



DISCERNING SERVICE

The Leader as Servant and the Ignatian Tradition

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‘What am I trying to do?’ Is one of the easiest questions to ask and the most difficult to answer. A mark of leaders, an attribute that puts them in a position to show the way for others, is that they are better than most at pointing the direction.

— Robert Greenleaf (Greenleaf, 1977, p. 15)

By the grace of God, we are meant to recognize the influencing powers by evaluating those motions which are good so that we might let them give direction to our lives and those which are bad so that we might reject them or turn aside from them.

— Ignatius of Loyola (as cited in Fleming, 2016 p. 247)

Throughout his spiritual autobiography, Ignatius of Loyola humbly refers to himself as “the pilgrim.” Ironically, it is a group of pilgrims in Herman Hesse’s *The Journey to The East* that inspires Robert Greenleaf’s understanding of the servant as leader. In the late 16th century, Ignatius witnessed



and was a product of the turbulent European Reformation — the reason infusion of the Renaissance, and the expansive globalization of the Age of Exploration. Greenleaf, an executive for AT&T throughout the mid-twentieth century, witnessed the American countercultural movement of the nineteen sixties and the institutionalization of the American workplace. Both men provided a concrete vision to promulgate and encourage human flourishing in the midst of change. Ignatius, the founder of the Society of Jesus (or the Jesuits), crafted a concrete spiritual methodology to allow practitioners to search for God in all things. Greenleaf promoted the notion of the servant as leader as a panacea to the corrosive domineering forms of leadership he experienced at the time.

This paper explores points of contact between the spirituality of Ignatius of Loyola and Robert Greenleaf's concept of the servant as leader. To do so, the tenants of Ignatian spirituality will be briefly explored. This exploration will be done with an emphasis of their expression in Jesuit Higher Education, specifically leadership development of lay employees. To aid in this endeavor, servant-leadership will serve as a theory from which to navigate the current changing tide in contemporary Jesuit education: the transition from Jesuit leaders to lay leaders. Historically, leadership within Jesuit institutions of higher education have infringed upon and been insulated by Jesuit formation. As documented by Holtschneider and Morey (2005) the number of Jesuit priests and brothers has and will continue to diminish at Catholic universities. This paper proposes the servant as leader as a potential means to



adequately establish lay leadership while maintaining the Ignatian spirit of Jesuit Education.

THE MOVE TO SCHOOLS: VISION AND FORESIGHT IN DISCERNMENT

In 1540, Ignatius of Loyola created a religious order within the Roman Catholic Church. Over the past 450 years, the order has flourished and blossomed as a global network present in 112 nations on six continents. While Ignatius and his first companions were ordained priests, the scope and breadth of the Society now employ a multitude of vowed religious and lay colleagues. Within the Society, leadership is specific and regimented: provincials in charge of provinces and a Superior General overseeing the entire society. Three guiding documents – Ignatius’ *Autobiography*, *The Constitutions*, and the *Spiritual Exercises* – dictate decision making. Ignatian Spirituality refers specifically to the broad worldview and vision outlined in Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises*. Each Jesuit, an ordained Catholic priest within the Society, is required to make the *Spiritual Exercises* as a 30-day retreat during their formation. The retreat has become widely popular with lay Catholics, Christians, and even non-Christians alike.

Jesuits are most widely known for their institutions of education. Jesuits have 168 tertiary institutions in 40 countries and 324 secondary schools in 55 countries. From the beginning, as O’Malley (1993) notes, “part of the Jesuit style, was learning” (p. 7). The early Society, however, was not formed with an explicit goal of formal education. The eventual



turn toward education carried out by the Jesuits came through a discernment process of paying attention to the needs of the community. Responding to need, Ignatius and the first Jesuits established education as the path to doing God's work here on earth. A true education process presented learning about the world as a way to help students fall in love with the world and work towards its innate glory. This notion flows from the *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus* written by Ignatius:

The end of this Society is to devote itself with God's grace to the salvation and perfection of the members' own souls, but also with great diligence to labor strenuously in giving aid toward the salvation and perfection of the souls of their fellow men [and women]. (Ganss, 1984, section3)

Ignatian scholar Howard Grey (2002) exegetes the above segment of the Constitution into three specific points: "1) Ignatian education is about appropriation, 2) Ignatian education is about the social ramifications of learning, and 3) Ignatian education reconciles a plurality of experiences within a Catholic commitment" (p. 196).

These three points reinforce the implicit discernment of Ignatius and the first Jesuits' initial decision to form schools. This discernment outlines a distinct methodology of Ignatian Spirituality that is still used today. This methodology begins with the incarnation of the divine mediating a loving God who is present and at work in the world. Ignatian spirituality "does not deny the importance of intentional prayer activities, but is more essentially about recognizing the presence and power of God in absolutely everything and in every activity



done for love” (Burke & Burke-Sullivan, 2009, p. xxxv). Discernment then becomes the process by which each of us can “pilot within our heart a kind of ebb and flow of movements through which we can find the will of God” (de Mello, 2010, p. 100). This deep trust is embedded in the Ignatian education model as understanding the world (biologically, chemically, psychologically, mathematically, or theologically) is a tool by the student may learn how her gifts may plurally benefit the common good of society.

Such discernment has been at the heart and soul of Jesuit decision making from Ignatius’ time until today. Ignatian discernment establishes distinct commonality with Greenleaf’s concept of foresight. Foresight emerges as one of ten characteristics of servant-leadership developed by Spears. While attempting to develop a scale for servant-leadership, Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) establish agreement that Greenleaf and Spears “are the most accepted views driving the field, so any operational work on servant leadership should begin with their major tenets” (p. 304). After surveying the literature on servant-leadership, Barbuto and Wheeler (2006) articulate the ten characteristics of servant-leadership developed by Spears: listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, growth, and community building while adding an eleventh: “calling” (p. 300). Leaders use foresight to “anticipate the future for the organization and its members” (Spears, 1995, p. 8). This tends to be seen historically by leaders who are able to use a philosophical or theoretical background and apply it to the



future. Avolio (1999) argues that the ability of leaders to envision the future state of the organization is essential to their effectiveness. Inherent in this ability is both anticipation of the future and knowledge of potential consequences. Bierly, Kessler, and Christensen (2000) have argued that leaders must know the appropriate application and context to guide purposeful action. The notion of application and context provided by Bierly et al. finds deep commonality with Ignatian discernment.

In elaborating how Ignatian discernment is tied explicitly to leadership, O'Malley (1993) states:

Leadership is a gift difficult to analyze, but it consists to a large extent in vision, in the ability to see how a given juncture change is more consistent with one's scope than staying the course. It consists as well in the courage and self-possession required to make the actual decision to change and to convince others of the validity and viability of the new direction. (p. 100)

Theologically speaking, Ignatian discernment centers decision makers on the teleological end all things are directed toward. This teleological focus orients the practitioner as to how each tool can lead self, others, and world toward a continual source: divine love. Foresight, while not specifically rooted in religion, calls for an appropriation of theoretical and philosophical frameworks to aid in future decisions. This is seen explicitly in the Jesuits' initial decision to move from pastoral work to education. The future scope and purview of the institution was informed deeply by the philosophy–Ignatian



Spirituality—at work.

The foresight and discernment at work by the first Jesuits provides a helpful foundation and litmus test for the emergent shift of leadership emerging in Jesuit Universities: the rise of lay leadership. SanFacon and Spears (2011), quoting Greenleaf, surmise the paradoxical nature of working in and on systems:

“Workers work in systems, leaders work on systems.”

Greenleaf identified the system of organization, what he referred to as “people and structure,” as fundamental to better leadership and a better society. Structure relates to how power, rights, and responsibilities are distributed, which encompasses the executive functions. It is, therefore, the metasystem for the enterprise, through which all other systems are controlled and mediated. (p. 119)

Examining the historical formation of the Jesuits, we may explicate certain elements such as discernment, an incarnational God that loves humans *a priori*, and the ways in which we as humans can freely choose to respond to such love as the metasystems at work in the Society. It is these theological precepts that inform the foresight and vision of historical and contemporary Jesuit leaders. Therefore, it is this metasystem that can be transferred and absorbed by lay leaders at Jesuit Universities. To do so, however, there must be an essential connection to a leadership model that orients the leader toward something greater. That leadership model is one that recognizes the servant as leader.



DISCERNMENT AS A TOOL FOR HEALING: INSTITUTIONAL IMPLICATIONS

Our examination of metasystems henceforth has identified the specific positive tools at work within the Jesuit Tradition. It would be remiss to romanticize the tradition without mentioning the shadow side of Jesuit ministries and their colleagues historically. The discernment toward education by the first Jesuits could not have envisioned black slaveholders at Georgetown University, the cross and the sword of Spanish Conquistadors in Latin America, and the child sex-abuse scandal and its cover-up by Roman Catholic church leadership of which many Jesuits were implicated. These realities also form the metasystem(s) inherited by future generations of both Jesuit and lay leaders.

The reality of living into such staunch misuse of power presents an opportunity for two key concepts emergent in servant-leadership and the Ignatian Tradition: tension and healing. Tension within the Ignatian Tradition presents itself around the often paradoxical terms of consolation and desolation. Consolation can be understood as those times in our life in which the head (the empirical) and the heart (the emotive) are in unity and a freedom stems from the joy of living and experiencing the world. Desolation is understood as those times where the head and the heart are in disarray, confusion, and/or opposition. The tension present in the movements from personal consolation to desolation and vice versa serve as an imperative tool to translating such phenomena to institutions.



Discernment, grounded in the theological understanding of a God who both exists in the world and loves each of us deeply a priori, means that the individual discerning is willing to search for God in times of consolation, but also challengingly, in moments of desolation. The human potential to both obscure and confuse the head and the heart serves as reminder to return to grace and find the presence of a loving God in all experiences. Practitioners of the Exercises, then, are urged to move into times of tension. The epistemological cause of such tension lies in the belief of what Lynch refers to as “a defense of contrariety” (Kane, 2016, p. 57). The Ignatian Tradition, seen through the tension of consolation and desolation, defends “the constantly recurring fact that many contraries, instead of constituting alternatives, are mutually creative of each other and cannot live with one another” (Kane, 2016, p. 57). Living “in” the tension means a sense of acceptance of mutuality and coherence that, despite contradiction, God and love are present in light and darkness.

Our discussion has focused on the individual appropriation of discernment surrounding consolation and desolation. How might such terms and concepts be translated and understood institutionally? As we have seen, the consolation of Ignatian discernment regarding a loving God present in the world and foresight orienting institutions toward a greater sense of love are mutually creative with a contextual understanding of evil and atrocity carried out in the name of Jesuits and by Jesuits. To this end, while delivering a speech to a Conference of Catholic Laypeople, Greenleaf (1996) names “healing through listening”



carried out first and foremost by “a mission that accepts that institutions must be cared for before persons can be cared for” (p. 99). Greenleaf acknowledges concretely that to orient an institution toward healing the world, the institution must be willing to do the work of healing itself.

Greenleaf (1996) identifies listening that allows for healing as “intense listening that communicates faith in the capacity of the one talking to heal himself, is advocated as the basic attitude-builder for the healer” (p. 99). Listening serves as the way by which the servant-leader imbedded in the Ignatian Tradition is able to navigate tension surrounding institutional consolations of academic success, work toward social justice, and a greater sense of love and relationship with the desolation of past, present, and recurrent injustices such as slavery, colonialism, consumerism, and racial injustice. Greenleaf’s notion of healing through listening presents a tangible way in which leaders in Jesuit institutions may live with mutual creative realities, past and present, in an honest, caring, and potentially healing way. As we have seen, the head (or mission) of the institution can become disoriented from the actions and intentions (heart) of the institution. Such times, as seen through history, can be understood as times of institutional desolation of which the only cure is active and intense listening. Listening to all parties in an intentional way that attempts to live in the tension can be understood as the only tool to cure the institution before moving forward and engaging outward. This outward expression can be understood as “mission” and it is to what we turn toward next.



SEEKER AND SERVANT: NAMING AND FINDING MISSION AT JESUIT UNIVERSITIES

In his essay “Religious Leaders as Seekers and Servants,” Greenleaf (1996) coins the term “faith as trust” describing it as:

A firm sense of the dependability of the inner resources of one whom as we have said, influences or takes actions that rebind; one whose actions recover and sustain alienated persons as caring, serving, constructive people; one who guides them as they build and maintain serving institutions; one who protects normal people from the hazards of alienation and gives purpose and meaning to their lives. (p. 23)

Greenleaf emphasizes that faith as trust stems from the vulnerability of the leader to reveal to others their inner resources. How might one understand “inner resources?” Greenleaf, for applicability sake, leaves this notion a bit ambiguous. Within the context of Jesuit Higher Education, such inner resources can be traced and linked to the metasystems of the Ignatian Tradition previously acknowledged.

In his work *Heroic Leadership: Best Practices from a 450-Year-Old Company That Changed the World*, Chris Lowney (2003) highlights 4 characteristics of the Ignatian Spirituality that all leaders might utilize for authentic success in all endeavors (p. 9). The first characteristic, self-awareness, is deeply rooted in the personal nature of Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises*. Within the methodology of the *Exercises* the retreatant does not read about another’s experiences, but



instead bases all reflection on their own life so as to confirm their potential life direction. The initial call of the *Exercises* asks the retreatant to endure an honest self-assessment: “that I may perceive the disorder in my actions, in order to...amend myself, and put myself in order” (Lowney, 2003, p. 115). The end goal of *the Exercises*, seen through the final integrative meditation—Contemplation to Attain Love—compels the retreatant to call forth how they may, uniquely, bring a greater abundance of love to the world. This final notion is an outward call, the fruit of such time spent in self-reflection. The meditation is quoted here in full to explicate the direct call to which the Exercises utilize such self-assessment:

God loves me so much, even entering into the very struggle of life. Like a potter with clay, like a mother in childbirth, or like a mighty force blowing life into dead bones, God labors to share divine life and love. God’s labors are wit large in Jesus’s passion and death on a cross in order to bring forth the life of the Resurrection. (Fleming, 2016, p. 179)

By examining *the Exercises* within the Ignatian Tradition, we see a facilitation by which the “inner resources” of the individual are developed for a specific end: an outward movement of such inner resources toward “love manifest in deeds more than words” (Fleming, 2016, p. 174).

In agreement with Lowney (2003), leadership in the Ignatian Tradition might be classified as “love driven” leadership as it expounds a “vision to see each person’s talent, potential, and dignity; the courage, passion and commitment to



unlock that potential; and the resulting loyalty and mutual support that energize and unite teams” (p. 179). Love-driven leadership is consistent and compatible with Greenleaf’s “faith as trust” as both rely on a transcendental guide to betterment of self and community and the ensuing vulnerability to base decisions and actions on such a transcendental value. Both love-driven leadership and faith as trust emphasize a “greater” to the actions of individuals, teams, and departments. The leader, then, must be able to facilitate self-awareness so as to expose such understanding of self toward others for an outward expression: greater love in deed over action. In this way, the motivation of the leader can be understood as “missional.”

Mission, from the Latin, *mitere* meaning “to send” is an essential element of the Ignatian Tradition. A contextualization of mission within the Ignatian tradition flows directly from the previous discussion. French historian of spirituality, Joseph de Guibert, asserts that mission is the single “most important principle of Ignatian spirituality” (as cited in Burke & Burke-Sullivan, 2009, p. 43). In one sense, the Ignatian understanding of mission is wholly religious. In the Second Week of the *Spiritual Exercises*, the retreatant is invited to respond to the “Call of the Earthy King” in which Jesus is imagined issuing an invitation to “join him in his mission to win the whole world for God” (Burke & Burke-Sullivan, 2009, p. 43). On the surface, this sense of mission is limited. When contextualized amidst the prior discussion of self-awareness, love-driven leadership, and faith as trust we observe that mission moves into a dynamic relationship between self and others. Within the Ignatian



tradition then, mission derives its meaning in a balance between the skills of the individual and the needs of the community. In this way, mission is wholly contextual to the individual.

What makes any Jesuit connotation of the term mission unique lies in its plurality of applicability. Unlike a corporate mission statement or objective based sense of mission, Jesuit Universities have different missions based on the context of their environment, culture, and community. This stems from the sending forth of the First Jesuits whose ministry was often on the road and vastly different. Jesuits had a global mission to save souls, but how saving was to occur was constantly a dialogue of discernment between the community, the Jesuit, and the Spirit.

Such sense of “mission” finds its theological and spiritual roots in the first aspect of Ignatius’ Spiritual Exercises: “The Contemplation of the Incarnation.” This exercise has the practitioner imagine the Trinity observing the world in all its pain and suffering and out of love and compassion sending forth—missioning—a part of itself (God the Son) as Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus speaks Aramaic, is culturally and religiously Jewish, and participates in a particular contextual cultural and historical landscape. These realities shape Jesus’ ministry—His “mission” encompasses a specific response to said landscape.

For Jesuits, this sense of mission is analogical to Christ’s mission “in the world.” Jesuits, and lay colleagues, become pilgrims “on the road” paying attention to the Spirit, globally attempting to “save souls,” but present and aware to the



specifics of their context (cultural, historical, and political). Community, then, also plays an important role in determining the ways in which Jesuits and lay colleagues may engage in a “shared” sense of mission.

In the Jesuit document “Our Mission and Culture,” promulgated at the Jesuit General Congregation 34 in 1995, the mission of each individual Jesuit is expressed as being in “service to the crucified and risen Christ, is directed to the ways in which he makes his presence felt in the diversity of human cultural experiences” (Traub, 2008, p. 15). The role of the individual, formed in the Ignatian Tradition, is to imaginatively search for the crucified and risen Christ, by way of discernment, in her cultural context. This search, then, becomes that individual’s mission.

The prior unpacking of what indeed “mission” entails in the Ignatian Tradition returns us back to the servant as leader and applicability to the transition in leadership from Jesuits to lay colleagues at Jesuit Institutions of Higher Education. A Jesuit priest’s sense of servanthood is articulated and formalized with formal vows of poverty, obedience, chastity, and to the Roman Pontiff. In this way, the specific lens of service may be expressed in different ways missionarily but service remains camped institutionally through religious norms of behavior. For lay colleagues this is not the case as formal vows are not institutionalized or formalized in connection to employment at a Jesuit University.

For lay colleagues, then, individual mission and institutional mission become the focal points of servanthood. In



clarifying intention as the path to servant-leadership Greenleaf, elaborates on the ability of servant-leaders to hone intentionality over developing a set of skills. In Greenleaf's (1977) language, this means goal setting:

As long as one is leading, one always has a goal... The word goal is used in the special sense of the overarching purpose, the big dream, the visionary concept, the ultimate consummation which one approaches but never really achieves. It is something presently out of reach, it is something to strive for, to move toward or become. (p. 15)

There is a deep commonality and relationship between Greenleaf's concept of goal in the above sense and mission in the Ignatian tradition. Servanthood for lay colleagues at Jesuit Universities means devoting themselves to a process by which they become more self-aware. The ways in which the unique talents and gifts of lay colleges become utilized drives the overarching goal or mission of the university. The subtle nuance at work between mission and goal is where the literature and concepts surrounding the servant as leader can aid the process of bringing lay colleagues into the corporate culture.

A TANGIBLE APPLICATION: THE DAILY EXAMEN

As Ignatius of Loyola formed the Jesuits in the sixteenth century, a major departure for the Society was a departure from the monastery. Modeled after the popular Mendicant orders of the day (the Franciscans and the Dominicans), the Jesuits embodied a spirituality wholly different than those institutionalized. The predominant amount of spiritual centers



were located behind walls in cathedrals and monasteries. Due to this context, most spiritual practices were housed in the life of the physical church or the monastery. Prayers were generally held at regimented times of the day communally. Ignatius, given the *Spiritual Exercises*, envisioned a spirituality on the road, outside the confines of cathedrals and walls, and encouraged prayer practices that suited practitioners who needed to check in spiritually while on the move.

The “examen” is the way in which Ignatius recommends individuals engage so as to center themselves contemplatively while remaining active in the world.

Each examen begins by recalling the positive, loving worldview that was the *Exercises* culminating meditation: The First Point is to give thanks to God out Lord for the benefits I have received. Then comes a mental replay of the day thus far, “exacting an account of self with regard to the particular matter decided upon for correction and improvement. She should run through the time, hour by hour or period by period, from the moment of rising until the present examination. (Lowney, 2003, p. 125)

The examen incorporates the Greenleaf notion of goal setting as ambitious goals become manageable when broken down into smaller goals. An individual is able to reflect daily to assess where and how they are living out their mission and participating as a servant to their own gifts and talents and to the flourishing of those around them.

The historical example of Ignatius’ shift “outside the walls” via the examen emphasizes what Greenleaf refers to as a



“growing-edge church.” Greenleaf (1996) articulates that a growing-edge church is one that “accepts the opportunity all churches have to become a significant nurturing force, conceptualizer of a serving mission, value shaper, and moral sustainer of leaders” (p. 32). An institutional practice of taking three to five minutes a day and training employees on how authentically doing the examen allows Jesuit Universities to maintain the “growing-edge church” experience. As we have acknowledged, the Ignatian Tradition, whether embodied by Jesuit Priests or lay colleagues, has a direct and intentional methodology related to discernment, self-awareness, and mission leading to love driven leadership.

Through the use of a tool like the Jesuit examen, lay colleagues and leaders at Jesuit Universities are able to bring a sense of awareness to their work that both individualizes but serves the greater mission. The examen, established in the Ignatian tradition, presents a way for each unique individual to access a deep center to their work and intentionally create meaning and authenticity of service to a greater mission. In this way, the examen is a practice of greater awareness, a central component of leaders who are servants first. In their book, *Spiritual Capital: Wealth We Can Live By*, Zohar and Marshall (2004) note the role of awareness leading to a deeper sense of integrity:

The Awareness that I...have a deep center and that I need to be in contact with it and to act through it, confers meaning and authenticity to my projects and actions. It is exhilarating to know that I have an internal compass and



that I can be led by its sense of direction. This is one crucial dimension of integrity — to act in accord with my internal compass. (p. 36)

The integrity mentioned by Zohar and Marshall is threefold as it is related to self, others, and in regard to Jesuit Universities, the greater mission and goal inherent. The examen, therefore, presents a practical tool to sustain a continual practice that can be individualized by colleagues and contextualized to all backgrounds while maintaining root in the Ignatian tradition. Further, by utilizing the practice of awareness, the examen creates a practice that drives a servant first mentality.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored points of contact between the spirituality of Ignatius of Loyola and Robert Greenleaf's concept of the servant as leader. The tenants of Ignatian spirituality were examined with an emphasis on discernment and mission. We delved into how Ignatian discernment finds consistency with two characteristics of servant-leadership: vision and foresight. Further, we established the connections between Ignatian sense of mission and Greenleaf's concept of goal setting. Finally, the Jesuit examen was proposed as a potential practice to allow lay members of Jesuit Universities to empower their own sense of self-awareness leading to love driven leadership. Our entire exploration has emphasized expression in Jesuit Higher Education, specifically leadership development of lay employees. This paper has argued and maintained that servant-



leadership serves as a theory from which to navigate the current changing tide in contemporary Jesuit education: the transition from Jesuit leaders to lay leaders. The Ignatian path is deeply rooted in service and providing education that leads to a deep understanding of how individual's gifts can serve the world in need. Highlighting the roots of this mentality, the scholarship of servant-leadership further authenticates the notion of the leader who is servant first. Such a notion, as seen in both Ignatius' and Greenleaf's lives, both encourages and allows leaders to navigate. This change is desperately needed as Jesuit Universities move into the 21st Century.

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