

The Identity of Ignatian Leadership and Ignatian Teacher Formation

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The student is at the centre of all we do as Ignatian educators. *The Characteristics of Jesuit Education* remind us that “the concern of Jesuit education is preparation for life, which is itself a preparation for eternal life.”¹ Life is not a prelude for the real thing but the eternal life given by God breaks into our lives here and now, at this moment, and in so doing imbues them with a much greater importance and far greater possibilities than they otherwise might have.

We are privileged as Ignatian educators to be entrusted with the lives of so many students day by day. How they are formed and how their lives and personalities are shaped is an awesome task entrusted to us by their parents and by God.

A recent survey² of the beliefs of 13-15 year olds by the University of Wales showed that:

- 40% believe in the existence of ghosts
- 35% believe in horoscopes
- 33% believe it is possible to contact the spirits of the dead
- 20% believe fortune tellers can see into the future
- 22% believe in black magic
- 41% believe in God (62% of adults)
- 75% want to marry in church
- 50% would have their baby baptised

This paints a strange picture of today’s young people. It is alarming that they hold such beliefs and that mainstream religion has apparently failed to provide any more orthodox alternative. Yet, at the same time, it shows clearly that they have not rejected the spiritual world in favour of a purely materialist one. It suggests a vineyard ripe for the workers.

And this is precisely what we are called to do as Christian educators – to engage in the work of formation of the children and young adults given to our care.

This work of formation means allowing our students to find themselves, to find a place in the school community, to absorb and make their own the tradition of Ignatian education, and ultimately to make their own unique contribution to the life of the school community.

1

The Challenge of Leading a School Community in the Ignatian Tradition – A Template for a Jesuit School

Ignatius himself provides us with a template for Jesuit schools. Now a word of warning – Ignatius is not good at sound bites. His writings are more like computer manuals than poetic inspiration and you have to do some searching and creative editing to come up with useful quotations! However in the

¹ n.37 *The Characteristics of Jesuit Education*, Rome 1987

² *Survey of views of 13-15 year olds*, University of Wales 2003

Constitutions, he does say that Jesuit schools are for “improvement in living and learning to the greater glory of God and the common good.”³

We are familiar with the saying of Fr Pedro Arrupe SJ that Jesuit schools are about forming “men and women for others”⁴. And Fr Peter-Hans Kolvenbach SJ has spoken about the task of forming men and women of “competence, conscience and compassion.”⁵ These templates of Jesuit education are now widely used in Jesuit schools around the world. They state, in a simple and direct way, what it is we are about in our schools.

In the 1970s and 1980s much work was done in the Jesuit high schools of the United States to articulate the qualities we would wish to see in a young person at graduation:⁶

- open to growth
- intellectually competent
- religious
- loving
- committed to doing justice

In the British Province, the ten schools have worked on a joint vision statement⁷ which sets out the characteristic features we would expect to see in a Jesuit school:

- finding God in all things
- caring for the individual (*cura personalis*)
- showing love in deeds
- building Christian community
- engaging with the wider world
- encouraging excellence
- co-operating in Jesuit mission

And of course the *Characteristics*⁸ document itself paints a detailed picture of the features of Jesuit education:

- Jesuit education is world-affirming
- insists on individual care and concern for each person
- is value-oriented
- proposes Christ as the model for human life
- is preparation for an active life commitment
- is an apostolic instrument in the service of the Church as it serves human society
- pursues excellence in its work of formation
- stresses lay-Jesuit collaboration
- adapts means and methods in order to achieve its purposes most effectively

At the 56th Conference of the Union of Superiors General, the USG’s president, Fr Claude Maréchal AA, set out a fascinating template to describe the charism of a religious congregation. He suggested that

³ Ignatius Loyola, *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus (Part IV and Formula of the Institute)*, Rome 1547

⁴ Pedro Arrupe SJ, Address to the 10th International Congress of Alumni of Jesuit Schools, Valencia 1973

⁵ Peter-Hans Kolvenbach SJ, Letter to Major Superiors regarding the Ignatian Pedagogical Paradigm, Rome 1993

⁶ Jesuit Secondary Education Association (JSEA), *Profile of a Graduate at Graduation*, Washington 1985

⁷ British Jesuit Province, *School Vision Statement*, London 2002

⁸ *The Characteristics of Jesuit Education*, Rome 1987

the genius of the founders of Religious congregations was to re-interpret the gospel in a way that was attractive to a new generation. He suggests that the characteristic features of such charisms are:^{9[7]}

- a story to enter
- a language to speak
- a group to which to belong
- a way to pray
- a work to undertake
- a face of God to see

This is another template or framework we can use to examine our own schools. From the perspective of the Ignatian tradition do we tell the story of Ignatius and the Jesuit tradition? Do we use the characteristically Ignatian language which encaptures so many of our core ideas and values? Do we provide a strong group identity to which students and staff wish to belong? Do we have prayer and a way of learning prayer at the heart of all we do? What are the particular works we undertake – teaching and learning certainly but also service of the poor? And in all this does the school reveal a face of God to see?

2

The Challenge of Leading a School Community in the Ignatian Tradition – The Ministry of Leadership

To be an Ignatian leader in a school is a challenge. It means recognising and engaging with a number of things:

2.1 Being Personally Rooted in the Ignatian Tradition

Anyone who wishes to be a leader in the Ignatian tradition must have an intimate grasp of that tradition and, above all, this means experience of the *Spiritual Exercises* of St Ignatius. The *Exercises* were the means by which Ignatius engaged others in conversation, disclosing their own lives and coming to discern the Spirit of God at work in the meanderings and rapids of those lives.

The Ignatian leader must gradually come to a point where, perhaps falteringly and with a sense of inadequacy and incompleteness, he or she can articulate the steps and choices of his or her life. In doing so, s/he will discover that this has not been a life lived alone but in the company of many. Among the many is God who walks quietly beside us as a pilgrim on our life path.

The Jesuit tradition offers us a help in this daunting task of articulating and understanding our lives. In the *Spiritual Exercises* we have the account of another's encounter with God – but one that maybe goes deeper and demands a rigor that can be frightening.

In Ignatius' journey of self-encounter, and within that encounter with God, we can see glimpses of our own struggles. The lens of the *Exercises* gives us a language with which we can grapple with our inner stories.

⁹ Claude Maréchal AA, Address to the 56th Conference of the Union of Superiors General, Rome 2002

It is only once we have done this ourselves, that we can be of help to others, our students and teachers, in the Ignatian way. We must first receive the legacy of the Jesuit tradition before we can gift it to others.

2.2 Leadership v. Management

One of the greatest pressures on school leaders is the demand of management. Time spent managing people and managing buildings inevitably takes away from time which could be spent on leadership. School leaders must create the time that allows them to see the bigger picture; time really to understand the things that affect people's lives. School leaders are, above all, the those who are charged with supplying the vision for the school – if they do not do it, no one else will. And this must be done relentlessly. It is easy amidst the busy-ness of school life to lose sight of the important things. It is the Head's job to make sure that the vision is kept before our eyes, as Ignatius would say.

2.3 Leadership as “Modelling”

In the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius tells us that actions are to be preferred to words. One of the challenges of school leadership is to *model* the behaviours and values that we want to see in our students and teachers. In seeing how we respond, in detecting the values which underlie our actions, those around us in the school community will either see the spirit of God or else something rotten, earth-bound and worthless. Our calling is to act prophetically – announcing by our actions the arrival here and now of God's reign on earth. Our colleagues need to see practical action, spirited and filled with energy. When other tire, our mission as school leaders is to keep going! Acting out our core values in the daily interactions of life is what Ignatius meant by “our way of proceeding”. It is a phrase he uses often in the Constitutions. He is clear that there is a Jesuit way of doing most things. Not necessarily better than other ways, but most certainly different. As school leaders we must model the Jesuit way of proceeding in all we do. Of course to do this we must understand what the Jesuit way of proceeding is – our instincts and values must be confidently and thoroughly rooted in the Ignatian tradition.

2.4 Creative Fidelity

Fr General has spoken much recently of this idea of *creative fidelity*. It takes up Ignatius' refrain in the *Constitutions* that Jesuit ministry has to be adapted, sometimes radically, to people, places and times. If our schools, our efforts at evangelisation, our work of education fail to fire the imaginations of our young people, then we must return to the foundations of the Gospels and the spiritual patrimony of Ignatius, suck out of them the marrow, and find new ways of re-presenting them to those whom God puts in our path. For this we need imagination for our task is nothing less than to inspire.

2.5 Above All Personal and Engaging

In his hugely important book¹⁰ on the practice of the first Jesuits, John O'Malley observes that it was the ministries of the Word of God which were their method of engagement with people before the sacraments and the more overtly religious practices of the day. The early Jesuits would engage people in conversation just as Ignatius had done day by day with Francis Xavier until he was won over two years later.

These conversations were different from the residual chatter we are so used to. They are not about filling the silence that would otherwise envelop us. They are about the things that matter.

¹⁰ John W O'Malley, *The First Jesuits*, Harvard University 1993

Jerome Nadal, entrusted by Ignatius to expound the spirit of the new Society to communities around Europe, writes that “the power of the Spirit means to speak from the heart and to speak with the forceful grace of the sacred word”¹¹

In explaining what was characteristic, new and powerful about the preaching and spiritual conversations of the early Jesuits, Nadal sums it up in three words: “*Spiritu, corde, practice*”¹² (“In the spirit from the heart practically”). This is how our conversations must be if we wish to follow in the Ignatian tradition for the help of souls today.

3

Forming teachers in the Ignatian tradition – The Ministry of Teaching

I have been asked also to offer some reflections on the formation of teachers in the Ignatian tradition.

Firstly, some tensions to beware. We cannot assume that our teachers are equally open or indeed able to participate in their own formation as we might wish.

3.1 Old Minds v. New Minds

Formation is what St Paul would call the task of re-minding people – literally giving them new minds for old – seeing things in the new way that the fact of Christ’s incarnation and resurrection allows.

God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself – we are declared to stand in a new relationship with God and this radically transforms our old relationships with God, with others, with ourselves, with the world around us. We cannot go on living as before. What was important before is now trivial and what was marginal before is now central to our lives.

3.2 Profession v. Vocation

Teaching in my country has become an ever more professional occupation. The well-intentioned amateurism of the past, perhaps especially among Jesuits, is simply no longer acceptable in the modern age of accountability. Teachers, like people in other caring professions such as nursing and social work, often go to become teachers because they see it as a vocation – a powerful desire to help others, to make a difference. And yet there is great, and wholly appropriate, pressure for them to behave as professional with clearly defined lines of action and accountability.

So there arises a tension between the vocational and professional interpretations of their jobs. This can be as confusing for the leader in a Jesuit school as for the teacher. There are some things we ask them to do which fall into their idea of the vocational and voluntary (perhaps running retreats or spiritual days, helping with Christian activities in the school, service and charitable projects and so on) and sometimes these activities clash with their professional ones (such as preparing classes and correcting pupils’ work). There can be confusion about which takes precedence. Leaders in Jesuit schools must be aware of this tension and make sure that there is time, space and appropriate procedures which allow teachers who are willing to contribute to the Jesuit character of the school beyond their contractual duties to do so without feeling pulled in every direction.

¹¹ Jerome Nadal SJ (1507-80), *Orationis Observationes* n.568

¹² Jerome Nadal SJ, *Platicas in Monumenta Nadal* 5:227ff

3.3 Subject Specialist v. Life Generalist

With the increasing professionalization of teachers and schools comes an inevitable specialisation. Teachers are in danger of becoming technicians – narrow subject specialists when what is needed is both subject expertise and also a role model in life. Teachers in Jesuit schools are called to be teachers of living. We recall Ignatius’ definition of a Jesuit school as a place for “improvement in living and learning to the greater glory of God and the common good.” We want our teachers to share the joys and successes, the sorrows and disappointments, the sometimes difficult and at other times delightful discovery that students make of themselves and others. We want them to share, in appropriate ways and within appropriate boundaries, their own life stories. This is the Ignatian way – sharing conversations about life experiences and discerning within those stories how God leads us and allows us to become fully human. Teachers who insist on being no more than transmitters of their subjects cannot do this.

3.4 Autonomy v. Community

In the past Jesuit schools have been centres of their communities – places where people wanted to be and belong. I am sure we all have experience of people in our schools or former pupils who wrap a considerable amount of their own identity around the institution they love and which has had a great effect on them.

This sense is gradually being eroded as notions of individuality and autonomy gain hegemony. In forming our teachers we need to make sure there are things (from friendships to facilities) in our schools which make them want to belong. We must create an environment where they can, with comfort and reassurance, lay down their loads and gain rest for their souls.

3.5 Workplace v. Home Life

Perhaps nowhere have the tensions between traditional and contemporary expectations of teachers been thrown into starker relief than in the competing demands of work and home. As employment law in Europe gives teachers, as other workers, a life balance with greater emphasis on home and the family, Jesuit schools must adapt so they can offer both a full programme of Jesuit activity for their students and the time and space for their staff to enjoy life away from school.

This needs careful consideration and planning if we are to avoid the resentment which comes when teachers are simply expected to offer the *magis* without ever being consulted about it!

Aware of these tensions in the work of teacher formation, there are perhaps some principles and methods which may be helpful to consider.

Degrees of Association

We need to be careful when we try to form our teachers of not making the mistake of assuming they are all in the same place and with the same needs. An Irish Jesuit once spoke about what I will call the degrees of association of Catholics at Sunday Mass: some arrive early and take prominent places reading, serving, taking up the collection. Others come and sit in the front row with their families, carrying their own Sunday Missals, hymn books ready and answering up to the prayers. Others sit in the body of the church and are perhaps not so lusty in their singing. Others choose to sit behind pillars and probably didn’t pick up the Mass sheet. Others loiter in the church porch while others sit on the wall outside lining up the pints from the pub next door for the weekly socialising which takes place after Mass.

All of these people are participants in the act of worship and gathering though, from an ecclesiological point of view, to different extents. We must be careful not to judge – the person who is the Eucharistic Minister may indeed be no better a Christian than the man who is lining up the pints.

So it is in our schools. Different people will engage at different levels with the enterprise of Jesuit education. While one will attend discussions and prayer groups and be a leading carrier of the torch of Jesuit ethos, another will teach his subject well and in so doing contribute to a fundamental of Jesuit education namely that God is to be found in all things, even mathematics and rugby.

Awareness of the Need for Formation

However, the fact that people place themselves at different “distances” from the heart of what is happening does not mean they do not need to be formed. Many of our teachers have themselves come through an education system without the overarching structure and underlying values which can give meaning and sense to their lives and their work as teachers of the young.

Invitation

We need to invite people to participate in conversations and events which will allow them to be formed – as human beings, as teachers, as role models for the young, as Christians and as Ignatian educators.

A Variety of Pathways

That invitation, however, must be to a variety of pathways so each can find his own mix of comfort and challenge. There should never be one exclusive way for teachers in Jesuit schools to contribute to the Jesuit character of their school.

Celebrating the Contributions of Each Person

The truth of whether or not a school really values the variety of contributions which can be made is to be seen in whether or not the school recognises and celebrates the contributions of each.

Instilling a Sense of Ownership in the Jesuit Enterprise

Teachers in Jesuit schools will ideally feel a sense of pride and ownership of the achievements of the school. This does not happen by accident. It is something we as Jesuit leaders have to enable.

Establishing and Sustaining the Core Group

All this said, there is unlikely ever to be a time when all the staff of a Jesuit school are fully supportive of and contributing to its ethos as we might like. Indeed, Ignatius himself was disappointed by the quality of many Jesuits in the schools and their failure to understand and support the mission.

It is, therefore, important to gather around yourself a core group of those most enthusiastic about and supportive of the Jesuit identity of the school. This core group need not be a formal group or even be aware overtly of its own existence. But it must at least be a group in the mind of the Principal who then draws on those people to support and sustain initiatives which give the school its characteristic Jesuit identity.

The members of the core group themselves need care and formation. The Jesuit leader needs to put opportunities their way and to affirm them when they do precisely the things that build the school community up in the Jesuit way. Not least they, like the Jesuit leader, need access to the foundational sources of Jesuit life including the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius and an understanding of the Christian Humanist tradition of Jesuit education.

4 Christian Humanism

I want to say something this morning about Christian Humanism because this is what has marked out the Jesuit approach to education over four centuries and what is, in my view, the pearl of great price for Jesuit schools today and in the future.



Lorenzetti (1290-1348) *The Allegory of Good Government in the Palazzo Pubblico, Siena*

Humanism is the great legacy of the Italian Renaissance. Already in the mid-14th century we see in the astonishing murals of Ambrogio Lorenzetti¹³ the idea that good education will lead to virtuous living and harmonious society.



Of course the great proponent of Humanism was Erasmus (1466-1536). Erasmus passionately believed that human beings contained within themselves the capacity for self-improvement; that this improvement was achieved through education; and that such improvement would, by consensus and consent, ultimately create a peaceful society.

This early engraving¹⁴ shows Jesuits engaged in the ministries of the Word of God: Ignatius preaches to the adults of the city, while another Jesuit (with a big stick!) teaches catechism to the children. In the background another Father hears confessions (which Ignatius spoke of as a sort of “personal homily” given for the benefit of the individual alone) and only then do we notice

¹³ *The Allegory of Good Government – the Effects of Good Government in the City* in the Palazzo Pubblico, Siena, 1338-40

¹⁴ Jesuit ministries at Santa Maria della Strada from Rubens' *Vita Beati Patris Ignatii*, Rome 1609

the priest giving communion. The precedence of ministries of the Word is striking.

Pierre Favre SJ, one of the first companions whose anniversary year we are about to celebrate, wrote of the characteristic ministry of the word: “. . . through Christ I might be able to bring help to many – to console, liberate and give them courage; to bring them light not only for their spirit but for their bodies also, and bring as well other helps.”¹⁵

When asked in 1551 what the new Roman College was for, Ignatius wrote that it was “una scuola di grammatica, umanità e dottrina cristiana, gratis.” Notice *umanità* – Jesuit schools were, from the outset, about leading people into a deeper understanding and practice of what it meant to be human. They were as much about learned humanity (known as *pietas* in the Classical and Humanist traditions) as about the basics of grammar and the teaching of Christian doctrine.

Christian Humanism is a great treasure in the patrimony of the Society. It is something which, adapted to the times, people and places of our own ministries can again, I believe, serve to draw people to the God who chose to reveal himself precisely in human form. One of the best ways in which we can serve the students, staff and parents of our schools is to recover the Jesuit tradition of Christian Humanism.

I suggest a contemporary version of Christian Humanism would:

- offer an alternative to materialism, pragmatic relativism and lazy atheism of so many of our contemporaries
- propose a moral compass for negotiating contemporary living
- take up the focus on human beings and quality of human life wherever it is lived
- offer the possibility of many pathways to God
- hallow our human endeavours whatever they might be (“finding God in all things”)
- be a creative work in progress not a finished solution – thereby offering everyone a part to play, a conversation in which to engage and make their own contribution



And of course there is always plenty of room for sceptics – an approach based on the betterment of human beings can appeal to those of little or no religious faith just as powerfully as those who adopt Christian Humanism, as did Ignatius, because they passionately believed that God became man in Jesus Christ and that incarnational theology, which set aside Christianity from all religions before and after, simply transforms the mundane things that humans get up to.

¹⁵ Pierre Favre SJ (1506-46), *Memoriale*

Christian Humanism in a contemporary form aspires to nothing less than the salvation of the human project that God started in Eden. It is extraordinary that God chooses us to complete his project and we should be assured that he always supplies the means to do so, even though this may not be very evident at the time. The endeavour of Christian Humanism in our schools is exactly what Ignatius wanted the first Jesuits and their lay collaborators to do – “helping souls”.

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