

Elements of an Ignatian Leader

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[Abstract] This article examines leadership and Ignatian spirituality. More specifically, what wisdom can the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola offer regarding the spirit and skills of a good leader. The paper outlines basics of leadership, Ignatian spirituality and the Spiritual Exercises. It then articulates four aspects of the Spiritual Exercises that inform good leadership. First, how the Exercises and good leadership encourage people to interact directly with God, that is, interact directly with what is true, good and beautiful. Second, how flexibility in leadership is improved by examining the fruits, the ends and means as well as micro and macro aspects of situations. Third, the value of pausing to look deeper at the roots of success and failure so as to learn from these experiences. Fourth, the paradox of surrender, how leadership is made more effective not by increasing control, but rather, by surrendering to something greater. The article also includes reflection questions regarding leadership.

Keywords: leadership, Ignatian spirituality, Spiritual Exercises, discernment, group dynamics

Introduction

Leadership

Leadership is a broad topic. There is much discourse regarding the definition of a leader and the impact of leadership on society. Some leaders are internationally recognized figures, while others live out this role quietly in schools, small businesses and families. Leaders may be icons or they may be ordinary people.

The focus of this article is leadership from an Ignatian perspective. More specifically, what wisdom can the Spiritual Exercises offer regarding the spirit and skills of a good leader?

To provide some context, we will first consider points regarding leadership. This will not be an exhaustive discussion of leadership, but rather, serve as an introduction to the more specific topic of Ignatian elements of a good leader.

The Oxford dictionary defines a leader as, “The person who leads or commands a group, organization, or country.”¹ More specifically, leadership can be defined as “a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal.”² The leader helps people move forward, to progress toward something that is desired. Leadership is multi-faceted.³ In fact today, the word ‘leadership’ is often

¹ “Leader”, Lexico.com, Oxford University Press, (2020), accessed 3 June 2020: <https://www.lexico.com/definition/leader>.

² Peter Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice—Sixth Edition* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2013), 6.

³ There are approximately 1400 different definitions of “leader” or “leadership.” Gloria Moss, *Inclusive Leadership* (New York: Routledge, 2019), 2.

prefaced by other words such as: collective, transformational, relational or servant.⁴

To better understand leadership it can be beneficial to consider specific models or approaches, for example, the trait perspective and the process perspective.⁵ The trait model holds that leaders have a certain personal quality (or combination of qualities) that facilitates the expression of the leadership role. Accordingly, if we want to understand leadership, then, we must examine these qualities. Unfortunately, there is no consensus as to which qualities definitively constitute a good leader. Various studies purport various traits as key: confidence, persistence, emotional intelligence, communication skills, problem-solving ability, etc.

The process perspective understands leadership not as primarily dependent on traits of the leader, but rather, as a process by which the leader interacts with members of the group. Leadership involves helping a team move together toward commonly held goals. This process is non-linear and includes changes (positive as well as negative) in the way the team perceives the leader and the way the leader perceives the team. Leaders and followers exist in a reciprocal relationship; it is not the

⁴ For example, the idea of servant leadership, first coined by Robert Greenleaf, holds that a leader must act as a servant first and leader second. Such a person seeks primarily to help followers become more healthy, wise, free, autonomous, able to reach their full potential and more likely to become servant leaders themselves. Balancing conceptual thinking with day-to-day operations, servant leaders nurture in others the ability to dream great dreams. Larry Spears, “Characteristics of Servant Leadership” in *Servant Leadership in Action*, ed. Ken Blanchard and Renee Broadwell (New York: Berrett-Koehler, 2018), 14-18.

⁵ Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice—Sixth Edition*, 5-7.

individual leader, but rather, this dynamic relationship that is actually leadership.⁶

This more inclusive understanding of leadership helps us notice a crucial dimension of leadership: leaders can be considered either assigned or emergent.⁷ Assigned leaders have a leadership role designated to them, such as manager or director. Whether or not they actually live out the qualities of an authentic leader, however, is independent of this assigned title. An assigned leader may be a true leader or may be a leader in title alone.⁸

In contrast, an emergent leader is a person who, over time, becomes the most influential member of a group, regardless of whether or not this person has a title. Such a leader surfaces gradually through a process of communication and interaction with team members.

What encourages an emergent leader to emerge? Is it possible for a person to learn and be formed into a leader? “Ample empirical research illustrates that leadership is unequivocally learnable...leaders are rarely born and often made.”⁹ In fact, there are specific aspects that facilitate the formation of leaders. A formal education in leadership from a university may be beneficial. However, research indicates that other

⁶ Nicholas Clarke, *Relational Leadership: Theory, Practice and Development* (London: Routledge, 2018), 1-2.

⁷ Northouse, *Leadership: Theory and Practice—Sixth Edition*, 8-9.

⁸ Managers may or may not be true leaders. Managers administer, leaders innovate; managers maintain the status quo, leaders challenge it; managers focus on systems, leaders focus on people; managers cling to stability, leaders tolerate chaos to attain a broader vision; managers do things right, leaders do the right thing. Leaders may have more in common with artists and creative thinkers than with managers. Moss, *Inclusive Leadership*, 6-8.

⁹ John P. Dugan, *Leadership Theory: Cultivating Critical Perspectives* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 17, 18.

elements are more crucial in regard to what forms a leader: a person must be sensitive to what is happening around him or her, learn about self, learn about others, reflect upon his or her ways of acting as a leader and accrue insight from such reflection.¹⁰ Thus, a significant factor that creates growth and improvement as a leader is personal reflection on experience. Personal reflection is also a key element of Ignatian spirituality.

Ignatian Spirituality

Ignatian spirituality is the spirituality based on the experiences and writings of Ignatius of Loyola, a sixteenth-century soldier, mystic and saint. This spirituality presupposes that God is present in Scripture and the Church. It goes further, however, and asserts that God can also be found in the everyday world around us. Accordingly, Ignatian spirituality provides tools to assist a person in recognizing and discerning God's voice amidst the busyness of daily life. It presupposes that Christ has an invitation or calling for each person. Ignatian spirituality helps a person to hear this call and respond to Christ with love.

This exploring of relationship with Christ occurs through prayers, such as Gospel contemplation, meditation and the Examen. Such prayer gradually informs what a person says, does and decides in daily life. However, it does not end here. Actions, experiences and desires from daily life are brought back to the Lord in prayer. In this way, there is continual interaction between the two aspects of prayer and daily life

¹⁰ Ann Cunliffe and Julie Wilson, "Can Leadership Be Taught?" in *The Routledge Companion to Leadership*, ed. John Storey, Jean Hartley et al. (New York: Routledge, 2017), 532.

experience; there is a balancing of contemplation and action. Accordingly, it is a spirituality that is open to both the practical and the mystical. The aim is a drawing closer to God, a deepening of relationship with Christ.

The Spiritual Exercises

All essential aspects of Ignatian Spirituality spring from *The Spiritual Exercises*. This is a retreat consisting of prayer material written by St. Ignatius. This material can be prayed during 30 days of silence at a retreat house or for nine months over the course of daily life.

The specific content is divided into four main parts or “weeks.”¹¹ Each week has its own theme or dynamic. For instance, during the First Week, the retreatant is invited to recognize and have a felt experience of self as a sinner as well as someone who is loved deeply by God. As the retreatant prays various contemplations, meditations and other exercises of the retreat, he or she experiences movements in the soul. The retreatant is encouraged to notice these movements. Gradually through the Exercises, the retreatant is invited to put aside disordered attachments (aspects of life that lack freedom), recognize God’s invitation more clearly, and finally, respond generously to God’s call in daily life—this is what leads to salvation.¹² This is not an easy process. Through the Exercises, however, retreatants are often blessed with an intimate union with Christ; a person “...acquires the style of Jesus, his

¹¹ Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, trans. Louis Puhl (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1951), #4.

¹² Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, #1.

feelings, his choices.”¹³ It is this relationship with Christ that changes the person. It is Christ who inspires a sense of mission and a desire to share God’s love with others in the world today.

How did Ignatius himself view the Exercises? We catch a glimpse in a letter he wrote to Fr. Manuel Miona in 1536. Ignatius writes, “The Spiritual Exercises are all the best that I have been able to think out, experience and understand in this life, both for helping somebody to make the most of themselves, as also for being able to bring advantage, help and profit to many others.”¹⁴

Leadership and the Spiritual Exercises

Is there a relation between the Spiritual Exercises and leadership? If so, what does this look like practically?

Below we will examine how the form, content and spirit of Ignatius’ Spiritual Exercises denote elements of an Ignatian leader. This article is not meant to be a comprehensive examination of this topic. Rather more modestly, it offers points for reflection, prayer and discussion for people who are interested in Ignatian spirituality or who engage in some form of leadership. We will consider four elements: interacting directly with God, flexibility, depth and the paradox of surrender.

¹³ “Decree 1: Companions in a Mission of Reconciliation and Justice.” in *Jesuit Life and Mission Today: The Decrees & Accompanying Documents of the 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus* (Boston: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2017), par. 18.

¹⁴ Letter to Rev. Fr. Manuel Miona, 16 November 1536. Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *Saint Ignatius of Loyola—Personal Writings: Select Letters*, trans. Joseph Munitiz and Philip Endean (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 139.

Considering Elements of an Ignatian Leader

1. Interacting Directly with God

“But while one is engaged in the Spiritual Exercises, it is more suitable and much better that the Creator and Lord in person communicate Himself to the devout soul in quest of the divine will, that He inflame it with His love and praise, and dispose it for the way in which it could better serve God in the future. Therefore the director of the Exercises, as a balance at equilibrium, without leaning to one side or the other, should permit the Creator to deal directly with the creature, and the creature directly with his Creator and Lord”¹⁵

In the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius very rarely refers to the person who accompanies the retreatant as “the director,” but rather, as “the one who gives the exercises.”¹⁶ This choice of words may seem odd, even cumbersome. An important point, however, underlies this distinction. The role of the person who gives the exercises is not to direct the retreatant, but instead, to encourage the retreatant to interact directly with God.

The prayer style known as Ignatian contemplation is an example of this and is used extensively throughout the Exercises. It invites the person praying to not simply read the Gospel text, but more profoundly, to enter into and become an active part of the scene. The person is invited to interact with the characters within the context of the particular Gospel story. Most importantly, the person praying is invited to interact directly

¹⁵ Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, #15.

¹⁶ Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, #6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14 etc.

with Jesus, whether this be walking with him, eating with him, expressing a deep desire to Jesus, listening to Jesus or simply being with Jesus and letting Jesus embrace him or her. By way of this interaction and time spent together, the retreatant slowly learns from Jesus, lingers in his blessing and is gradually changed by Jesus.

For people accustomed to Ignatian prayer, this type of interaction may seem obvious or natural; it can be easily taken for granted. However, not all prayer traditions aim for such interaction.¹⁷ Ignatius presumes that, by the grace of God, a person can interact directly with God in prayer—this is no small grace. The dynamics and effect of the Exercises rely heavily on this generous gift from God.

Can this grace of direct interaction with God be extended beyond the experience of prayer? Can leaders and leadership benefit from such grace?

The teacher is a leader in the classroom. If we apply this principle from the Exercises, it affects the way we perceive the role of teacher. A primary task of the teacher is to convey content to the students, for example, by giving lectures, having students read a textbook or presenting a video. From an Ignatian perspective, however, a teacher has a more profound and valuable role than conveying content: it is to encourage students to interact directly with truth. Jesuit education emphasizes activity on the part of the student, rather than passive

¹⁷ For example, the Carmelite tradition of contemplation is one that does not rely on words, images or the sensual. Contemplation is viewed as an infused gift from God that a person receives rather than actively creates. Carmelite Sisters of the Most Sacred Heart of Los Angeles, *Meditation and Contemplation—What is the Difference?* (2020), accessed 3 June 2020: <https://carmelitesistersoecd.com/2013/meditation-contemplation/>.

reception, and encourages the student to learn independently of the teacher.¹⁸

Inviting such direct interaction with the truth requires great tact and creativity. At times, it is more convenient or expedient for the teacher to provide an answer or conclusion directly. Great patience is required to wait for a student to receive some material, grapple with what is unknown and then discover the truth for himself or herself.¹⁹ In practising this Ignatian ideal, there is also a risk that the student may not arrive at the answer today. If a teacher (or any leader), however, chooses to ask a question that inspires exploration, rather than give a direct answer, then the teacher allows the student time and space to develop. In this way, the student is not merely gaining knowledge about a specific topic, but rather, being formed as a human being. Through this process of discovery, the student acquires a deeper and more memorable appreciation of something. By demonstrating such patience, the teacher or leader is also imitating God’s abundant patience with us.

¹⁸ Jesuit Institute, *The Characteristics of Jesuit Education*, par. 45 (1986), accessed 3 June 2020: <http://jesuitinstitute.org/Resources/Characteristics%20of%20Jesuit%20Education.pdf>.

¹⁹ For example, instead of listing the rules of refraction of light, the teacher may provide students with a convex lens and a light source. The students are invited to experiment creatively. Reflecting on the results, students take note of any patterns and discover rules for themselves. In another field, instead of explaining the meaning of a poem, the teacher may invite a student first to read it out loud and then notice any emotions it evokes. This noticing of emotion and the sensual aspects of the poem can enhance intellectual understanding. It can help the student have a felt experience of the art of poetry.

Subsidiarity

There is a further advantage of a leader allowing a person or group to interact directly with God. This method allows the people involved to have a deeper sense of participation and ownership of the fruits produced over the course of a project or process.

An Ignatian leader, for example, provides support and guidance for a team. However, if the leader notices that the members of the team have the ability to move toward the goal on their own, then this leader steps back and allows the group to move in this direction as independently as possible.

This is risky. The people may not arrive at the goal. They may make mistakes or end up using time, money or other resources inefficiently. However, if they can achieve the goal without undue directing, then the beauty and sense of fulfilment of their achievement are magnified.

Approximately 2500 years ago, the Chinese sage, Lao Tzu, reflected on leadership in this way:

The highest type of ruler is one of whose existence the people are barely aware.

Next comes one whom they love and praise.

Next comes one whom they fear.

Next comes one whom they despise and defy.

When you are lacking in faith,

Others will be unfaithful to you.

The sage is self-effacing and scanty of words.

When his task is accomplished and things have been completed,

All the people say, “We ourselves have achieved it!”²⁰

Lao Tzu lists various kinds of leaders: one who is detested, one who is feared and one who is adored. Yet there is one leader greater than any of these. It is the leader whom people hardly notice. It is the leader reserved enough to allow the people to express their gifts, take responsibility and move toward the goal with little or no interference.²¹ The result is that the people are naturally inspired by their own sense of accomplishment.

This may sound easy. However, to guide in this way, a leader requires a deep appreciation of his or her own value. After all, the credit for any success that the group receives may not fall to him or her. The leader needs to be free from the craving for affirmation. If the leader is not grounded in his or her personal value, then the leader will be tempted to take hold of the reigns and so—directly or indirectly—inhibit others from stepping up and manifesting their gifts.

This idea, implicit in the Spiritual Exercises, also corresponds to the Church’s social teaching. The principle of subsidiarity holds that “functions of government should be performed at the lowest level

²⁰ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, trans. John C.H. Wu (Boston: Shambhala, 1961), #17.

²¹ Such letting go of control is sometimes known as “enabling leadership” and is well suited to our modern knowledge economy. Clarke, *Relational Leadership: Theory, Practice and Development*, 139.

possible, as long as they can be performed adequately.”²² ²³ This describes governments but can also apply to businesses, parishes and families. If someone is able to do a task independently, this person should be allowed the opportunity to do so—to express his or her gifts freely.²⁴ Subsidiarity, in other words, opposes a dictatorship or undue control from above. Rather, it affords people at every level freedom to develop, increases their sense of responsibility and ultimately contributes to the common good.²⁵

How does a leader, then, invite people to interact directly with God? How does an Ignatian leader ask people to explore the truth, explore beauty or explore goodness? There are myriad ways. An Ignatian leader may choose to ask a question instead of giving an answer. An Ignatian leader can tell a story that inspires curiosity or that motivates the listener to look deeper. An Ignatian leader can invite people to reflect on the experience of daily life so that they themselves notice the ways God is already speaking to them or interacting with them.

²² Development and Peace: Caritas Canada, *Subsidiarity and the Role of Government* (2018), accessed 3 June 2020:

<https://www.devp.org/en/cst/subsidiarity>.

²³ The first Pope to formally describe subsidiarity was Pius XI, “...it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do.” Pope Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, par. 79 (1931), accessed 3 June 2020: http://w2.vatican.va/content/pius-xi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo-anno.html.

²⁴ Subsidiarity helps a team to move forward when members are first adequately educated or trained to carry out the tasks related to a project.

²⁵ Pope Francis, *Laudato Si*, par. 196 (2015), accessed 3 June 2020: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html.

2. Flexibility

The Spiritual Exercises must be adapted to the condition of the one who is to engage in them, that is, to the retreatant’s age, education, and talent.²⁶

Ignatius stresses that the form and content of the Exercises are to be adjusted to suit the situation or needs of the person praying. For example, in annotation 4, Ignatius states that the length of each week (each section of the retreat) is not fixed, but rather, open to shortening or lengthening. Ignatius also prescribes flexibility in relation to prayer content, listing various options for praying with materials of the Second Week and Third Week.²⁷ This spirit of flexibility also extends to the physical. Ignatius discusses how prayer posture is adaptable and that the number of prayer periods per day may be adjusted according to physical considerations such as weakness or exhaustion.²⁸

What is the criterion for such adjustment? It is whatever will help the retreatant attain “the fruit that is proper to the matter assigned.”²⁹ In other words, the standard to consider is what will help the retreatant have a felt experience of the grace or essential theme of that particular exercise.

Ignatius did not wish the Exercises to be given rigidly. This does not mean, however, that anything goes. Rather, adjustments are made in

²⁶ Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, #18.

²⁷ Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, #162, 209.

²⁸ Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, #76, 129.

²⁹ Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, #4.

light of what will draw the retreatant closer to God. Accordingly, an Ignatian leader guides people with a heart that is flexible.

What particular criteria, then, exist to provide some boundaries or reference for such flexibility? What determines whether an adjustment should be made to a situation or whether a leader should simply leave it unchanged?

Flexibility: Observe the Fruits

Jesus illustrates that if we want to identify the nature of something, then we should look at its fruits.³⁰ The Spiritual Exercises encourage a retreatant to look at the fruits—the fruit of prayer, relationships, habits, life experiences, etc.. More specifically, Ignatius invites the retreatant to look at two particular fruits: (a) consolation—what increases faith, hope and love in the soul and (b) desolation—what results in a lack of faith, hope or love.³¹ The heart or essential meaning of consolation is a movement—being drawn closer to God. Desolation is also essentially a movement—being drawn away from God. Since consolation and desolation both involve direction, noticing such direction is key to discernment.

An Ignatian leader, then, notices the fruit. If the predominant fruit of a particular relationship, project, or new way of operating within the organization consistently draws the group closer to God, then this is affirmation that the group is cooperating with God. However, if it is discovered that the consistent and main fruit of a particular relationship,

³⁰ “No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit; for each tree is known by its own fruit.” Luke 6:43-44 NRSV.

³¹ Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, #316, 317.

project, behaviour or way of proceeding is unhealthy and is drawing people away from God as the centre of their lives, then this indicates that something needs to be changed.

Intriguingly, consolation and desolation can be observed at the level of the individual, as well as at the level of the community. Peter Bisson, S.J. articulates this difference when describing discernment in common (group discernment).³² Communal or group consolation, for instance, is specifically manifest as creativity, respect among group members, mutual trust and a sense of hope for the future present among the team. Communal desolation, in contrast, commonly manifests as a predominant sense of fear, mistrust, hanging on to past hurts or competition between group members. Many of these movements are recognizable whether or not the group is Christian; these fruits are valid in both religious and secular contexts. The leader does not need to use explicitly Ignatian language or terms; the importance is the observation of fruits and then acting accordingly. In fact, Ignatius provides suggestions concerning how to act during a time of consolation and how to act during a period of desolation.³³

³² Additional signs of communal consolation: the group is aware of God’s presence among them, there is a sense of hope for the future, group members listen to one another listen, talents of members are recognized and used toward shared goals, the group is able to move forward in creative ways, the group recognizes that they are more than the sum of their parts. Additional signs of communal desolation: the group cannot sense God’s presence, fear or hopelessness predominates group interactions, members are preoccupied with personal agendas, the group is fixated on old ways of proceeding, members do not feel free to express true feelings or opinions, there is an absence of humour and unity. Peter Bisson, Elaine Regan-Nightingale & Earl Smith, *Communal Apostolic Discernment: A Toolkit*. Document currently in draft stage. (Toronto, 2014), 59-60.

³³ For example, in a time of desolation, do not hastily change what was decided during a period of consolation. Instead, learn from this experience. Reflect back

Noticing consolation and desolation, however, has its challenges. Often the pressures of work do not encourage us to pause and examine fruits. Instead it is easy to become overly focused on completing a task rather than considering its quality or direction. Further, the fruit at the beginning may differ from the fruit after a period of time has passed. Life is rarely black or white; it is often a mixture of consolation and desolation.

In order to arrive at greater clarity then, Ignatius invites us to look at the beginning of something, its middle and end.³⁴ If the predominant fruits of all three periods are consolation, a focus on God and what leads us to cooperate with God, then this indicates that the individual or group is on the right path. If one or more of these periods produces something unhealthy or predominantly leads away from God, then the leader needs to be flexible and free enough to consider a change.

Flexibility: Observe Ends and Means

Another criterion for flexibility and deciding on whether or not to make a change is to consider if the means are suited to the end. In the section of the Spiritual Exercises known as the Principle and Foundation,³⁵ Ignatius invites the retreatant to consider that all the things on the face of the earth are to be used to attain the end for which human beings have been created. That is, a person is to interact with

to see what led to the onset of this desolation. Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, #318-324.

³⁴ Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, #333.

³⁵ Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, #23.

things in so far as they help the person “...praise, reverence and serve God our Lord, and by this means save his [or her] soul.”³⁶

We are to engage with people and utilize the resources of this world to the degree to which they help us give glory to God. In other words, things in themselves should not become our focus; they are means to a greater end. This may seem obvious. Practically, however, it is easy to confuse means and ends.

“I must not subject and fit the end to the means, but the means to the ends. Many first choose marriage, which is a means, and secondarily the service of God our Lord in marriage, though the service of God is the end.”³⁷ In this part of the Exercises, Ignatius asserts that, when discerning a calling in life, the first step should be to ask the Lord which state of life (i.e. marriage, the single life, the religious life) will bring God the greatest glory and then proceed accordingly.

So as we reflect on leadership, keeping means ordered toward an end is just as important, and this principle is evident in the work performed by the group. For instance, a person or group can be so engrossed with completing a project, that it results in an unhealthy drive to finish. In the process of completing the work, relationships are harmed, personal needs are neglected (e.g. balance, rest, prayer, etc.)³⁸, and environmental resources are not used in a sustainable way. In the end,

³⁶ Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, #23.

³⁷ Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, #169.

³⁸ Self-care is sometimes an aspect that is neglected in the process of completing a project. Intentionally taking time for self-care allows a leader to fulfill physical, psychological and spiritual needs that can result in better long-term health as well as greater fruit for the mission.

the battle is won, but the war is lost. For the sake of a short-term gain, the group has put aside fidelity to deeper values.

This discussion of means and ends relates deeply to daily life activities. There are subtle ways that ends can be subsumed to means. Sometimes a business, parish or group continues to perform an activity even though the activity no longer supports the mission. For example, an activity is carried out this year because it was carried out last year or in previous years. There may be little reflection or evaluation of the relevance of this project to the current mission of the group. This can lead to a kind of “clutter” within the organization, as new activities are added on while old ones are maintained. Ultimately, this can engender a dissipation of resources, decreased sense of satisfaction among the team, a lack of connection with the people whom the group serves and difficulty focusing on meaningful goals.

A group may discover that in order to live out the mission more fully it does not need to do more; rather, it needs to do less. An Ignatian leader is not afraid to consider how a streamlining of process or a reduction in activities can help a group move closer to its ultimate purpose or end. Doing less or doing something more simply can sometimes give a clearer witness to Christ.

The Exercises encourage a leader to consider the mission of the community or group at the beginning, middle and end of a project. In practical application, if I am a leader, how familiar am I with the group’s mission statement and values? Do I find that these are relevant today? Do they need to be updated? Is this particular project commensurate or in tension with the group’s overarching mission, vision and values? Are

the methods of implementing the project also consistent with the overall values of the group? Are people being respected in the process of implementation or are they being objectified? More essentially, is God calling us to implement this project? These questions require patience, perspective, flexibility and great courage to answer.

An Ignatian leader considers the ultimate end regularly since this informs the process being carried out today. This principle flows from Jesus’ own encouragement: “No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.”³⁹ On one hand, Jesus invites the listener to avoid hesitation when following him. More positively, however, Jesus also exhorts the listener to look toward the goal and keep the distant target in view. If the group tends to stray from the path, as human beings sometimes do, a good leader is not afraid to make an adjustment to help the group return to the way which leads to the authentic and ultimate end.

Flexibility: Let the Macro and Micro Complement Each Other

There is one more aspect of flexibility that can guide leaders: fruits can be observed at the level of macro and the level of micro. An example of this wisdom is manifest in Ignatius’ description of the Election in the Second Week, more specifically, as he describes ways of “making a good and correct choice.”⁴⁰

In this section, Ignatius invites the retreatant to consider two ways to approach a choice at hand. The first method is to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of the options. Using the intellect, the retreatant

³⁹ Luke 9:62 NRSV.

⁴⁰ Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, #178-188.

considers the practical elements and reasons: What are the advantages of choosing A? What are the disadvantages of choosing A? Such brainstorming may include anything from salary considerations to accessibility to public transportation, from proximity to a good school for the children to the local level of pollution. A chart can be used to list out the various advantages and disadvantages of each option.

The second method Ignatius presents is a set of scenarios for the retreatant to consider: How would I advise a third person in my situation to choose? At the moment of my death when I look back on my life, what option would I wish to have chosen at this point in my life? At the final judgment, which option would I be most pleased to tell Jesus I chose at this moment of my life? These cases invite the retreatant to step back and gain a larger perspective.

There is a simple but profound internal logic at work here. Ignatius invites the retreatant to consider the details in the first method. Then he invites the retreatant to step back and gain perspective on the broader context. These methods complement each other. Often one or the other of the methods will help the retreatant come to clarity regarding Christ's voice or invitation.

An Ignatian leader strikes a balance, paying attention to the details of daily life as well as the broader mission. Specifics are important, yet an Ignatian leader resists the temptation to get caught up in details or spend an inordinate amount of time on minutia. Conversely, stepping

back and looking at the larger picture can provide valuable perspectives. Yet, this too must be balanced with definite actions in daily life.⁴¹

Considering micro and macro dimensions relates closely to reflection on means and ends. These all relate to an examination of fruits. They provide useful information when considering if a change is appropriate or if a situation should be left as it is. These considerations help leaders to be flexible in an Ignatian way.

3. Depth

“The complexity of the problems we face and the richness of the opportunities offered demand that we build bridges between rich and poor, establishing advocacy links of mutual support between those who hold political power and those who find it difficult to voice their interests. Our intellectual apostolate provides an inestimable help in constructing these bridges, offering us new ways of understanding in depth the mechanisms and links among our present problems.”⁴²

Looking deeper allows us to discover patterns in the nature of things. It helps us to see challenges more clearly—including their root causes—and consider ways to address these for the benefit of individuals

⁴¹ Consider the final years of Ignatius. A man who once walked vast distances and sailed to the Middle East, chose to remain in small rooms in Rome during his last years. From here he wrote (or dictated) between 6000 and 7000 letters concerning matters such as administration of the Society of Jesus, personal friendship and spiritual direction. Ignatius found that administrative work—when performed with balance—was not a waste of time, but rather, an invaluable tool for the advancement of the Society as well as the progress of individual souls. Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *Saint Ignatius of Loyola—Personal Writings: Select Letters*, 113.

⁴² “Decree 3: Challenges to Our Mission Today,” in *Jesuit Life and Mission Today: The Decrees & Accompanying Documents of the 31st-35th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus*, ed. John Padberg (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2009). par. 28.

and society. We see this dynamic of taking a deeper look as present within the Spiritual Exercises.

For example, in the meditation on the Two Standards, Ignatius reflects on the nature of good and evil. He invites the retreatant to notice a pattern. Evil tempts in stages: “The first step, then, will be riches, the second honour, the third pride. From these three steps the evil one leads to all other vices.”⁴³ Ignatius explains that being drawn away from God does not happen all at once. Rather, there is a slippery slope: one first concedes to something that does not appear terribly dangerous, yet this subtly and steadily leads to serious sin and significant distance from God. Ignatius then articulates another and contrary pattern. Jesus invites people to poverty as opposed to riches, insults as opposed to worldly honours and humility as opposed to pride. From these three, Jesus leads us to all other virtues.⁴⁴

Through this meditation, Ignatius invites the retreatant to consider if the patterns above manifest in his or her own experience. Eventually, if the retreatant is able to recognize evil more quickly in the future, then he or she will be more likely to break free from its pattern. The meditation on the Two Standards also provides the retreatant with the chance to notice (as well as savour) the ways Jesus leads him or her to what is holy, good, beautiful and true.

In summary, Ignatius fosters a deeper understanding through first articulating a pattern but then leaving space for the retreatant to reflect and find connections with personal experience.

⁴³ Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, #142.

⁴⁴ Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, #146.

This same dynamic is also present in the First Week of the Exercises when the retreatant considers the topic of sin.⁴⁵ Ignatius does not simply ask the retreatant to examine sin in his or her life. Instead, Ignatius utilizes an approach that inspires a deeper understanding. He invites the retreatant to notice that, before any human being sinned, sin was committed on a cosmic level—the sin of the angels. The retreatant first takes time to pray with this story. Secondly, there was the sin of Adam and Eve, original sin—sin on the level of humanity. The retreatant slowly reflects on sin and its effects as described in Genesis. Thirdly, Ignatius invites the retreatant to consider a mortal sin committed by an unnamed third person. Through this ordering of material, Ignatius invites the retreatant to realize that the choice to sin made by someone today is related to and affected by a larger context of sin. By noticing these dimensions of sin, the retreatant is able to understand the nature of sin more deeply.

It is only after such reflection that Ignatius invites the retreatant to review his or her own life and personal sins.⁴⁶ The retreatant is thus able to reflect on sin in the context of human relationships, creation and relationship with God. Since the retreatant has been prepared by way of the material above, he or she can now pray more practically and profoundly. Accordingly, retreatants often not only notice their own sins but also issues of structural sin present in their society and world today.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, #45-54.

⁴⁶ Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, #55-61.

⁴⁷ Structural sin refers to the ways in which social or economic structures of a culture systematically resist God’s grace. Structural sin transcends the sin of an individual person; it describes a collective way of thinking or acting that is sinful yet has become engrained in a society. Modern and historical examples include preference or privilege given to male children over female, over-reliance on oil

Ignatius then goes one step further. In the Third Exercise⁴⁸ of this same First Week, he invites the retreatant to ask for the grace of understanding—this is a chance to look at the root of sin in his or her life. What is causing sin, especially those sins that emerge again and again in life? This opportunity to pause and reflect more deeply on personal sin as well as the nature of sin itself can become a moment of grace. Retreatants sometimes realize for the first time that a particular sin present in his or her life today is related to some specific experience of hurt or trauma from the past. Beneath this sin there is a deeper need that lies unrecognized, such as the need for healing, safety, acceptance, authentic intimacy or simply to be loved. Sin is often an unhealthy and unsuccessful attempt to fulfill this underlying but healthy need. If a retreatant is able to see and understand this, he or she can bring this need to Jesus. Perhaps for the first time in life, the retreatant can ask the Lord directly to fulfill this need.

How does this relate to leadership? When a leader realizes that the group is facing a challenge, how does he or she respond? There is perhaps an instinct to remedy the problem as soon as possible. In this way, the team can move on to other pressing issues. What would it be like, however, to pause instead and look deeper? What if the leader and team took time to reflect together?

What has led to this situation of challenge? What is the context or background? Is this current situation part of a pattern? If similar challenges are emerging regularly, is it possible that there is a deeper

and single-use plastics, and legalized discrimination against once race within a society.

⁴⁸ Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, #62-63.

need that is not being addressed? This could be a need within the team, a need of the people whom the team serves, or a need of the people with whom the team cooperates.⁴⁹ Once the need has been acknowledged, the team can then consider how it can be addressed more appropriately.

Good leaders reflect on experience. What would it be like to learn from the Two Standards, to pause together with the team and reflect upon team dynamics?⁵⁰ How does the enemy try to distract our team from attaining our goals? Are there any specific ways that the enemy draws us into squandering time, energy or other resources? How does the enemy try to blind us to see the good work we are already doing, the good fruit we are already producing? Perhaps more profoundly, amidst the busyness of daily life, when have we most clearly felt God present in our team? What does the Lord do or say to us that encourages us as a team to keep serving others with generosity and love amidst the

⁴⁹ There are many ways to identify and articulate deeper needs. Surveys, analyzing current trends in the broader society, and consulting with universities or other research institutes can bring to light useful information and trends. Time for reflection as well as communication—within the team and beyond—often benefits this process.

⁵⁰ Given the demands of work, a team day of reflection may seem like an unaffordable luxury. Yet, such an opportunity to reflect, share, listen to each other, and listen to Christ’s voice can be a turning point for team dynamics. “Spiritual conversation” involves taking account of inner movements, both individual and communal, and then sharing the fruits of this reflection with others. The content of conversation does not need to be a religious topic, but rather, can be any work or service done by the team. Respectful listening to others and then expressing what has stirred a person most deeply creates at an atmosphere of trust and welcome. Such spiritual conversation is encouraged by the latest Jesuit General Congregation. “Decree 1: Companions in a Mission of Reconciliation and Justice.” in *Jesuit Life and Mission Today: The Decrees & Accompanying Documents of the 36th General Congregation of the Society of Jesus* (Boston: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2017), par. 12.

difficulties of modern society? Such communal reflection takes time but leads to greater depth and richer fruits.

As a particular example of group reflection that looks deeper, consider something that is unsightly by worldly standards—failure. Failure is a terribly painful thing. It hurts tremendously when we are unable to achieve what we desire or expect. When we fail, we not only feel pain from within; we naturally consider how others will view or judge us in light of this failure. Ignatius experienced failure in his life. At the battle of Pamplona, not only was his leg seriously injured, to add insult to injury, he and his companions clearly lost the battle. Yet we now know God used this failure and subsequent time of recovery to lead Ignatius to reflect on his life. This failure ultimately altered the course of Ignatius' life for the better. This very painful experience of loss became an instrument of grace.

According to worldly standards, Jesus was a failure. In the end, he was abandoned by friends and was tortured to death. We also know that Jesus' death was not the end of the story, nor the end of God's work. It was the beginning of abundant life through the resurrection. Leaders and teams will fail. How does the leader view this failure? How does the team view this failure? Is it possible to find any meaning in this failure? If we dare to ask these challenging questions, they can lead to a greater depth of understanding concerning the meaning of work. Such discussion can also establish deeper bonds between team members, including the leader. This confirms the notion that leadership is not about one person, rather, leadership is deeply relational.

4. The Paradox of Surrender

“For one must keep in mind that in all that concerns the spiritual life his progress will be in proportion to his surrender of self-love and of his own will and interests.”⁵¹

A good leader naturally wants a group to progress and reach its goals. So what happens when a challenge obstructs progress, or worse, makes it seem as though there is no way forward? What does a leader do when there is no apparent way to resolve an issue? At such times, it may seem advantageous for the leader to assert greater control over a situation or the people involved. A voice whispers: the more you control, the better; the harder you push, the more progress; rely on strength and force.

In the Spiritual Exercises, Ignatius posits something radically different: authentic progress depends, not on control or will power, but rather on the degree to which a person surrenders to God. Progress relates to how deeply someone is willing to place control in God’s hands.

Yet, is this reasonable? Is this not, rather, foolish or at the very least an escape? Perhaps. Yet when one steps back and considers, that for Ignatius, the greatest leader of all is the Lord, then this option is at least worth exploring. For Ignatius, progress depends on the extent to which a person is willing to put aside any self-centred tendencies and place one’s will at the disposal of God, who is the paradigm of leaders.

How is this to be done? Is Ignatius advising us to forsake our faculties and become passive observers to God’s work? Not so. Rather,

⁵¹ Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, #189.

an Ignatian leader deliberately allows the Lord to take the reigns. An Ignatian leader places his or her faculties in the Lord's hands and then actively cooperates with the Lord's lead. It is a surrender of control, not a renunciation of action.

This willingness to let God lead, however, is risky. It takes courage. We do not know what God will do or ask of us if we surrender. We do not know what new endeavour the Lord will ask us to take up or what project he will ask us to put down. It makes us vulnerable. Yet Jesus himself chose to live with courage and vulnerability in just this way:

Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus,
who, though he was in the form of God,
did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited,
but emptied himself...⁵²

Jesus chose to empty himself and follow the Father's invitation for his life completely. The Greek term for this self-emptying is *kenosis* and is predicated on Jesus' deep humility and obedience to God the Father.⁵³ For Jesus, this choice entailed immense sacrifice and intense pain. It was neither easy nor comfortable. Yet he held firm faith that God's way is indeed best. Such self-emptying and surrender, not only determines how and where Jesus lived out his ministry on a daily basis, it is what led Jesus through his darkest suffering and to the ultimate fulfilment of God's desires for him. In the Garden of Gethsemane, when faced with the prospect of intense suffering, it is Jesus' surrender to God the

⁵² Philippians 2:5-7 NRSV.

⁵³ Ingvild Røsok, "Unconditional Surrender and Love: How Spirituality Illuminates the Spirituality of Karl Rahner," in *The Way* (Oxford, England: The British Jesuits Oct. 2011, Vol. 50 Issue 4): 122.

Father⁵⁴ that leads to his death. It is this same surrender that leads to his definitive victory through the resurrection. This surrender leads to new life for him and many, many others.

The Spiritual Exercises encourage a leader to live in this way. The Exercises help us recognize that we are indeed sinners with limitations. Paradoxically, this is not a drawback, but rather, a way forward. Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner explains that when we admit our own limitations and finiteness, we open ourselves to something greater—we become aware that there is something infinite beyond us. Rahner holds that “...man is in so far as he abandons himself to the absolute mystery whom we call God.”⁵⁵ In other words, such surrender to God infinite actually allows us to be most fully who we are called to be, to be most fully human.

If Rahner’s words seem abstract, perhaps we can see this paradox more plainly through an example, the life of Mother Teresa. In 1928 she entered religious life by joining the Loreto Nuns in Ireland. The next year she was sent to serve in Calcutta, India. There she taught religious studies and geography at a Loreto school for 15 years. She eventually became principal. Her life seemed quite settled.

On 10 September 1946, however, while riding a train to Darjeeling, she had an experience of God that changed her life irrevocably.⁵⁶ God

⁵⁴ “Then he withdrew from them about a stone’s throw, knelt down, and prayed, ‘Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done.’” Luke 22:41-42 NRSV.

⁵⁵ Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Seabury Press, 1968), 218.

⁵⁶ Joseph Langford, *Mother Teresa’s Secret Fire* (Huntington Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor, 2008), 42-47.

allowed Teresa to feel Jesus' deep thirst on the cross.⁵⁷ She understood Jesus has a profound desire to love every human being and to be loved by every human being. God communicated to Teresa that she was to go to the slums of Calcutta and express Christ's unconditional love to the poorest of the poor. She decided to follow this voice.

Yet how was she to do this? Many questions swirled. Would she have to leave the Loreto Sisters? She had promised to be a Loreto Sister for the rest of her life. How could she serve so many people? Would people view her choice as naïve, idealistic or futile?

The decision to leave Loreto and follow God's voice made her vulnerable in many ways.⁵⁸ It took great courage to step away from the stability offered by the Loreto Sisters and to try something drastically different. This is self-emptying exemplified. This choice is a reflection of the *kenosis* we see in Jesus' own life. It was precipitated by a humble and profound faith in God.

It is in this abandoning of her life direction into the hands of God infinite that allowed something greater to emerge. Mother Teresa's radical and loving acceptance of God's invitation to serve the poor, sick and dying, gradually attracted a group of followers. The first companion arrived in 1949 and the group grew to twelve by 1950.⁵⁹ Eventually,

⁵⁷ For Mother Teresa, Jesus' words on the cross, "I thirst" (John 19:28) were instrumental in her choosing this path. She understood deeply the mystery of God's thirst revealed in Jesus. God's yearning to love and be loved is a force that inspires all God's works. She discovered that God was further asking her to be an instrument of this love. Langford, *Mother Teresa's Secret Fire*, 77-80.

⁵⁸ Mother Teresa left the convent with five rupees in her pocket. Langford, *Mother Teresa's Secret Fire*, 28.

⁵⁹ Missionaries of Charity, *About the Missionaries of Charity* (2020), accessed 3 June 2020: <https://www.motherteresa.org/missionaries-of-charity.html>.

Mother Teresa became the leader of the congregation known as the Missionaries of Charity. This group now numbers more than 5000 members and serves the poorest of the poor in 139 countries.⁶⁰ By abandoning herself to God’s lead, she discovered a deeper vocation and led others to do the same.

Such surrender is indeed delicate. It requires prayer and honest communication with God. It requires deep faith to accept that God’s path is better than any other, even when we cannot see how. What leads to progress is paradoxical.⁶¹ Examining the fruits of such surrender, however, reveals its inherent goodness. An Ignatian leader recognizes surrender to God not as act of weakness, but rather, as an act of wisdom.⁶² When a leader surrenders and allows God to lead, then it is God, the best of all leaders, that leads the leader and the group.

In this way, we see Ignatius’ own prayer in the final section of the Spiritual Exercises in a new light. It is a deliberate, wise and loving

⁶⁰ Missionaries of Charity, *About the Missionaries of Charity* (2020).

⁶¹ The Trappist monk and mystic, Thomas Merton agrees with this view. He holds, “The whole Christian life is a life in which the further a person progresses, the more he or she has to depend directly on God. The more we progress, the less we are self-sufficient. The more we progress, the poorer we get so that the person who has progressed the most is totally poor and depends directly on God.” Thomas Merton, *Monastic Spirituality* (cassette tape AA2083) cited in Richard Boileau, “Falling in Love with God,” in *The Way* (Oxford, England: The British Jesuits Apr. 2014, Vol. 53 Issue 2): 18.

⁶² The spiritual diary of St. Ignatius provides glimpses into his soul. When faced with decisions about forming the new Society of Jesus, Ignatius had to make decisions that would impact the lives of Jesuits to come. His diary indicates the frequency and importance he placed on seeking God’s preference when making decisions. Ignatius remarks on the value he placed on submission to God. His diary entries from 12 March to 4 April 1544, for example, mention *submission* 29 times. Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *Saint Ignatius of Loyola—Personal Writings: Spiritual Diary*, trans. Joseph Munitiz and Philip Endean (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 100-104.

decision to give all to God so that his life, and the lives of those who pray the Spiritual Exercises, will be more profoundly led by God.

Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty,
my memory, my understanding,
and my entire will,
All I have and call my own.

You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.

Everything is yours; do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace,
that is enough for me.⁶³

Conclusion

As a way of bringing this article to a conclusion, a classic approach would be to reiterate the main points. However, I would like to try something different. Since Ignatius encourages us to reflect on our experience and to interact directly with the truth, why not try this now?

Below are some simple questions—it is enough to choose just one:

As I come to the end of this article, what is in my heart? Is there one point or image that strikes me the most?

⁶³ Loyola Press, *Suscipe: St. Ignatius of Loyola* (2020), accessed 3 June 2020: <https://www.loyolapress.com/our-catholic-faith/prayer/traditional-catholic-prayers/saints/suscipe-prayer-saint-ignatius-of-loyola>.

What is one area of my work where I can give myself or others greater space to interact directly with God (truth, beauty, goodness, holiness)?

As I reflect on my team or community, when is one moment we have experienced communal consolation?

What most commonly distracts my team or community from more deeply living out our vision? Is there a deeper need here? Can I present this need to Jesus?

Do I dare to surrender myself (or my work) to God’s care and leadership?

Jesus is Lord as well as a friend. I can talk to him about anything that surfaces in my heart, any hope, any fear or any question. I pause for a moment to listen, to see if the Lord has anything to say to me. I wait on Jesus...to discover how he desires to lead me.

〔摘要〕本文探討領導才能和依納爵靈修。更具體地說，對於成為一個好領袖的精神和技巧，依納爵·羅耀拉的神操可以提供什麼樣的智慧。本文概述領導才能的基本要素、依納爵靈修和神操；然後闡述神操有四個方面，能有助於建立良好的領導才能。首先，神操和良好的領導才能如何鼓勵人們直接與天主互動，即與真、善、美的事物直接互動。第二，如何通過檢視結果、目的和方法以及微觀和宏觀的形勢來提高領導能力的靈活性。第三，暫時停下來的價值在於更深入了解成敗的原因，從這些經驗中學習。第四，屈從的悖論，如何通過聽任於更高的事物而非增加控制來提高領導的效能。本文還包括有關領導才能的反思問題。

關鍵詞：領導才能、依納爵靈修、神操、分辨、群體動力