyclical letter, Vatican website, May 15, 1961, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_15051961_mater.html, sec. 71.

⁸ Greenleaf, *Servant-Leadership*, 62.

improving society in manifold ways, “even when the benefits of progress will go primarily to others.”⁹

An embodiment of the intersection of the Catholic concept of the common good and the idea of servant-leadership can be found in the life and work of John XXIII, who was canonized, along with John Paul II, by Pope Francis in 2014. Within Catholicism, “Good Pope John”¹⁰ is regarded as a beloved figure¹¹ that “made a major contribution to the social teaching of the Catholic Church.”¹²

As mentioned earlier, John XXIII invoked and defined the principle of the common good in his encyclicals – “one of the most important contributions of the Catholic Church to contemporary thinking about the ordering of social life.”¹³ In John XXIII’s view, the state’s fundamental purpose is the “realization of the common good.”¹⁴ Additionally, leaders “invested with public authority” ought to foster “social conditions which favor the full development of human personality.”¹⁵ For John XXIII, the concept of the common good was one of integration. Key to the argument in his final encyclical, *Pacem et Terris*, is that “each political community also has a common good, which transcends the individual person’s good, but which cannot be divorced from the common good of the entire human community.... – what Pope John refers to as the universal common good.”¹⁶

⁹ Thomas Massaro, *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action*, 3rd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 89.

¹⁰ Peter Hebblethwaite, *John XXIII: Pope of the Century* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2005), 156.

¹¹ John W. O’Malley, *A history of the Popes: From Peter to the Present* (Lanham, MD: Sheed & Ward, 2010), 300.

¹² Donal Dorr, *Option for the Poor & for the Earth: From Leo XIII to Pope Francis*, Rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2016), 72.

¹³ Randall Rosenberg, *The vision of Saint John XXIII* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2014), 84.

¹⁴ John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, sec. 20.

¹⁵ John XXIII, sec. 65.

¹⁶ David O’Brien and Thomas Shannon, *Catholic Social Thought: The Documentary Heritage*, 3rd ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010), 136).

Along with his influential encyclicals, the most indelible and “irreversible imprint”¹⁷ that John XXIII left on Catholicism was his convening of an ecumenical council, the first in one hundred years, shortly after his election to the papacy in 1958.¹⁸ It would be known as the Second Vatican Council (or Vatican II) since it was the second time an ecumenical council had been held in Vatican City.¹⁹ According to Gerald O’Collins, John XXIII convoked Vatican II to spiritually renew the Catholic Church, “heal division within Christendom, and alter the church’s reactionary attitude to the world.”²⁰ Despite John XXIII’s advanced age²¹ and much opposition from the Vatican bureaucracy known as the Curia,²² he went ahead with the council because of his spirited desire to save and strengthen the Church while at the same time having it embrace the modern world by reading the signs of the times.²³

John XXIII’s bold decision to hold Vatican II resulted in the production of enduring Catholic teachings, including the contemporary Catholic understanding of the common good. Quoting from Vatican II’s Pastoral Constitution of the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et spes*, the Catechism of the Catholic Church contended that the common good entails “the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily.”²⁴ According to Jesuit political scientist, Matthew Carnes, Catholicism’s robust understanding of the common good invites further “reflection about

¹⁷ Robert K. Greenleaf, *Seeker and servant: Reflections on religious leadership* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1996), 143.

¹⁸ Gordon Oyer, *Pursuing the Spiritual Roots of Protest: Merton, Berrigan, Yoder, and Muste at the Gethsemani Abbey Peacemaker Retreat* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2014).

¹⁹ Greg Tobin, *The Good Pope: The Making of a Saint and the Remaking of the Church – the Story of John XXIII and Vatican II* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2012), 111.

²⁰ Gerald O’Collins, *Living Vatican II: The 21st Council for the 21st century* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2006), v.

²¹ Patricia Treece, *Meet John XXIII: Joyful Pope and Father to all* (Cincinnati, OH: Servant Books, 2008), 135.

²² Giuseppe Alberigo, *A Brief History of Vatican II*, trans. Matthew Sherry (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2006), 5-6.

²³ Jean Maalouf, ed., *Pope John XXIII: Essential Writings* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008), 16-17.

²⁴ Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2nd ed., (1997), n. 1906.

the meaning of human fulfillment, how social conditions must be considered together rather than in isolation, and how individuals and groups are integrally bound to each other.”²⁵

For Robert Greenleaf, a Quaker and lifelong student of organization, John XXIII’s convoking of what is “widely recognized as the most significant religious event in the twentieth century,”²⁶ was a “signal triumph of the human spirit...perhaps in many centuries.”²⁷ Greenleaf was so inspired by him that he penned a piece titled, “Pope John XXIII: Nurturer of Spirits.” In Greenleaf’s view, John XXIII is “one of the greatest examples of all time of the servant as the nurturer of the human spirit – both his own spirit and the spirits of millions who know about him.”²⁸ As an organizational leadership researcher, Greenleaf was interested in exploring the life, work, and leadership of John XXIII to better understand “how a servant can nurture the human spirit, both in oneself and in others.”²⁹

Who is Robert K. Greenleaf?

The term servant-leadership was first coined in a 1970 essay by Robert K. Greenleaf (1904-1990), entitled “The Servant as Leader.” Greenleaf, born in Terre Haute, Indiana, spent most of his organizational life in the field of management research, development, and education at AT&T. Following a 40-year career at AT&T, Greenleaf enjoyed a second career that lasted 25 years, during which time he served as an influential consultant to a number of major institutions, including Ohio University, MIT, Ford Foundation, R. K. Mellon Foundation, the Mead Corporation, the American Foundation for Management Research, and Lilly Endowment Inc. In

²⁵ Matthew Carnes, “Contributions of Contemporary Political Science to an Understanding of the Common Good,” in *Empirical Foundations of the Common Good: What Theology can Learn from Social Science*, ed. Daniel K. Finn (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 22.

²⁶ Gerald O’Collins, *The Second Vatican Council: Message and Meaning* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), vii.

²⁷ Greenleaf, *Seeker and Servant*, 153.

²⁸ Greenleaf, 149.

²⁹ Greenleaf, 153.

1964 Greenleaf also founded the Center for Applied Ethics, which was renamed the Robert K. Greenleaf Center in 1985 and is now headquartered in Indianapolis.

As a lifelong student of how things get done in organizations, Greenleaf distilled his observations in a series of essays and books on the theme of “The Servant as Leader”—the objective of which was to stimulate thought and action for building a better, more caring society.

The Servant as Leader Idea

The idea of the servant as leader came partly out of Greenleaf’s half century of experience in working to shape large institutions. However, the event that crystallized Greenleaf’s thinking came in the 1960s, when he read Hermann Hesse’s short novel *Journey to the East*—an account of a mythical journey by a group of people on a spiritual quest.

After reading this story, Greenleaf concluded that the central meaning of it was that the great leader is first experienced as a servant to others, and that this simple fact is central to his or her greatness. True leadership emerges from those whose primary motivation is a deep desire to help others.

In 1970, at the age of 66, Greenleaf published “The Servant as Leader,” the first of a dozen essays and books on servant-leadership. Since that time, more than a half-million copies of his books and essays have been sold worldwide. Slowly but surely, Greenleaf’s servant-leadership writings have made a deep, lasting impression on leaders, educators, and many others who are concerned with issues of leadership, management, service, and personal growth.

What is Servant-Leadership?

In his works, Greenleaf discusses the need for a better approach to leadership, one that puts serving others—including employees, customers, and community—as the number one priority. Servant-leadership emphasizes increased service to others, a holistic approach to work, promoting a sense of community, and the sharing of power in decision-making.

Who is a servant-leader? Greenleaf said that the servant-leader is one who is a servant first. In “The Servant as Leader” he wrote, “It begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. The difference manifests itself in the care taken by the servant—first to make sure that other people’s highest priority needs are being served. The best test is: Do those served grow as persons; do they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society? Will they benefit or at least not be further deprived?”

It is important to stress that servant-leadership is not a “quick-fix” approach. Nor is it something that can be quickly instilled within an institution. At its core, servant-leadership is a long-term, transformational approach to life and work—in essence, a way of being—that has the potential for creating positive change throughout our society.

Characteristics of the Servant-Leader

After some years of carefully considering Greenleaf’s original writings, Larry Spears, whom Ken Blanchard considers the “premier student of Greenleaf’s writings,”³⁰ extracted a set of 10 characteristics of the servant-leader that he viewed as being of critical importance. The following characteristics are central to the development of servant-leaders:

³⁰ Ken Blanchard and Renee Broadwell, eds., *Servant Leadership in Action: How You Can Achieve Great Relationships and Results* (Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2018), 14.

1. Listening: Leaders have traditionally been valued for their communication and decision-making skills. While these are also important skills for the servant-leader, they need to be reinforced by a deep commitment to listening intently to others. The servant-leader seeks to identify the will of a group and helps clarify that will. He or she seeks to listen receptively to what is being said (and not said!). Listening also encompasses getting in touch with one's own inner voice and seeking to understand what one's body, spirit, and mind are communicating. Listening, coupled with regular periods of reflection, is essential to the growth of the servant-leader.

2. Empathy: The servant-leader strives to understand and empathize with others. People need to be accepted and recognized for their special and unique spirits. One assumes the good intentions of co-workers and does not reject them as people, even while refusing to accept their behavior or performance. The most successful servant-leaders are those who have become skilled empathetic listeners.

3. Healing: Learning to heal is a powerful force for transformation and integration. One of the great strengths of servant-leadership is the potential for healing one's self and others. Many people have broken spirits and have suffered from a variety of emotional hurts. Although this is a part of being human, servant-leaders recognize that they have an opportunity to "help make whole" those with whom they come in contact. In "The Servant as Leader," Greenleaf writes: "There is something subtle communicated to one who is being served and led if, implicit in the compact between servant-leader and led, is the understanding that the search for wholeness is something they share."³¹

4. Awareness: General awareness, and especially self-awareness, strengthens the servant-leader. Making a commitment to foster awareness can be scary—you never know what

³¹ Robert K. Greenleaf, *Servant-leadership*, 50.

you may discover. Awareness also aids one in understanding issues involving ethics and values. It lends itself to being able to view most situations from a more integrated, holistic position. As Greenleaf observed: “Awareness is not a giver of solace—it is just the opposite. It is a disturber and an awakener. Able leaders are usually sharply awake and reasonably disturbed. They are not seekers after solace. They have their own inner serenity.”³²

5. Persuasion: Another characteristic of servant-leaders is a primary reliance on persuasion, rather than using one’s positional authority, in making decisions within an organization. The servant-leader seeks to convince others, rather than coerce compliance. This particular element offers one of the clearest distinctions between the traditional authoritarian model and that of servant-leadership. The servant-leader is effective at building consensus within groups. This emphasis on persuasion over coercion probably has its roots within the beliefs of The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), the denomination with which Robert Greenleaf himself was most closely allied.

6. Conceptualization: Servant-leaders seek to nurture their abilities to “dream great dreams.”³³ The ability to look at a problem (or an organization) from a conceptualizing perspective means that one must think beyond day-to-day realities. For many managers this is a characteristic that requires discipline and practice. The traditional manager is focused on the need to achieve short-term operational goals. The manager who also wishes to be a servant-leader must stretch his or her thinking to encompass broader-based conceptual thinking. Within organizations, conceptualization is also the proper role of boards of trustees or directors. Unfortunately, boards can sometimes become involved in the day-to-day operations (something that should always be discouraged!) and fail to provide the visionary concept for an institution.

³² Greenleaf, 41.

³³ Greenleaf, 30.

Trustees need to be mostly conceptual in their orientation, staffs need to be mostly operational in their perspective, and the most effective CEOs and leaders probably need to develop both perspectives. Servant-leaders are called to seek a delicate balance between conceptual thinking and a day-to-day focused approach.

7. Foresight: Closely related to conceptualization, the ability to foresee the likely outcome of a situation is hard to define, but easy to identify. One knows it when one sees it. Foresight is a characteristic that enables the servant-leader to understand the lessons from the past, the realities of the present, and the likely consequence of a decision for the future. It is also deeply rooted within the intuitive mind. As such, one can conjecture that foresight is the one servant-leader characteristic with which one may be born. All other characteristics can be consciously developed. There hasn't been a great deal written on foresight. It remains a largely unexplored area in leadership studies, but one most deserving of careful attention.

8. Stewardship: Peter Block (author of *Stewardship* and *The Empowered Manager*) has defined stewardship as "holding something in trust for another."³⁴ Robert Greenleaf's view of all institutions was one in which CEOs, staffs, and trustees all played significant roles in holding their institutions in trust for the greater good of society. Servant-leadership, like stewardship, assumes first and foremost a commitment to serving the needs of others. It also emphasizes the use of openness and persuasion rather than control.

9. Commitment to the growth of people: Servant-leaders believe that people have an intrinsic value beyond their tangible contributions as workers. As such, the servant-leader is deeply committed to the growth of each and every individual within his or her institution. The servant-leader recognizes the tremendous responsibility to do everything within his or her power

³⁴ Peter Block, *Stewardship: Choosing Service over Self-Interest*, 2nd ed. (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler, 2013), xxiv.

to nurture the personal, professional, and spiritual growth of employees. In practice, this can include (but is not limited to) concrete actions such as making available funds for personal and professional development, taking a personal interest in the ideas and suggestions from everyone, encouraging worker involvement in decision making, and actively assisting laid-off workers to find other employment.

10. **Building community:** The servant-leader senses that much has been lost in recent human history as a result of the shift from local communities to large institutions as the primary shaper of human lives. This awareness causes the servant-leader to seek to identify some means for building community among those who work within a given institution. Servant-leadership suggests that true community can be created among those who work in businesses and other institutions. Greenleaf said: “All that is needed to rebuild community as a viable life form for large numbers of people is for enough servant-leaders to show the way, not by mass movements, but by each servant-leader demonstrating his own unlimited liability for a quite specific community-related group.”³⁵

These ten characteristics of servant-leadership are by no means exhaustive. However, Spears believes that the ones listed serve to communicate the power and promise that this concept offers to those who are open to its invitation and challenge.

What Servant-Leadership Characteristics did John XXIII Embody?

Pope John XXIII embodied servant-leadership characteristics in varying degrees and in different ways during his life and leadership. He concretized these characteristics by attending to all with whom he crossed paths, regardless of whether they were a prisoner or prince of the Church. Given the space constraints of this paper, only the following three closely connected

³⁵ Greenleaf, *Servant-Leadership*, 53.

characteristics of servant-leadership, as identified by Larry Spears, were explored in the life and work of John XXIII: (a) conceptualization; (b) foresight; and (c) building community.

Conceptualization is the capacity of servant-leaders to look beyond the daily activities of an organization. Distinguishing between conceptualizer and operators, Greenleaf noted that while both are results-oriented, “The operator is concerned primarily with getting it done. The conceptualizer is primarily concerned with what ought to be done – when, how, at what cost, in what priority, and how well it was done.”³⁶ While achieving short term operational targets are an important component of actualizing institutional goals, organizational managers who want to create a servant-leadership culture ought to invest time and energy in developing the capacity to be both mindful of the present-day need(s) and stretch said need(s) into alternative future possibilities.³⁷

Balancing both a conceptual vision and the day-to-day survival of the Catholic Church became immediate priorities for Cardinal Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli after becoming Pope John XXIII on October 28, 1958. While John XXIII envisioned a global and cooperative Church that helped unify humanity, he also inherited an organization with “serious problems in its administration”³⁸ His papal predecessor’s health challenges had resulted in some organizational neglect, ranging from a depleted and elderly roster of curial cardinals – Catholicism’s organizational bureaucracy – to inadequate compensation for Vatican employees. As a veteran Vatican ambassador, John XXIII knew the persuasive power of political diplomacy and its role in earning respect and trust. To that end, as a gesture of the new pope’s openness to collaborate with others, John XXIII, the jovial conversationalist, appointed Cardinal Domenico Tardini, a taskmaster, who differed from the pope in temperament, experience, and perspective, to the long

³⁶ Greenleaf, 80.

³⁷ van Dierendonck, “Servant-Leadership: A Review and Synthesis,” 1231.

³⁸ Massimo Faggioli, *John XXIII: Medicine of Mercy* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2014), 107.

vacant post of Vatican Secretary of State.³⁹ He also reestablished regular meetings with offices of various sectors of the Vatican curia to facilitate direct communication between the pope and his colleagues, a practice that had vanished toward the end of Pius XII's pontificate.⁴⁰ With regard to employee compensation, the new pontiff, who was the son of a peasant sharecropper, immediately gave everyone access to pension benefits and salary increases.⁴¹

As evidenced in the aforementioned leadership activity immediately after his election in 1958, John XXIII signaled a commitment to investing time and energy into organizational maintenance. At the same time, however, John XXIII also demonstrated an abiding interest in conceptualizing visionary ideas such as unity, peace, love, charity and mercy through his servant-leadership prose and practices. For example, within the first few months of his papacy, John XXIII made international headlines by visiting a children's hospital and a prison.⁴² The last time a pope had darkened the doors of a Roman penitentiary was the year 1870.⁴³

As a trained historian, who had spent three decades as a Vatican diplomat, John XXIII was "optimistic about the world"⁴⁴ and from the very beginning of his papacy sent signals about his global vision for the future of the Catholic Church. For instance, in an effort to internationalize the Curia's understanding of the world, John XXIII appointed the "first Japanese, Filipino and African cardinals and cutting back on Italians, so that for the first time they were no longer the majority."⁴⁵ Drawing upon lessons from his experiences as an ambassador to Bulgaria, especially ones pertaining to the "problems arising when people in

³⁹ Treece, *Meet John XXIII*, 140-141.

⁴⁰ O'Malley, *A history of the Popes*, 295.

⁴¹ Treece, *Meet John XXIII*, 146.

⁴² Michael Collins, *Good Pope John* (Dublin, Ireland: Columba Press, 2014), 98-99.

⁴³ Faggioli, *John XXIII*, 110.

⁴⁴ Dorr, *Option for the Poor & for the Earth*, 102.

⁴⁵ Treece, 142.

Rome made decisions for those far away,”⁴⁶ he tried to appoint native bishops, leaders who better understood the language, culture, and nuances of local realities.

As evidenced in the examples above, Pope John XXII embodied the servant-leadership characteristic of conceptualization by looking at the Vatican’s complex administrative difficulties in a manner that inched away from an Italian-centric operational approach to a more global and inclusive one. According to servant-leadership scholar, Shann Ferch, leaders who concretize the servant-leadership characteristic of conceptualization are those who construct meaningful responses “to the complexities of personal, family, and work life in a global world.”⁴⁷

Closely related to the servant-leadership characteristic of conceptualization is foresight, the ability to understand the interplay of past lessons, present realities, and the possible implications from decisions about the future. In addition to reforming the Vatican organizational bureaucracy and embracing the wider world, John XXIII exercised foresight by initiating a process that resulted in the holding of the Second Vatican Council (or Vatican II), the “largest meeting in the history of the world.”⁴⁸ Acting on his desire to “reconceive the church’s relationship to the larger world,”⁴⁹ John XXIII hosted roughly 2,300 bishops, from 116 countries, at various periods to vigorously debate how to best “restate the church’s self-understanding by re-interpreting the Catholic tradition in the light of contemporary challenges.”⁵⁰ While previous popes of the twentieth century had considered calling a council – Pius XI in 1923 and Pius XII in

⁴⁶ Treece, 142.

⁴⁷ Shann Ray Ferch, *Forgiveness and Power in the Age of Atrocity: Servant Leadership as a Way of Life* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012), xi.

⁴⁸ O’Malley, *A History of the Popes*, 298.

⁴⁹ Richard R. Gaillardetz, *An Unfinished Council: Vatican II, Pope Francis, and the Renewal of Catholicism* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), 25.

⁵⁰ Ormond Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II: Some Hermeneutical Principles* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2004), 3.

1948 – “John XXIII was the only one not afraid of the institutional and theological complexities of a council for the global Catholic Church.”⁵¹

Among the institutional complexities was the general resistance from Vatican cardinals to the pontiff’s idea of a council. The fruit of a Church council comes in the form of change. As the administrative arm of the Catholic Church, the curial cardinals “had a vested interest in protecting the status quo.”⁵² With numerous attempts from curial officials to dissuade him and the gradual realization that he “might not live to see the Council finished, John was determined to at least inaugurate it.”⁵³ As Robert Greenleaf noted, “Despite his great, loving feeling, and gentle, persuasive ways, John was a tough-fibered man of great courage.”⁵⁴ His conceptual vision for “renewal and reform: his pastoral charity and vision for the Church’s teaching office; his bridge building with Christians, Jews, Muslims, and secularists; his contribution to Catholic social teaching and its challenge to imagine human unity on a global scale,”⁵⁵ “transformed the church.”⁵⁶ In a reflection commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of John XXIII’s passing, Pope Francis offered the following commendation:

Fifty years after his death, the wise and fatherly guidance of Pope John, his love for the church’s tradition and his awareness of the constant need for renewal, his prophetic intuition of the convocation of the Second Vatican Council and his offering of his life for its success stand as milestones in the history of the church in the 20th century and as a bright beacon for the journey that lies ahead.⁵⁷

⁵¹ Faggioli, *John XXIII*, 114.

⁵² Tobin, *The Good Pope*, 111.

⁵³ Collins, *Good Pope John*, 114.

⁵⁴ Greenleaf, *Seeker and Servant*, 152.

⁵⁵ Timothy Cardinal Dolan, “Foreword,” in *The Vision of Saint John XXIII*, Randall S. Rosenberg (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2014), viii.

⁵⁶ O’Malley, *A History of the Popes*, 297-298.

⁵⁷ Pope Francis, “Speech on 50th Anniversary of Death of Pope John XXIII,” *Origins* 43, no. 7 (June 20, 2013), 102.

Pope John XXIII's intuition and courage to convoke Vatican II evidenced the servant-leadership characteristics of conceptualization (looking beyond day-to-day operations) and foresight (anticipating possible future outcomes). Though these characteristics may be "somewhat bound to the intuitive mind, Greenleaf posits it as the servant leader's responsibility to purposefully develop these in order to help people, organizations, and nations avoid undue entrapment in poor thinking, mental enslavement, lack of wisdom, or lack of autonomy."⁵⁸

In John XXIII's view, the misguided mentality of the official Catholic culture he inherited from his papal predecessors was too focused on condemning the modern world.⁵⁹ According to Jesuit historian, John O'Malley, "from the beginning of the nineteenth century up until John XXIII's pontificate, the popes and the Holy See usually framed public statements in negative terms of warning or condemnation."⁶⁰ Instead of repudiating modern developments, John XXIII opted to reframe Catholicism's relationship with the world, "in less oppositional and more relational categories."⁶¹ In both word and deed, John XXIII's leadership style was "measured and reconciling, even addressing all people of good will and not just members of the Catholic Church"⁶² As historian James Hitchcock asserted, "Apart from anything he decreed or authorized, John immediately effected a revolution in the public image of the papal office, an abrupt transition from the concept of pope as ruler to the pope as kindly pastor [and servant-leader]."⁶³

⁵⁸ Ferch, *Forgiveness and Power*, xi.

⁵⁹ Rosenberg, *The Vision*, 3.

⁶⁰ John O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 17-18.

⁶¹ Rosenberg, 4.

⁶² Rosenberg, 3.

⁶³ James Hitchcock, *The History of the Catholic Church: From the Apostolic Age to the Third Millennium* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2012), 474.

Along with nurturing the capacity to conceptualize a life-affirming vision and foresee possible outcomes, developing a healthy understanding of an organization's historical context can inspire a servant-leader to co-construct systems for (re)building community. For Shann Ferch, building community “requires staying power and emotional, mental, and spiritual capacities that match community challenges with creatively imagined and morally persuasive resolutions”⁶⁴

As pope, John XXIII's prophetic vision of Catholicism as a friendly and unifying force for good emerged from an intersection of his experience as a diplomat, education as a historian, and deep spirituality. His plea for unity emerged out of dangerous historical moment in which he became pope. According to Stephen Schloesser, John XXIII entered the global stage as the world was grappling with “the consequences of the Jewish Holocaust, of a global war that claimed between 50 and 60 million lives, of the invention of the atomic bomb, and of the possibility of human annihilation, of the Cold War and the Soviet totalitarian empire, of decolonization and the end of Western hegemony”⁶⁵ Given the large shadow of these concerning memories and anticipations, John XXIII “saw himself as an instrument of peace”⁶⁶ For instance, despite a cancer diagnosis in September of 1962, John XXIII penned an appeal for peace during the Cuban missile crisis. According to Randall Rosenberg, there is evidence that the pontiff's cordial friendship with Soviet Premier, Nikita Khrushchev, may have contributed to Russian ships in the Atlantic Ocean returning home⁶⁷ As Robert Greenleaf observed, “John [XXIII] talked to

⁶⁴ Ferch, *Forgiveness and Power*, xi.

⁶⁵ Stephen Schloesser, “Against Forgetting: Memory, History, Vatican II,” in *Vatican II: Did Anything Happen?*, ed. David G. Schultenover (New York, NY: Continuum, 2007), 95.

⁶⁶ Faggioli, *John XXIII*, 112.

⁶⁷ Randall Roseberg, *The Vision of Saint John XXIII* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2014), 86.

everybody in the spirit of love for that person, no matter what they believed or what they had done. Every person was seen as sacred, redeemable.”⁶⁸

John XXIII’s ability to build relationships by becoming a “steward of others, capable of raising up future generations....through his, “protracted effort toward bettering society with the paradox of living with a sense of oneness toward the mystery of existence as well as generating practical ways of working together,”⁶⁹ was rooted in a commitment to ongoing spiritual reflection. Cardinal Timothy Dolan recounted the following story about one of Pope John XXIII’s spiritual routines:

I love the story of Pope John XXIII told by Monsignor Loris Capovilla, his private secretary. Every night, about midnight, before going to bed, Pope John would kneel before the Blessed Sacrament. There he would rehearse the problems he had encountered that day: the bishop who came in to tell of his priests massacred and his nuns raped in the Congo; the world leader who came to tell him of his country’s plight in war and asking his help; the sick who came to be blessed; the refugees writing for help; the newest round of oppression behind the Iron Curtain. As Pope John would go over each problem, examining his conscience to see if he had responded to each with effective decisions and appropriate help, he would finally take a deep breath and say, “Well, I did the best I could...It’s your Church, Lord! I’m going to bed. Good night.”⁷⁰

As the previous anecdotes suggest, John XXIII’s approach to exercising papal servant-leadership was anchored in an abiding trust in and commitment to the common good. His unshakeable passion for people and the possible was universally recognized following his death in 1963. John XXIII’s passing “evoked an outpouring of grief worldwide that had never occurred for any other pope.”⁷¹ According to Bill Huebsch,

⁶⁸ Greenleaf, *Seeker and Servant*, 157.

⁶⁹ Ferch, *Forgiveness and Power*, 155.

⁷⁰ Timothy M. Dolan, *Priests for the Third Millennium* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2000), 33.

⁷¹ O’Malley, *A History of the Popes*, 300-301.

Throughout the world, everyone mourned. Patriarch Alexis of the Russian Orthodox Church called his people to prayer. The rabbi of the Sephardic synagogue in Paris introduced a prayer for John's intention in the office of the Sabbath.⁷²

While people recognized the loss of a great world leader, they also felt the death, "almost as the loss of a personal friend, of somebody who understood them, who could tell jokes, and whose heart was warm."⁷³ This loss of a beloved friend who embodied servant-leader characteristics such as conceptualization, foresight, and building community was best captured by a community of prisoners at Rome's Regina Coeli prison, where he had visited during his first Christmas as pope. In reaction to his passing, they sent the following message: "With an immense love, we are close to you."⁷⁴

How Does the Vision of Servant-Leadership, as articulated by Robert Greenleaf and embodied by John XXIII, contribute to the Catholic understanding of the Common Good?

Robert K. Greenleaf, the intellectual parent of contemporary servant-leadership studies, was noted for his close observation of both people and institutions, including the Catholic Church. Greenleaf was long interested in the Catholic Church given its status, "as the largest, most influential non-governmental institution in the world."⁷⁵ As a Quaker and life-long student of institutions, Greenleaf offered the following insightful observations about the perception of the Catholic Church in the United States prior to Pope John XXIII's positive and consequential contributions to the development of both servant-leadership and the common good:

The Catholic Church in the United States as a minority religion, but I regard it as, potentially, our largest single force for good. It fails to realize its potential for good in society as a whole because, I believe, it is seen as predominantly a negative force. The issues on which the Church is in opposition, such as birth control, abortion, euthanasia,

⁷² Bill Huebsch, "John XXIII: The Accidental Saint," *NCR*, 2014, <https://www.ncronline.org/news/vatican/john-xxiii-accidental-saint>

⁷³ O'Malley, *A History*, 301.

⁷⁴ Huebsch, "John XXIII."

⁷⁵ Greenleaf, *Seeker and Servant*, 142.

divorce, and communism, are specific and defined, and the actions of the Church are vigorous and sustained.... One must oppose those things one believes to be wrong, but one cannot lead from a predominantly negative posture....Pope John XXIII's regime lifted people because an affirmative building leadership seemed to be emerging, and this gave hope for the world..."⁷⁶

How can a Servant-Led Vision of the Common Good Inspire and Sustain Ethical Institutions?

With the notion of the common good undergirding John XXIII's world-affirming and servant-led vision, rhetoric, and activity electrified the media and the masses. As mentioned earlier, the institutional Catholic Church that he inherited in 1958 was more interested in condemning the modern world. Immediately after his election, John XXIII initiated a number of organizational changes – rooted in his vision of the common good – that reflected a more inclusive, positive, and consultative approach. For example, he promoted a cardinal with a different temperament and perspective to a key leadership post; reintroduced standing meetings with various Vatican departments to reopen direct communication channels; gave Vatican employees a raise; visited the incarcerated; reached out to non-Catholic religious leaders; exchanged letters with children and world leaders; and kept a diary about his spiritual life and leadership.

While most businesses and corporations in today's globalized, technologically advanced, and rapidly changing workplace differ in their organizational mission and structure, the organizational leadership lessons are many. For instance, how relatable and affective is the organization's mission, vision, and values? Given the international and intercultural nature of customers and stakeholders, how are businesses hiring talent – from the corporate suite to the team members across all functional areas – who have the capacity to be in touch with the ever

⁷⁶ Greenleaf, *Servant-Leadership*, 248.

evolving tastes and realities of consumers? How familiar are decision makers with the organizational realities, morale, and satisfaction of colleagues, especially those who earn the least? What organizational communication culture, channels, strategies, and structures are in place to allow for the free flow of ideas and information, including critical feedback?

While the modern day corporate executive, university president, and/or pope cannot possibly be intimately familiar with every last detail of a colleague's work, how does one communicate and demonstrate interest and availability to associates of all ranks? For example, consider motorsports entrepreneur and billionaire executive, Roger Penske, who believes that human capital is the most important asset in his diversified transportation-services corporation. Similar to John XXIII's practice of dropping-in unannounced to various Vatican departmental offices and talking directly to various associates in the company, Roger Penske visits each of his businesses once a year. Among the many data points he prioritizes during his visits are the following: customer satisfaction index as well as soliciting needs and ideas from employees to improve performance and employee satisfaction. That type of investment of time and energy from the chief executive in every unit of the business goes a long way in inspiring and sustaining the common good of organizational members, especially employee satisfaction, morale, and productivity.

Conclusion

“One of the titles of the pope is the Servant of the Servants of God,”⁷⁷ said servant-leadership thought-leader, Robert Greenleaf. “The life of John XXIII, who reigned as pope from age seventy-seven to eighty-one and one-half, is to me one of the best examples of all time of the servant as the nurturer of the human spirit.”⁷⁸ In many ways, the international community owes John XXIII a debt

⁷⁷ Greenleaf, *Seeker and Servant*, 143.

⁷⁸ Greenleaf, 143.

of gratitude for his courageous, spirited, humane, and visionary servant-leadership rhetoric and activity. His life-affirming servant-leadership, characterized by conceptualization, foresight, and building community, among other attributes, left an indelible mark on Roman Catholicism's contemporary understanding of the common good. John XXIII literally opened a Vatican window to allow the fresh breeze of the modern world to renew Roman Catholicism's self-understanding by convoking Vatican II, a consequential, international and ecumenical gathering of bishops, to (re)consider many dimensions of Catholicism in light of the modern world, including its contribution to the common good.

According to Bill Huebsch, author of *The Spiritual Wisdom of Saint John XXIII*, the vision of John XXIII and his historic Second Vatican Council has impacted the common good in myriad ways:

...hundreds of thousands of lay ministers all around the world; people actually praying the Mass rather than merely attending it; work for justice on a par with teaching about religion; human dignity at the center of the church's witness; warm relationships between Christians and Jews; harmony and dialogue among the Christian denominations; and a new vigor in the Christian faith as we now embrace the leadership of Pope Francis.⁷⁹

Speaking of Pope Francis, this paper concludes by invoking Francis of Assisi, whose passion for the poor and creation undergird the current pontiff's own servant-leadership vision of the common good. "Remember that great line from the prayer of St. Francis, wrote Robert Greenleaf, 'For it is in giving that we receive'?"⁸⁰ For the authors of this paper, John XXIII and Robert K. Greenleaf are powerful examples of leaders who were servants first. Each of them gave an important and immense gift to the world, and their influence on the universal common good continues to grow.

⁷⁹ Huebsch, "John XXIII."

⁸⁰ Greenleaf, *Seeker and Servant*, 163.

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