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Ignatian Leadership Collection

Ignatian Leadership and the Contemporary Leadership Landscape: An Exercise in Counter-Cultural Engagement

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Abstract

This paper was written as a dialogue between two faculty members and scholars working within a Jesuit institution. Through their shared interest in leadership, especially an interest in Ignatian leadership, the following dialogue emerged. Kelly works in our institution as a theologian and former director of academic service-learning, and Moss Breen works in the graduate school directing an interdisciplinary leadership EdD program. Their backgrounds and fields are different, but their interest in Ignatian leadership is a common thread between them. Kelly starts the conversation and Moss Breen responds in kind.

In the spirit of the earliest Jesuits, who corresponded with each other to ponder the important questions that informed the formation of the Society of Jesus, the authors, Jennifer Moss Breen and Tom Kelly, have elected to take a similar exploratory style. This reflects the actual and organic dialogue between them and captures the flow of conversation over the eight months they corresponded on this topic.

Dear Jennifer:

I look forward to writing this paper with you and have enjoyed our conversations. Let me start this dialogue by sharing some of my thoughts regarding leadership as it relates to Ignatius. Leadership theories often begin with different ideas, values, or methods which result in different concrete outcomes. Becoming an “effective” leader, for example, involves an interpretation of what “effective” means and whether such a method allows one to achieve one’s goals. Machiavelli could be an example of an “effective” leader if one’s goals were more important than the way one achieved them. Yet even Machiavelli may have had more civic intentions when drafting *The Prince*.¹ The complexity of leadership in its many contexts calls for a deeper examination, especially when attempting to find connections between contemporary leadership studies and Ignatian leadership. We could wonder whether Machiavelli might have had a similar life path as Ignatius had

he the misfortune to suffer a battle injury that resulted in months of recuperation, inspirational visions, a radical conversion, and religious formation.

There were similarities in the early lives of Niccolò Machiavelli and Íñigo López de Loyola. In fact, many may not be aware that they were contemporaries. Though they shared the same historical moment, their lives and the outcomes they achieved were vastly different. Although both began with aspirations to succeed at court, Machiavelli chose to become bitter and then sought vengeance on the Medici family. Ignatius listened to the movements of God in his heart, was humbled, and changed forever.

So, when speaking of Ignatian leadership, there may be a temptation to align it with other models and begin by determining the desired outcomes and then do all that can be done to achieve that outcome no matter the cost, though that would be

a mistake. However, unlike his contemporary, Ignatius valued the means as well as the ends. The moment Ignatius discerned how to make different choices than Machiavelli was the moment a new religious order was born.

I wonder what it might look like to base an approach to leadership on a form of spirituality rather than a focus on achieving secular outcomes. Would that approach differ from contemporary leadership studies? And, finally, why would it matter? If anyone has heard of the term Ignatian leadership, it is likely because of Chris Lowney and his books which have popularized the concept. Lowney translates the lessons from the life of Ignatius into what he calls the “four pillars” of leadership, which he identifies as self-awareness, heroism, ingenuity, and love. These are described in his well-regarded book, *Heroic Leadership: Best Practices from the 450-Year Old Company That Changed the World*.² As the title indicates, Lowney’s audience is primarily the business world, though his conceptual framework can be adapted to the educational and other environments. However, even Lowney has continued to reformulate his exploration of Ignatian leadership in his engaging biography, *Pope Francis: Why He Leads the Way He Leads*.³ This suggests there are many ways to conceptualize Ignatian leadership. However, I feel it would be more productive to try to think through these questions from the beginning, perhaps approaching the original sources of Ignatius, without relying on Lowney’s approach. This will allow us to take an original and creative approach to making this our own in our context.

Dear Tom:

Thank you for your thoughts. It is difficult to imagine Ignatius and Niccolo Machiavelli wandering the European countryside simultaneously. Both have left an indelible mark on leadership as we know it today—Ignatius the leader who initiated a new way of teaching and learning through the *Spiritual Exercises* and Machiavelli who will forever be thought of as the creator of “the ends justify the means” leadership approach.

I’ll start off by responding to your questions—what would it look like to approach leadership

from the perspective of spirituality rather than an outcomes-based mindset? Would the spiritual approach differ from those available in contemporary leadership studies? And, would it matter? These are the questions that drew me into conversations with you as I see value in both approaches to leadership. Be it good or bad, we live in an outcomes-based world, and even Ignatius established goals and outcomes throughout his life.⁴ The existence of Jesuit education is a significant outcome of his work. This outcome took years of discernment, exploring, and creating the *Spiritual Exercises* as well as listening to God’s will for the Society of Jesus.

Yet, basing a leadership practice on spirituality is appealing, especially given the complex and troubled world in which we live today. For one to embrace a spiritual approach to leadership, it is presupposed that when faced with difficult decisions, leaders would use a spiritual lens to inform their behavior and practices, regardless of the potential outcome. For example, if a leader is basing their leadership on spirituality, then he or she would make decisions that honor their faith commitments despite potential negative outcomes for the organization or society. Perhaps this explains why spirituality-based leadership practices are so rare.

Honoring our faith, no matter how strong, can look different depending on who you are talking to. Like the plethora of ethical theories that have dominated our culture for centuries, spirituality varied in its meaning and implementation over time.⁵ Many criminal acts have taken place in the name of spirituality, and this is not what we anticipate God wants for us.⁶

I argue that spirituality-based leadership and contemporary secular leadership approaches are necessarily different, and this matters a great deal. I wonder, however, if spirituality-based leadership is a realistic goal for society. As humans, we have a subjective and flawed nature, as did Ignatius. Though we may follow and embrace spiritual practices, we never do so perfectly. Given the number of difficult decisions we make every day, it is likely we will make some based upon outcomes other than those informed by spirituality. We assess our choices based on many

factors, not only on what we imagine God calls us to do. Even the most fervent believer may fail.

At the same time, we have examples of leaders like Pope Francis, Ignatius, Mother Teresa, and Gandhi who did make decisions ultimately based upon their understanding of the will of God. These leaders were able to move beyond personal comfort and opportunities to serve those in need; they followed their calling to work on God's behalf. They decided to serve rather than be served or remain idle. They might be our models that link Ignatian leadership with contemporary thoughts on leadership.

Contemporary secular leadership theories are valuable because they can offer models that may be a bit more attainable and accessible than these remarkable individuals. While we may seek to model the leadership behaviors of Mother Teresa, Gandhi, Ignatius, and Pope Francis, we also need to remember that even they were not perfect. However, we can study and practice the skills and ideas set forth in contemporary leadership theories including transformational,⁷ servant leadership,⁸ and adaptive leadership, and we can build our own leadership humility,⁹ self-awareness,¹⁰ and cultural intelligence.¹¹ These leadership skills and characteristics offer strategies that allow us to emulate spiritual leaders like Ignatius and they present elements that may align with the spiritual because they form leaders for the common good.

The theories and their underpinnings I will discuss are accessible to all and can be developed and learned—similar to what the Church teaches about the call to sainthood. But in our contemporary society, the notion of sainthood can seem out of reach for many leaders. Still, leaders can invest time learning to be better leaders, and these theories offer an approachable and tangible method for growth both as a leader in contemporary society and as a spiritual leader. There will still be difficult decisions to be made, but these theories offer practical techniques to use as a guide. Not all of these theories are entirely outcomes-based. It is assumed that leadership implies working to improve society and the lives of others, and this was the work of Ignatius. However, it is difficult to capture the outcomes of soft skills such as spiritual growth, understanding others' perspectives, and service. Early leadership

theories and many current organizational practices, particularly those related to the business environment, focus on outcomes related to productivity, efficiency, and sustainability, often forgoing the human element to do so.¹² Organizational well-being and efficiency are all worthy outcomes, but they often ignore the spiritual and human perspectives that Ignatius was so careful to remember. I will elaborate on these theories later, but for now, I leave this to you, Tom, for reflections and further thought.

Dear Jennifer:

Thank you for your thoughts. I would like to elaborate not only on spiritually-based leadership, but more specifically, Ignatian leadership. I believe that Ignatian leadership, by definition, emerges from a spirituality that is fundamentally counter-cultural. It is counter-cultural because it is not based in self-interest, narrowly construed or even what people in general would consider good for them. Rather, such an approach to leadership understands human fulfillment as based on “a mission to reconcile and recreate right relationships with God, others and creation.”¹³ This is an outcome, but a very different kind of outcome.

This approach was counter-cultural in Ignatius' time and it remains so in ours. Therefore, it will not fit comfortably into the plethora of leadership paradigms or the methods used to measure their outcomes, although it may share similar ideas with some. To delve deeper into this, I think we need to define spirituality in general and Ignatian spirituality in particular. Next, because the criteria for success are part of the spirituality, how might an approach to Ignatian leadership find itself in conflict with dominant cultural values? Finally, what are both challenges to and benefits of a counter-cultural Ignatian leadership paradigm?

Let me start by considering spirituality and the human condition. In a diverse and pluralistic world, it is important to offer an understanding of spirituality that most people can understand. This is especially important for the millennials who often assert that they prefer being spiritual over being religious.¹⁴ For the purpose of our conversation, spirituality refers to the interplay of three core and fundamental relationships shared

by all human beings: how a person understands and relates to self, how they understand and relate to their ultimate, and how they understand and relate to the world. Allow me start by elaborating on the understanding of self.¹⁵

All human beings have a relationship to their own selves, even if that relationship is a non-reflective unawareness of self. We may see ourselves differently over time or throughout our life. We may understand ourselves as helpless (fatalism) in terms of agency or able to act and change our history (optimism). We may understand ourselves morally in categories of good (virtuous) or bad (sinful). We may understand ourselves through explicit reflection on ourselves (self-aware) or never think about who we are becoming or why we do what we do (non-reflective).

But in one way or another, we all have a relationship to this self, if nowhere else than in the “I” we utter to distinguish ourselves from others when we communicate. We could argue that all people, no matter where or when, by omission or commission, have some sense of the “I” to which they refer when they reference themselves in language and interaction. This “I” is one of three poles in a relationship called spirituality. The second component of spirituality is our relationship to what is ultimate for our lives—what might be called our “functional god.” I would argue that human beings have at their core a sense of a *terminus*, an end or goal toward which their action is directed ultimately. For some this movement toward their end may be simple survival, for others the accrual of power, prestige, or possessions, and for still others, a quest for ideals such as enlightenment, salvation, or peace. Regardless of its content, the human condition moves us toward an envisioned end for which we all strive, even if that is the denial of any end (nihilism) and the consequences that may come with that. Most everyone gets out of bed every day for a reason, even if that reason is to live another day in absurd non-meaning or simply to meet our physical needs for nourishment, shelter, or physical well-being.

Because we are inherently limited beings, it is possible that our *ideal* ultimate and our *actual* ultimate do not align; this is common. For example, I often hear undergraduates speak of

their hope to practice medicine because of a deep desire to “help others.” When pushed about whether this desire to help others might entail a simple life of serving those most in need or those who happen to have the fewest resources, one frequently notices the limits of altruism and some evidence that the interest in medicine may be for the income and prestige. In this case, when we probe the student’s motives to practice medicine, the ideal ultimate and the real do not match.

The understanding of and relation to the self and one’s ultimate are closely related. To the degree that one is honestly and authentically self-reflective, one’s *ideal* ultimate and one’s *actual* ultimate should be consistent, albeit never perfect. These two fundamental relationships—first to one’s self, however construed, and second to one’s ultimate, however understood—lead to a way of encountering reality, that is to say the context within which we move and have our being—namely, the world.

How do our realizations of self and our ultimate influence how we interact with the world? If I understand myself as hopeless and oppressed by others and my ultimate end is simply survival, then my actions in the world will emerge from those two relations. I could use my will freely to choose this response without ever realizing I have free will. Likewise, if I understand myself as an agent of change with my ultimate as absolute love, my actions in the world (if the prior two relations are authentic) will cohere and flow from them—although always imperfectly. In like manner, if I don’t have any awareness of myself except as one who unreflectively pursues pleasure in all my actions while avoiding pain, my relation to the world will be through acts that maximize my pleasure and minimize my pain (which is a view of humanity espoused by Freud).

The point in all of this is to assert that spirituality is something inherent to the human condition. Whether we are Freudians, Christians, or Hindus, we all live out a spirituality. We all have a relation to self (otherwise we wouldn’t be interested in how we can lead better). We all move toward an ultimate (however varied that may be). We all live and act and move in the world in concrete ways with concrete ends in mind.

In my view, when a leadership paradigm is based on spirituality, it configures and reconfigures these fundamental relationships to self, ultimate, and world—the same way an outcomes-based model would—but *with different criteria*. This is what is at stake in a leadership paradigm based on Ignatian spirituality. It is much more than embracing a set of values or methods that will facilitate the results one desires, which seems to be that of a typical, secular approach to leadership. What is at stake is the very identity of the leader and the purpose of her life.

Dear Tom:

Thank you for your concise articulation of spirituality. I can see how the understanding of self, the ultimate and one's place in the world can impact one's approach to leadership. I must stop you here, however, to redirect our conversation. You mention above that most contemporary leadership approaches are purely based upon values or methods that facilitate what one desires. Yes, you are correct, that the secular approach to leadership can be self-centered and without consideration for the good of others.¹⁶ Unfortunately, when the goal is to maximize profit, less-than altruistic leadership is at the forefront.

I suppose it all depends on what one desires and how one embraces the purpose of their life, doesn't it? You mention the young undergraduate pre-med student who is pursuing a medical career, so they can "help others." This is an honorable goal. The sincerity of this goal, however, may change over time. Perhaps income potential is at the heart of it, at least at first. But any physician who wishes to offer optimal patient care could learn to understand leadership as well as find life fulfillment in helping others.¹⁷ Without an attachment to the care of others, the physician could quickly find their career empty, despite how much money they make.¹⁸ Do you believe, Tom, that one can enter a field for the wrong reason and then, when one learns more about oneself and that career, change one's perspective? Perhaps this physician will seek to grow as a person, and contemporary leadership development is an excellent tool for one to grow. I'd like to know more about Ignatian spirituality and Ignatian

leadership so I can see if contemporary leadership approaches can be logically connected to them.

Dear Jennifer:

Thank you for your thoughts. Your question about the doctors who love money more than patients is important. This can happen when the people they are supposed to care about have become a means to an end—their desire to achieve wealth. These physicians can "learn about themselves" and change the orientation of their professional life but doing so requires a self-honesty that is central to the spirituality of Ignatius of Loyola. His spirituality is precisely framed to help us understand what the purpose and meaning of things in this world are, but it requires honesty about one's motives. I quote it in full here.

Human beings are created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by means of this to save their souls.

The other things on the face of the earth are created for the human beings, to help them in working toward the end for which they are created.

From this it follows that I should use these things to the extent that they help me toward my end and rid myself of them to the extent that they hinder me.

To do this, I must make myself indifferent to all created things, in regard to everything which is left to my freedom of will and is not forbidden.

Consequently, on my own part I ought not seek health rather than sickness, wealth than poverty, honor rather than dishonor, a long life rather than a short one, and so on in all matters.

I ought to desire and elect only the thing which is more conducive to the end for which I am created.¹⁹

For our dialogue here, only a summary of this spirituality can be given, but the First Principle and Foundation, written after *The Spiritual Exercises* was composed, is an excellent place to begin. While entire books have been written about this, we will keep our comments related to "spirituality" as we have defined it. What does the

First Principle and Foundation say about our relationship to self, ultimate, and world?

For Ignatius, the human person is an imperfect agent who can choose God as their meaning giver in a graced act of freedom and faith. As you mentioned earlier, Jennifer, no human ever makes this choice perfectly. The key is to be constantly aware of the movements of one's heart. Human beings experience consolation when their affectivity, imagination, and intellect move toward God. They experience desolation when their affectivity, imagination, and intellect move them away from God.²⁰ This was Ignatius' key insight: awareness of one's affectivity, imagination, and intellect will reveal whether one's orientation is to God or something else, and we call this process discernment. Teaching this at a Jesuit university is what makes us unique.

For Ignatius, we know we are moving toward God if we experience "love, but it can also include tears of remorse, any sensible increase of faith, hope, charity and a joy whose effect is quiet and peace in God."²¹ Desolation is "precisely the opposite, that is, any movement of emotionality or sensibility whose term is evil, whether that affectively be painful as a troubled mind or comfortably cynical as a movement to distrust."²² In the context of Ignatian spirituality, this process of reflection is not done alone but in the company of a spiritual guide known as a spiritual director. Thus, the self is never understood through an act of isolated self-introspection; the self is social and finds its being and fullness in relation to others.

If human beings are made for God, and God is love, then the way we move and live and have our being in the world must be characterized by this same love. The great medieval theologian, St. Thomas Aquinas, translated *caritas*, the theological virtue of love, as "the effective willing of the good of another."²³ In this sense, love is not an emotion or an occurrence that happens to someone (either falling in or out of it)—it is an act of the will that first discerns the good and how to effectively bring that good to another human being—not a bad motive for leadership! A person who embraces Ignatian spirituality, and any understanding of leadership that flows from it, will engage the world *by effectively willing the good of others*,

especially those who are vulnerable and/or marginalized, whenever and wherever possible.

Within this relationship to the world are some very interesting parameters put forth by Ignatius:

The other things on the face of the earth are created for the human beings, to help them in working toward the end for which they are created. From this it follows that I should use these things to the extent that they help me toward my end and rid myself of them to the extent that they hinder me.

One's relationship to the things of this world is determined by whether they help a person reverence, praise, and serve God. In as much as they do this, they can be used for that purpose, and in as much as they do not do this, they ought to be left behind. Making everything subject to that judgment is the essence of what Ignatius means by *indifference*. Nothing is sought in and of itself, but only insofar as it helps us better serve God. Thus, not only do human beings have a purpose, we now have a way of understanding the purpose of things in the world as we work out and discern our call from God. Sarah Broscombe summarizes this in the following:

With a steady orientation—where, as in the Principle and Foundation of the Exercises, God's praise, reverence and service come first—freedom grows. Ignatian freedom is both an 'indifference' ("be[ing] prepared to wish to relinquish something out of love of God") and an active disposition that is open, unencumbered and therefore equally able to welcome everything, or let it go. Freedom is a grace we seek. From this beginning, the Exercises moves on to growing in self-understanding as a loved sinner. Being utterly loved within the felt experience of my own brokenness brings humility; not the false humility of self-rejection or worthlessness, but acceptance of my real need for redemption. Humility fosters authenticity, because it counters the pressure of perfectionism. This is inherently freeing.²⁴

I want to return, for a moment, to the point I made earlier about Ignatian leadership as fundamentally counter-cultural. It is not possible to offer a sophisticated or complete analysis of American culture here, but it is possible to outline some tendencies or trajectories that most people would agree with. American culture is intensely individualistic, competitive, and consumeristic.²⁵ These may be considered virtues by some and vices by others, but either way they define our culture in powerful ways.

Ignatian spirituality, conversely, is based on perspectives and values lived out by Jesus of Nazareth, few of which were individualistic, competitive or consumeristic. Thus, Ignatian leadership will have counter-cultural criteria for what good leadership includes. An example of this occurs during the second week of the *Spiritual Exercises* and is called a “meditation on the two standards.”²⁶

When preparing to make a serious “election” or decision, Ignatius encouraged a reflection on the struggle between good and evil using the imagery of the “standards” or flags of each side. In classical medieval binary thinking, Ignatius believed that “Christ calls and desires all persons to come under his standard, and . . . Lucifer in opposition calls them under his.”²⁷ According to Ignatius, we live and move within these opposing forces: “The powers of egoism pull us backward to slavery unto death, while the divine Spirit draws us forward to freedom and life.”²⁸ Very concretely, evil tempts human beings first through riches, second through honor, and third through pride, “and from these three steps the enemy leads them to all the other vices.”²⁹ “Riches” refers to material wealth, “honor” refers to prestige; both of these are clear and present goals of cultural and social formation today. Of course, not everyone is formed successfully by our culture, but these are significant forces in social formation. I have never heard a student frame their understanding of success in life without these two realities, and once pride—the notion that “we are more important than others”—begins to creep in, it is over.³⁰

Conversely, Christ attracts followers through a counter praxis of spiritual poverty in all cases and actual poverty in some cases. Spiritual poverty indicates that we are not our own meaning givers;

meaning is received from God, and we are dependent creatures. Your will, not mine, be done. Spiritual poverty means *indifference* to wealth. If it serves God, wonderful. If it doesn’t, we don’t aspire to it. We receive our meaning, and the meaning of everything in the world, from how it helps or hinders our progress and others’ progress toward God.

Insults and contempt follow poverty. Caring for others over efficiency, sacrificing self for others when there may be no benefit, and/or putting people before profit will often result in criticism. If we embrace the first value of poverty, insults and contempt for that value will often follow. What flows from this point is finally humility: the recognition that “I have no greater dignity than anybody else, including the drunk down the street. So, I demand no privileges.”³¹ Poverty, insults, contempt, and humility—not values many of us willingly sign up for.

So, can Ignatian leadership succeed in a society that values little under the standard of Christ? Can we have effective leaders who have a relationship with the poor, side with the marginalized and stand with the outcast? This is, in part, what a “successful” Ignatian leader would look like.

Dear Tom:

Thank you for sharing the deeper concepts, beliefs, and ideas behind Ignatius’s spirituality and its counter-culture expectations. These are difficult, but not impossible goals to work toward over the course of our lives. I will respond to each area of thought and attempt to draw contemporary leadership models into the conversation. This will not be a simple task, as living a life for God is not commonly thought of as success in our world. In fact, it is largely the opposite.

Your discussion of Ignatius reminds me of a form of love that I can see in his work. According to Ignatius, God is at the center of all relationships and represents all forms of love. In some religious context, *agape* love is referred to as the form of love that is a “pure and perfect self-gift” to others.³² You also mention that we exist to receive and share God’s perfect love with others. We can learn to do this through reflection and the

guidance of a spiritual director, who offers us direction for how to grow closer to God through the *Spiritual Exercises*. Our spiritual director can help us discern whether our actions and thoughts cause pain or joy.

We know we live in an imperfect world and the human ego can shift us from a healthy sense of self to an unhealthy sense of self. It is the personal work we do either through reflection or with the guidance of a spiritual director. Through our discernment and by seeking a way to help us see into and beyond our own ego, which is limited by insecurity, pride, greed, guilt, and shame in us all, we can grow as pilgrims on our journey. Lastly, you discuss the concept of indifference, the mindset that suggests we can use all forms of resources without shame if we believe we are using them for the work to which God has called us. With this, we remain in a state of spiritual poverty, knowing that our walk on earth will always be flawed and that our indifference to wealth is important for our freedom to act upon our mission and vision. While we imperfectly pursue a closer path to God, it is useful to have tools to help us along the way. We can learn to act and think like Ignatius even while remaining imperfect people. Our further discernment and reflection might help us to see the good we can do through our actions and beliefs. Below I will share several leadership approaches that can give us tangible steps toward understanding others, serving them, and practicing the behaviors of Ignatius.

I want to share how the perspective of contemporary leadership studies might be congruent with Ignatius's counter-culture leadership. I offer ideas that are fully vetted and researched contemporary leadership topics. While each of these has little value if a leader is not oriented to the good, perhaps they can give us a pathway toward becoming a leader in a way that is consistent with Ignatian leadership. In what follows, I will frame contemporary leadership approaches through the behaviors and characteristics modeled by Ignatius after his life-changing war injury, during his conversion, and throughout the remainder of his life. I hope we can find some common ground here.

Ignatius fostered the idea of self-reflection throughout his post-conversion life. He learned this skill while convalescing within the walls of his family's property. Prior to this time, Ignatius was a self-consumed warrior and court noble with an abundant ego and bravado. At that point in time, Ignatius was not highly self-aware. Self-awareness is a construct within the contemporary leadership field.³³ Self-awareness entails acknowledging, understanding, and attending to our own thoughts, emotions, fears, goals, and desires. Self-awareness is fostered through purposeful internal reflection and outward reactions to those thoughts. Self-awareness helps us see our own insecurities, egos, greed, competitiveness, and desires so that we begin to see ourselves honestly.

By becoming self-aware, we can grow beyond our current self and toward a more desired, balanced state of existence. Self-awareness includes four primary components: one's ability to understand one's own values and beliefs; how one manages emotional health and reflects upon one's own well-being; how one receives feedback as a mechanism for self-improvement; and how accurately one assesses one's own performance.³⁴

Ignatius gained a deeper self-awareness while suffering through an injury that required months of convalescence. While healing, his only outlet to alleviate boredom was reading Ludolf of Saxony's *The Life of Christ* and a book on the lives of the saints. While reading these over his months of recovery, Ignatius started to change. He became aware of his own thoughts and, more importantly, the longer-term consequences of those thoughts. In his autobiography, he articulates certain thoughts about his preferred court romance novels that left him dissatisfied and empty—desolation—and other thoughts after reading the life of Christ and about the lives of the saints that made him feel fulfilled and more alive—consolation.³⁵ He started to pay attention to those things that made him feel better, more energized, and joyful during this time. When he was focused on Jesus and the pursuit of holiness, Ignatius felt deep joy; in contrast, when he was thinking about chasing a forbidden woman or seeking honor for himself at court, he felt worse.

The reflections of Ignatius during his healing resulted in the points you mention, Tom: consolation and desolation. When we reflect, either alone or with the support of a spiritual guide, we enter a deeper self-awareness and understand how our mind, body, spirit and soul “feel” while engaging these thoughts. This is the essence of self-awareness, and it is essential for leading others and making major life choices. Using reflection to understand what gives us desolation and consolation makes us feel more fully alive.

Like self-awareness, cultural awareness means understanding not only our own culture but also seeking to understand the culture of others, in both local and global contexts. Cultural awareness includes several dimensions including the meta-cognitive (what we think about our own thinking), cognitive (what we know and how we reason), motivational (what drives us to action), and behavioral (what we do). Building cultural awareness also helps learners to understand how they judge and evaluate cultures, how they make decisions about and among cultures, how well they adapt to other cultures, and finally, how well we work within and among differing cultural contexts.³⁶

Cultural intelligence encompasses our understanding of where we begin, where we end, and where others begin and end. Enhancing cultural intelligence allows us to become aware of and possibly overcome inherent bias and assumptions about others. It can alleviate cruelty to others and is a building block for greater awareness of the needs of others.

After his conversion, Ignatius went on a journey across Europe to the Holy Land.³⁷ When he came to the realization that his direction for serving would not be possible or will the good of others, he embraced a deeper discernment. Ignatius was literally kicked out of the Holy Land and began to discern next steps. He came to realize he did not possess the qualifications to be effective in the way he was being called by God—so he went back to school at 40 years old.

Ignatius’s response to this rejection was amazing, and it was the beginning of yet another stage in his ongoing conversion. He spent the next nine years

in studies preparing for the priesthood and founding the Society of Jesus with a close circle of companions. He began his studies in Latin with 12-year old children in Spain and finished with a master’s degree at the University of Paris. He travelled across Europe, both on foot and by mule, to share what he had learned with others from his conversion. These “spiritual conversations” were essential to the development of his own spirituality.

Throughout this time, Ignatius humbly developed cultural awareness, which included how to interact with people of all socio-economic levels and in different cultural contexts. He served the poor he encountered and interacted easily with the nobility who funded his mission. Ignatius demonstrated remarkable growth throughout these years of his adult life. No longer an egotistical soldier and courtier, he was now in active ministry, engaging one person at a time, learning from them and guiding them through what would eventually become the *Spiritual Exercises*.

It was here that Ignatius and the later Jesuits fostered the notion of a spiritual director, which I mentioned above—one who walks beside you and, together, helps you find your call and how to respond to it. It is very important to realize that the function of the spiritual director is to listen, guide, and help one build both self-awareness and cultural awareness. No judgment—just recognition of the process of consolation and desolation and the knowledge that process imparts.

Next there is the concept of humility or the ability to accurately assess our own strengths and weaknesses, acknowledge our limitations, and honor the work of others. The secular world has largely dismissed humility as a character weakness rather than a strength. Humility recognizes that the self is not its own meaning-giver and embraces the belief that all human beings have a positive worth that must be respected. Humility allows for a developing awareness of one’s existence in relation to others’ existence, and the ability to forget oneself.

This understanding of humility can help us understand how Ignatius understood spirituality and leadership to try to live these out. He did not

begin life's journey as a humble person. In fact, he was bred to be the opposite of humility: a self-centered, privileged, and self-unaware person. It was through his trials and the suffering he endured that Ignatius gained the opportunity to listen better to God and to become the leader he was called to be. He learned through his suffering and humiliations, was reduced to bed-rest for months, suffered rejection from the Roman Catholic church, and, when faced with years of physical and spiritual healing, emerged a wholly different person.

Today, humility can be fostered in much the same way, but its development requires patience, deep reflection, and the desire to change. As humans, our existence is more fragile than we like to believe. Yet, we know in our hearts that we can be gone from this world in a moment. This fear of losing life, losing our power, and losing our own will drives us to foster unhealthy egos. Fear drives us away from humility.

This is how humility can become a strength. If one accepts their frailty and vulnerability, speaks to it, and shares it with others, they ultimately become stronger. This is the paradox of humility: the more we embrace our own weaknesses, the stronger we become; the more we share our challenges and learning with others, the stronger they become; the humbler our leaders are, the humbler their followers become. This is another legacy of Ignatius, and by fostering this within our lives and the lives of others, we are one step closer to living and leading as he did.

Of the many leadership theories that might be aligned with the Ignatian approach, one of the most cited is servant leadership, initially articulated by Robert Greenleaf.³⁸ This form of leadership has been extensively researched in contemporary leadership studies.³⁹ The premise of servant leadership is that leaders exist to serve others. Servant leaders understand their role as bringing out the gifts and talents of others and thereby achieving the mission, vision, and goals of an organization. Servant leadership has been somewhat controversial in contemporary leadership research in ways similar to how spiritual or Ignatian leadership might be controversial. Servant leadership is often thought of as unrealistic or weak.⁴⁰

What most people don't understand is that servant leadership is a form of strength and power. Servant leadership is composed of five dimensions including altruistic calling (feeling called to do good for others), persuasive mapping (the ability to help others achieve their goals), organizational stewardship (honoring the needs of the organization above the needs of self), emotional healing (helping others heal), and wisdom (using past experiences and learning to inform current decisions).⁴¹ I can see strong linkages between spiritual leadership and servant leadership, can't you? What's more, one can learn to be a servant leader. Perhaps servant leadership is one contemporary leadership approach that does not seek to serve self or attempt to get what one desires? Can you share with me, Tom, more about Ignatian spirituality and how it can be lived or modeled today?

Another contemporary leadership approach that lends itself to comparisons with Ignatian spirituality and Ignatian leadership is adaptive leadership, in other words leading by first empathizing with others, understanding them, listening to them, and then assisting them on their own terms and to their desires.⁴² Adaptive leadership is required when society and leaders within that society face recurring problems that do not have straightforward solutions. These new types of problems are typically addressed by using solutions that worked in the past. Unfortunately, utilizing old solutions is not always an effective approach to solving complex, repetitive, and ambiguous problems. Ignatius lived in a time that experienced complex, recurring problems, especially in the context of his Catholic faith and a surging reformation. How could he convince the Church that "God is in all things" and that while good dogma was important, it was attentiveness to God in the movements of one's heart that ultimately transforms us and others?

In contemporary leadership, the context is seemingly different on the surface, but much of the same mindset is present in current leaders. There are many economic, social, environmental, and technological factors that create uncertainty, ambiguity, and volatility where leaders must function. Our competitive global economy exists amidst greed, incivility, power, and economic downturns that marginalize whole peoples. A

myriad of factors create the need for adaptive leadership approaches in contemporary societies. The adaptive leader is presented as similar to Ignatius' spiritual guide, as competent individuals who have great capacity. By utilizing four adaptive leadership dimensions outlined below, the adaptive leader equips others to be stronger, humbler, and better able to serve others. Adaptive leadership utilizes four dimensions that can be embedded into a leader's practice and empower them and their organization to thrive amidst the chaos. The four dimensions include the following:

- Adaptive leaders embrace and develop a culture that embraces uncertainty, which becomes viewed as a potential competitive advantage rather than a threat. Policies and procedures that no longer serve as solutions are set aside and new approaches are developed and fostered. Employees are asked and allowed to think in new and different ways, encouraging new solutions to recurring and challenging problems.
- Adaptive leaders foster empathy—the ability to feel and understand what others feel—within their teams and organizations. When we understand the needs of others, we can better serve, and in terms of today's competitive business environment, we can better meet the needs of clients through empathy. Also, adaptive leaders encourage autonomy within their organization, encouraging employees to be creative and build self-accountability into their work practices.
- Adaptive leaders foster continuous learning through self-correction and reflection. Failure is viewed as a valuable learning experience that drives future excellence. Safety exists within organizations, so no question is too dumb, and every mistake is an opportunity to grow.

- Finally, adaptive leaders work with stakeholders to create win-win solutions that benefit everyone. No longer do leaders attempt to outsmart or incumber their stakeholders. Rather, and with integrity, they foster open communication, transparency and clarity.⁴³

Ignatius was an adaptive leader. Living in a culture that was complex and volatile, he sought a better way to serve God through his approach to the world. He lived as an adaptive leader. He deeply empathized with others, taught the use of reflection, and fostered a sense of continuous improvement in his students. Working one on one with each of his companions, Ignatius sought after win-win solutions, always pushing for honest discernment from his peers and protegeses. He was the essence of the adaptive leader, and his message remains so today.

Dear Jennifer:

All of what you have said resonates with me and with what I believe to be important, even essential elements of Ignatian leadership. Self-awareness is essential to authentic discernment as are the components of cultural awareness, especially the motivational and behavioral elements. While Ignatius may not have used those words, he would embrace the meanings you put forth. Your ideas on humility, servant-leadership, and adaptive leadership also deeply resonate with my understanding of Ignatius, his spirituality, and his unique form of leading others. Humility and self-honesty are closely related for Ignatius; coming to a clear recognition of what gives consolation and desolation and why brings this to the forefront. Focusing on the needs of others and adapting our way of proceeding based on what is the reality we are trying to transform characterizes the Jesuits and their ministries throughout the world even today.

Jennifer, I see the benefit of contemporary leadership studies, at least the aspects you have emphasized to me. They help me better understand Ignatian leadership and, perhaps, how to communicate the importance of this in ways that people who work and lead at Jesuit colleges and universities can understand. At a recent

gathering of Jesuits and lay collaborators in higher education in Spain, the following statement emerged in a document relating to leadership. It is a fitting close to our conversation.

The future of Jesuit education relies on the availability of people, Jesuits and lay colleagues in mission alike, who are fully capable of leading universities and colleges in a manner consistent with and devoted to the mission of the Society of Jesus. This availability depends on the ongoing intention to cultivate such mission inspired leaders and to invest in formational opportunities characterized

by an Ignatian way of proceeding, a manner that is both faithful to our nearly 500-year-old tradition while at the same time constantly discerning, creative, and evolutionary.⁴⁴

I know that our conversation will enrich my ability to discuss Ignatian spirituality and its relevance to my theology students' leadership development. I hope you continue to make connections to Ignatian spirituality for the students in your leadership classes. Now more than ever, I believe our world can use more leaders who are guided by Ignatian wisdom. 卍

Notes

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