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Book Review by Craig Dalzell (as a requirement of 55209 Leadership Development)

of

Pope John Paul II An Authorized Biography
(1982, Michael Joseph Ltd & George Rainbird, London)

INTRODUCTION

The book *Pope John Paul II An Authorised Biography* (Longford, 1982) is an account of the development and early years of the current Pope of the Roman Catholic Church. The author identifies a number of key points in the Pope's life, which developed his capacity as a leader. These points are consistent with a variety of leadership development theories, but principally with the concept of wisdom described by Cacioppe (1997).

In this essay I support the authors assertion that these factors were significant in the making of the leader. The relevance to the development of other leaders, however, has limited application, as the circumstances of life of this one man are not capable of being repeated.

KEY DEVELOPMENT FACTORS

Karol Wojtyla (the real name of John Paul II) had, up until the writing of the book, lived a strict lifestyle of austerity. In his childhood this may have been imposed, due to the poverty of his living circumstances and the later German invasion, but he clearly chose this manner of life for all of his adult years. This is particularly evidenced by him giving essential belongings (eg. quilts, pillows, bedding) to the poor.

Recreationally, Karol Wojtyla wrote and published, under a pseudonym, poetry focusing particularly on the plight of the working class. He was also an active sportsman. These activities continued up until he became Pope.

Karol Wojtyla had two significant mentors, one who identified some talent in the young Karol Wojtyla and sponsored his progress, both through his initial studies and into his initial placements. His second mentor had significant influence in the opportunities and challenges given to Karol Wojtyla through the later part of his career. It was these opportunities and challenges, which included significant policy development and participation in very significant committees in the Vatican, that allowed Karol Wojtyla to develop a wide ranging network of colleagues and also brought him to the attention of the most senior of the church hierarchy.

The author points to the academic achievement of the Pope during his development. Karol Wojtyla had two intensive periods of study — one to complete two degrees as a Doctor of Divinity, the second to complete the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. This study was undertaken against a background of having left school at the age of twelve. The level of achievement during the course of his study points to a remarkably intelligent man, who does not experience difficulty in acquiring new knowledge.

The character of Karol Wojtyla was a strong theme in the book. It pointed to the development of a strong and personal set of values, especially during the second study period in Rome. The author follows the development of these values and how they influenced the later leadership style as Pope.

ANALYSIS AND APPLICATION TO THEORY

The theme expressed in the development of Karol Wojtyla was the development of his emotional intelligence, his intellectual intelligence and his capacity to learn rapidly. By applying the five criteria expressed by Cacioppe (1997, p. 335) we see the author seeking to demonstrate Karol Wojtyla's emotional intelligence.

First, the imposed and chosen austerity with which he chose to live his life was demonstration of the Pope's self-awareness of emotion. To live this lifestyle requires a significant level of self-denial, given the trappings that go with the various levels of office within the Church. Second, his management of the church, particularly during periods of attack from the Communist Polish Government, required appropriate responses and actions at all times. Third, the service of Karol Wojtyla toward the management of the church, its growth and acts of mercy were referred to throughout the text, demonstrating the singular focus on the goals of the church at large, and his region. Fourth, the openness of home and availability to, particularly, the youth in his region, displayed a good level of understanding of the individuals. Fifth, his interpersonal skills are an attribute the author places in high regard.

The intelligence of the Pope was demonstrated in his academic achievements, his development of a number of significant policies and his holding a professorial chair at two universities. His capacity to learn both in the formal and informal settings suggest the man experiences an effortless state while learning. The general level of wisdom required to occupy the posts held by Karol Wojtyla was high. The author highlights his selflessness and capacity to express himself, particularly his vision and values.

The Vatican and the associated centres of study are recognised as a significant step in the development of church leaders. This may have a historical basis other than the imparting of values of the central church, however, the effect in the context of Karol Wojtyla's development was to just that. It is clear that he was sent to Rome to undergo further studies in spite of him already being well educated for his roles. This further study gave him the unique profile of being both a theologian and a philosopher. The study being undertaken in Rome, at the instigation of his second mentor, suggests a period of removing the current Pope from the context of the church in Poland and its peculiarities to renew and develop his perspective of the church (Fulmer & Vicere, 1995).

The Pope wrote to friends of a process of identifying his own philosophy (Longford, 1982, p. 54). This process began during his second period of study in Rome. This is consistent with the suggestion that this period was a period of renewing and developing values, and goals consistent with the organization as a whole. The characteristic of strong values, courageously stated in the face of a hostile environment, is a characteristic signifying good leadership (Alter, 1997).

The idea of creating an understanding of the development of leaders is to allow generalisations about the findings into a usable body of knowledge. Much of the

development processes undergone by Karol Wojtyla are based in the context of his life in a communist country, dominated by a strong Catholic population. It cannot be argued that these experiences can be extended to others in other parts of the world. Further, the fact that this man rose above the rest of the population in this country indicates something different about him. The fact these steps and processes lead to him developing the leadership skills highlighted in the biography indicates a natural state predisposing him toward this conclusion. The only conclusion I can derive from the experience of Karol Wojtyla is that where applicable experience can be provided to potential leaders, this is an effective learning process provided there is sufficient match with the natural characteristics of the individual.

The leadership development theories are moving toward servicing leaders of organic organizations in highly turbulent environments (AGPS, 1995). The church as a whole would not lend itself to a description of being organic and, at times, it is argued that they very much seek to control their own environment. I believe that while the portrayal of Karol Wojtyla aligns well with the work of Cacioppe (1997) I believe that this work seeks to serve an organization closer to the organic end of the spectrum than the church. I would suggest that the timing of the biography did not allow analysis to discover the degree of fit between the position of Pope and Karol Wojtyla over time.

CONCLUSION

The work of Cacioppe provides a useful understanding of the characteristics leaders need to be effective and has a high intuitive appeal. He asserts that the development of wisdom is the development of effective leadership. The development wisdom is beyond the capacity of many organizations to replicate, as it depends greatly on the life experience in the individual. As an approximation, the use of job rotations and challenging projects to gather experience may, in part, satisfy this (Alter, 1999).

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