

What *Magis* Really Means and Why It Matters

Barton T Geger SJ

Abstract

Many definitions of the *magis* are proffered in Jesuit circles, not all of which are clear or helpful. The best definition, in terms of practicality, fidelity to the sources, and correspondence to other Ignatian themes, is *the more universal good*. It is closely linked to the unofficial motto of the Society of Jesus: *for the Greater Glory of God*.

I. The problem

No term appears more popular in the parlance of Jesuit institutions today than the *magis*. Originally a Latin adverb that meant *more* or *to a greater degree*, it is now commonly used as a proper noun to denote a key element of Ignatian spirituality. Especially in Jesuit schools, *Magis* Student Groups, *Magis* Classes, *Magis* Retreats, *Magis* Scholarships, *Magis* Auctions, *Magis* Institutes and *Magis* Committees are ubiquitous. The term appears in official decrees of General Congregations of the Society of Jesus, and also in the writings and allocutions of Jesuit Superiors General. Dictionaries and introductions to Ignatian and/or Jesuit spirituality endeavor to explain the *magis* at greater or lesser length.¹

For all its popularity, however, the *magis* has a problem. No one seems quite sure what it means. Some say *excellence*, others *generosity*. These are two quite different ideas, both of which appear harmless enough at first glance. Others say *the more universal good*, that is, discerning choices based on what will make the widest positive impact on people (a criterion that St Ignatius Loyola identified in the Jesuit Constitutions as characteristic of the Society's way of proceeding).²

¹ eg. George W. Traub, SJ, *Do You Speak Ignatian? A Glossary of Terms Used in Ignatian and Jesuit Circles* (Cincinnati: Xavier University, 2008), 9; Charles J. Healey SJ, *The Ignatian Way: Key Aspects of Jesuit Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 2009), 104; José Garcia de Castro SJ, ed., *Diccionario de Espiritualidad Ignaciana*, 2 vols. (Bilbao and Santander: Mensajero and Sal Terrae, 2007), II:1155-1168, s.v. *Magis/Más*; James Martin SJ, *The Jesuit Guide to Almost Everything: A Spirituality for Real Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 2010), 369-371; Kevin F. Burke and Eileen Burke-Sullivan, *The Ignatian Tradition: Spirituality in History*, *Spirituality in History Series*, ed. Phyllis Zagano (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2009), xlii-xliii.

² *Constitutions of the Society of Jesus* (henceforth abbreviated *Cons.*), §§258, 466, 623a; trans. George Ganss SJ, *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970), 157, 159, 275. Presently the official translation of the *Constitutions* in English is *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus and Their Complementary Norms*, ed. John Padberg SJ (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1996). The Ganss edition is preferable for study of Ignatius' understanding of the more universal good, as it contains extensive notes and cross-references. The Padberg edition serves to connect the *Constitutions* to revisions and clarifications of later General Congregations.

Other definitions include *magnanimity*, *greater efficiency*, *creative fidelity*, *choosing the harder option*, and even *choosing that which no one else will do*.

One might argue that multiple definitions are a benefit. If the definitions are not synonymous, neither do they appear irreconcilable, and therefore, all should be allowed to illuminate the dynamic character of the Ignatian *more*. In the same vein, if a wide variety of texts are cited to explain the magis – everything from the tales of chivalry that Ignatius read as a youth to the *Ratio Studiorum*, a manual for Jesuit schools written forty years after the saint's death – it only shows how deeply the magis permeated Ignatius' spirituality.

Unfortunately, however, the variety of definitions cannot be justified so easily, for at least four reasons. First, if anecdotal evidence is any indication, ambiguity about the magis can breed confusion and guilt among Jesuits and their colleagues.³ In 2011, for example, I was speaking to the faculty of a high school about Ignatian spirituality when a teacher raised his hand. "I want to serve the magis, I really do," he said. "But I have small kids at home. I can't give any more without burning out." Clearly the poor man thought he was supposed to be working harder than he already was.

On another occasion, administrators at a university in the eastern U.S. were citing the magis in an effort to persuade the faculty to take on new projects. Not surprisingly, some of the faculty grew resentful, since, by implication, their resistance to the requests meant that they did not understand or embrace the Jesuit mission.

Some years ago, the president of a university in the western U.S. informed a department

that it would not receive increased funding the following year. In response, a professor pointed angrily at the president and said, "I thought this place was supposed to be about the magis!" His response might seem amusingly unsophisticated. But was it? What if he had been told that the magis means *excellence* or *greater efficiency*?

A second problem is that 'reconcilable in theory' is insufficient when the definitions are put into practice. That a teacher labors *generously* does not necessarily mean that he labors *excellently*; and that difference is important to administrators when it comes time to write professional evaluations. That a social worker does *what no one else will do* is no guarantee that her project serves *the greater good* compared to her other legitimate options; a point not lost on charities that want to make the most of their limited resources. A Jesuit, for his part, might show *creative fidelity* in his obedience to his superiors, but this does not assure that he chooses the *more efficient* or *more generous* course. Creative adaptations can fail as easily as succeed, be naïve as easily as be perspicacious, and serve personal interests as easily as the greater good.

A third difficulty concerns applicability. If we wish the magis to denote a core value of Jesuit institutions, it follows that the value should be comprehensible and applicable to all or most people working there, regardless of their religion, 'state of life' in the church, or degree of spiritual advancement. Consider, for example, the famous prayer known as the *Suscipe*, in which Ignatius expresses a desire for utter surrender to God, even to the point of being relieved of his freedom, memory, intellect and will.⁴ This is an extraordinary prayer, to put it mildly; and if it is true, as is sometimes said, that even many Jesuits are not

³ See Trudelle Thomas, *Rethinking Magis*, in *Teaching to the Mission: A Compendium of the Ignatian Mentoring Program* (Cincinnati: Xavier University, 2010), 228-231.

⁴ *The Spiritual Exercises of St Ignatius Loyola* (henceforth abbreviated *Ex.*), §234; trans. Joseph A. Munitiz SJ, and Philip Endean SJ, *Saint Ignatius of Loyola: Personal Writings* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 339. The

Munitiz edition contains helpful notes and commentary, as does that of George Ganss SJ, *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius Loyola* (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1992). Since the former includes Ignatius' *Autobiography* and prominent letters in the same volume (all of which are referenced in this essay), it will be cited here for convenience.

prepared to make it, all the more should it not be pressed into service to explain the magis. Another example is the Kingdom Meditation in the *Spiritual Exercises*. Here Ignatius addresses all those 'who desire to show greater devotion and to distinguish themselves in total service to their eternal King and universal Lord.'⁵ Understandably, such a beautiful expression is often cited with regard to the magis. In its original context, however, Ignatius was suggesting that persons of greater devotion go beyond a willingness to suffer like Jesus did (if such is needed to accomplish God's designs), to what is more, a proactive request to suffer as he did, through deprivations and persecutions, in order to imitate Jesus' experience as closely as possible. Now if that request is taken seriously, with all the gravity that Ignatius intended by it, then it is hardly suitable for our purposes.

A request for suffering is all too easily misunderstood as a glorification of suffering,⁶ and it is arguably inappropriate for those with family members who will be adversely affected were that prayer to be realized. And if the response follows that, after all, the important thing is the desire for *greater devotion* and *total service* (so that we can keep the lofty language while ignoring the deprivations and persecutions), we are left with awkward questions about the extent to which we are willing to quote Ignatius out of context, and whether his words will not cease to represent anything authentically Ignatian.

⁵ Ex. §97.

⁶ For Ignatius, imitating the experiences and choices of the historical Jesus as closely as possible was a powerful means by which one could learn to love him more deeply. When Ignatius suggests that one ask for 'actual poverty,' he does not mean to glorify suffering for its own sake. Jesus himself, the model for all Christians, had been completely devoted to the Father's will; nevertheless, in the Garden of Gethsemane, he asked the Father to let the cup of suffering pass him by (Luke 22:42). In Ignatius' mind, therefore, those who ask for actual poverty are asking to experience that which Jesus himself had wished to avoid, precisely because Jesus himself had been unable to avoid it.

⁷ *Acta Romana Societatis Iesu XV* (Rome: 1968), 29. Henceforth abbreviated *ARSI*.

⁸ Pedro Arrupe SJ, *Missionary Vocation and Apostolate* (22 March 1972), in *Challenge to Religious Life Today*,

A final difficulty is the obscure origin of the expression *the magis*. Ignatius and the early Jesuits never used it to denote an element of their spirituality. The earliest appearances of that particular turn of phrase (of which I am aware) are in two writings by the theologian Fr Karl Rahner SJ, both of which date to the early 1960s. He was followed by Fr Pedro Arrupe SJ who frequently referred to the magis after he was elected Superior General of the Jesuits in 1965. Ten years later, it appeared in an official decree of General Congregation 32 (1974-1975), a worldwide meeting of Jesuit superiors. Initial evidence suggests, therefore, that the expression originated sometime in the 1950s.

Most of these early references are curiously brief and vague. In a letter to the entire Society dated January 2, 1967 (written in Latin), Arrupe referred to 'that magis' [illud «magis»] as a great theme of the *Exercises*. He did not elaborate, except to affirm that it 'excludes any form of mediocrity.'⁷ In later letters and talks, Arrupe called it 'a supernatural strategy' that 'continually seeks a more effective manner of service,'⁸ a principle of discernment by which one seeks 'the greatest possible service to God,'⁹ a magnanimity that seeks 'the greater glory of God,'¹⁰ and following Christ with 'radicality.'¹¹ On many occasions, he declined to explain the term at all.¹²

With equal brevity, the Fathers of GC32 defined the magis as 'the ever more and more

ed. Jerome Aixela SJ, Second Edition (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1979), 66 [French original in *ARSI XV*, 859-878].

⁹ *Some Far-Reaching Vistas of Decree 4 of GC 32* (26 March 1976), in *Justice With Faith Today*, ed. Jerome Aixela SJ, Second Edition (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1980), 154, 156.

¹⁰ Pedro Arrupe SJ, *Trinitarian Inspiration of the Ignatian Charism in Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits 33/3* (2001), 24.

¹¹ Pedro Arrupe SJ, *Our Way of Proceeding* §22.

¹² eg. Pedro Arrupe SJ, *The Jesuit Mission in the University Apostolate* (5 August 1975), in *Other Apostolates Today*, ed. Jerome Aixela SJ, Second Edition (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1981), 90-91; *Final Address of Father General to the Congregation of Procurators*, §§18.5, 28; *Our Way of Proceeding* §25.

giving' spirit of Ignatius,¹³ a phrase suggesting an interior attitude of generosity. But thirty years later, GC35 defined it as attention to 'the more universal good,'¹⁴ which implies an objective criterion for choosing ministries. In a subsequent decree, GC35 cited the magis again, but this time as 'creative fidelity' by means of which Jesuits obey superiors and discern options in light of the unique circumstances in which they find themselves.¹⁵

Fr Rahner, in a short treatise published in 1965, explained *the more* and *indifference* as two sides of the same coin.¹⁶ Every Christian, when faced with a choice between two or more good options – whether to marry or enter religious life, to become a teacher or an administrator, to major in music or finance – should choose that which is more conducive to the end for which she was created: the praise, reverence, and service of God. *Indifference*, continues Rahner, is the interior freedom required to be able to choose that magis in the first place. If a man is so taken with Susan's beauty that he cannot see, or will not admit, that marrying Joan better serves his holiness and hers, or if fear prevents him from even considering options like the priesthood, then he does not possess the indifference necessary to choose the magis.

Rahner's explanation is straightforward enough, but it does not offer much specific guidance for a person making an important decision. What does it mean to choose that which is more conducive to one's end? Rahner asserted in his book *The Priesthood* (1973) that this ambiguity is necessary.¹⁷ Given the uniqueness of an individual and the circumstances in which she exists and is obliged to choose, that which more serves her ultimate end will likewise be unique. Her choices will not necessarily be valid for others.

Rahner writes that one's pursuit of the magis is 'unique, unrepresentable, incommensurable,' and again, that 'there is no road laid out in advance, no definitive way already clearly described.'¹⁸

Rahner's idea of the magis is highly individualistic and subjective; so much so, that one who discerns it will not be able to express the reasons behind his choices adequately to others in words (which is what Rahner meant by *unrepresentable* above). For that reason, Rahner's explanation does not seem practicable for Jesuit institutions faced with difficult decisions in the service of God. Group discernment requires by its nature that personal experiences be articulated and shared, evidence weighed, reasons examined and debated. And to process all that data, Jesuits and their colleagues will need a criterion a bit more specific and tangible than 'that which is more conducive to the end for which one is created.'

In summary, then, what definition of the magis is needed? It should be accessible and relevant to most people serving in Jesuit institutions. It must not lend itself readily to harmful misinterpretations or trite generalities. It should be authentically rooted in the early sources, lest by calling something *Ignatian spirituality* we lend an air of saintly authority to that which, in reality, is our own idea. Finally, the magis must be specific enough to provide real guidance and/or existential challenge in actual practice, both to individuals and to institutions. Happily, there is a definition that fits all these criteria.

¹³ GC32 D2 §27. See *Jesuit Life & Mission Today: The Decrees and Accompanying Documents of the 31st-35th General Congregations of the Society of Jesus*, ed. John W. Padberg SJ (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2009), 295.

¹⁴ GC35 D2 §§16, 22 (Padberg, *Jesuit Life*, 739, 742).

¹⁵ GC35 D4 §§8, 27 (Padberg, *Jesuit Life*, 757, 761).

¹⁶ Karl Rahner SJ, *Spiritual Exercises*, trans. Kenneth Baker SJ (New York: Herder & Herder, 1965), 23-27. Rahner's reflections originated in a retreat that he gave to seminarians in 1955; they were extensively edited by others before going to print ten years later.

¹⁷ Karl Rahner SJ, *The Priesthood*, trans. Edward Quinn (New York: Herder & Herder, 1973), 37.

¹⁸ *ibid*

II. The meaning of the *magis*

The unofficial motto of the Society of Jesus is *ad maiorem dei gloriam*, which means *For the Greater Glory of God*. It appears hundreds of times, in slightly different forms, in the writings of Ignatius. Jesuits have placed it on the cornerstones of their buildings, at the end of their letters, and on the official seals of their institutions. Students in Jesuit schools often are encouraged to write AMDG at the end of their essays and exams, a reminder that studies are meant for the greater service and praise of God.

What does AMDG mean? It is not simply an inspirational saying like ‘Go and set the world on fire!’ Rather, Ignatius intended it to be the distinguishing characteristic of the Jesuit way of proceeding. He explained this clearly in Part VII of the Jesuit *Constitutions*.¹⁹ AMDG is a specific criterion for making decisions in the service of God. We can phrase it like this: ‘When discerning between two or more good options, all else being equal, choose that which serves the more universal good, i.e., that which makes the widest impact.’

A familiar proverb goes ‘Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.’ This well captures what Ignatius had in mind by the more universal good. No one questions that giving a poor man a fish is a holy and noble act. It is also first in the order of execution, meaning that no one can teach the man if he is starving in the meantime. Nevertheless, equally obvious is that teaching the man reaps wider benefits. He is now empowered to feed his own family without relying on charity, and so he realizes more fully the dignity of being a husband and father. His teacher is free to move on and help someone else, while the man, for his part, can return to his village and teach others to fish. In theory, then, teaching the man has the potential to transform his

whole society. For that reason (the more universal good) Ignatius would have called this the *magis*.

Expressions like *the more universal good*, *the greater divine service*, and *the greater glory of God* appear more than seventy times in the *Constitutions*. They all mean basically the same thing. In Part VII, Ignatius explains how the Superior General should mission Jesuits to various works:

[T]here are many who request help [of Jesuits] while considering more their own spiritual obligations to their flocks, or other advantages not so immediately their own, rather than the common or universal benefits. Therefore the superior general [of the Jesuits], or whoever holds this authority from him, ought to bestow much careful thought on missions of this kind in order that . . . that procedure may always be used which is conducive to the greater service of God and the universal good.’²⁰

To be sure, it is not always obvious which choice serves the more universal good. Desiring it is one thing (Ignatius calls it a ‘right and pure intention’ below), but knowing what that means in actual practice is another. Hence a Superior General should make a decision about the *magis* only after prayer, rational deliberation, and consultation with others:

‘If the superior thinks, while holding fast to this thoroughly right and pure intention in the presence of God our Lord, that it is wise because of the difficulty and importance of the decision, he will commend the matter to His Divine Majesty and cause it to be commended in the prayers and Masses of the house [where the Jesuits live]. He will also discuss it with one or more members of the Society who happen to be present and whom he thinks suitable. Then he himself will decide about sending or not sending,

¹⁹ See Karl Rahner SJ, *Being Open to God Ever Greater: On the Significance of the Aphorism Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam* in *Theological Investigations VII* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1971), 25-46; Santiago Arzubialde SJ, *El significado de la fórmula ‘a mayor*

gloria de Dios’ en el texto de las Constituciones de la Compañía de Jesús, *Estudios Eclesiásticos* 76 (2001), 593-630.

²⁰ *Cons.* §618 (Ganss, *Constitutions*, 271, 273). Emphasis mine.

and about the other circumstances, as he will judge to be expedient for the greater glory of God.²¹

In the *Constitutions*, Ignatius provides many examples of how to make choices based on the magis. These are still very helpful for us today, because they give clear evidence why certain interpretations of the magis currently in vogue are inaccurate. Ignatius writes:

‘To proceed more successfully in this sending of [Jesuits] to one place or another, one should keep the greater service of God and the more *universal* good before his eyes as the norm to hold oneself on the right course. It appears that in the vineyard of the Lord, which is so extensive, the following procedure of selection ought to be used. When other considerations are equal (and this should be understood in everything that follows), that part of the vineyard ought to be chosen which . . .’
[the following are paraphrased]

- has greater need. This can be due either a lack of other workers or greater spiritual or material deprivations among the people.²²
- where people already are enthusiastic about their spiritual renewal. Jesuits will make more progress here in less time here than if they went elsewhere.²³
- if two places are equally needy, but one is less dangerous to the welfare of the Jesuit being missioned, the safer option should be chosen.²⁴ There will be greater chance of success, and the one missioned will be better preserved and disposed for subsequent works. Sometimes the less risky option is the magis.
- if two places are equally needy, but in one the mission can be accomplished more

quickly, the easier mission should be chosen.²⁵ For that reason, the magis should not be defined as the harder option.

- if two places are equally needy, but in one the Society owes much to benefactors, then Jesuits should choose that place.²⁶ Here Ignatius does not spell out his reasoning, but he seems to mean that, aside from a matter of justice to the benefactors in that place, the long-term viability of the Society requires that it cultivate a good reputation among current and potential benefactors. Financial considerations sometimes can determine the magis.
- if certain works have more lasting value than others, they should be preferred.²⁷ The magis usually means thinking long-term.
- serving those who are influential in society is beneficial, since they will be a good influence on others.²⁸ The magis does not necessarily mean focusing exclusively on the underprivileged.
- serving in cities is preferable to rural areas.²⁹ This will allow the fruits of ministry to spread more rapidly to more people.
- working with groups over individuals is preferable for the same reason, presuming that both cannot be done simultaneously.³⁰
- also preferable are places where people are hostile to Jesuits, due to false reports or preconceptions. This eliminates obstacles to the spread of a more universal good, and the conversion of minds and hearts will give additional glory to God.³¹

To be clear, Ignatius was not saying that the more universal good is the only legitimate criterion for making a good decision. Rather, it is the distinguishing characteristic of the Jesuit

²¹ *Cons.* §618 (Ganss, *Constitutions*, 273). Emphasis mine.

²² *Cons.* §622a (Ganss, *Constitutions*, 274).

²³ *Cons.* §622b (Ganss, *Constitutions*, 274).

²⁴ *Cons.* §623e (Ganss, *Constitutions*, 276).

²⁵ *ibid*

²⁶ *Cons.* §622c (Ganss, *Constitutions*, 274-275).

²⁷ *Cons.* §623g (Ganss, *Constitutions*, 276).

²⁸ *Cons.* §622d, e (Ganss, *Constitutions*, 275).

²⁹ *Cons.* §622e (Ganss, *Constitutions*, 275).

³⁰ *Cons.* §623f (Ganss, *Constitutions*, 276).

³¹ *Cons.* §622f (Ganss, *Constitutions*, 275).

way of proceeding, the special emphasis or charism that Jesuits and colleagues bring to the Church and the world at large. Other Catholic groups like the Dominicans (who focus on good preaching) and the Benedictines (who focus on prayer and hospitality) have their own charisms. So too do many lay Christians. It is not a question of right and wrong but of focus, since it is impossible for one person or group to do everything. A good example is Mother Teresa of Calcutta, who wanted her Missionaries of Charity to focus on the immediate needs of the poor, that is, feeding them and tending to their health. She was sometimes criticized for not using her moral authority and resources to challenge the social structures that made people poor in the first place. Her response was: 'That's not what we're about!'

Ignatius served as the first Superior General of the Jesuits from 1541 to 1556. In that capacity, he made many decisions based on the magis. Below here are a few examples.

III. The *magis* in action

The case of Fr Andrea Galvanello SJ

When the Society was first founded, the idea was that Jesuits would be highly mobile, possessing the spiritual and material freedom to go at a moment's notice to wherever the needs of the church were greatest. In that sense, they are the opposite of monks who spend their lives in a monastery, or parish priests who work in neighborhood churches. ('The world is our home,' wrote Fr Jerome Nadal, an early Jesuit.) For Ignatius, this mobility was essential to the magis, since it enabled Jesuits to make a wider impact.

In this context, we can better understand the story of Fr Andrea Galvanello. In 1553, Ignatius missioned him on a temporary basis to a parish in Morbegno, on the northern border of Italy. After six months there, both the parishioners and the local authorities became hugely fond

of him. So they wrote letters to Ignatius, asking that he be allowed to stay as their official pastor.

Ignatius was gratified by Fr Galvanello's success, but he refused the request. The good that Galvanello accomplished in Morbegno could be accomplished in numerous other towns as well. Predictably, the citizens were not pleased by that response. They wrote letters to cardinals in Rome to put pressure on Ignatius. One man, Giovanni Schenaldo, wrote directly to Ignatius. He must have argued something to the effect of 'I thought Jesuits were supposed to be about the care of souls!' because Ignatius responded:

'It is true that our Society puts all its efforts into work to help and advance the salvation of souls. . . . What our *Constitutions* forbid is not that: it is the obligation that arises from pastoral responsibility and the contract of a parish priest. The professed members of this Society of ours have to be free and unencumbered, so that they may fly rapidly to any place on earth where greater hope of God's glory and the salvation of souls summon us like beacons; we must not stick to this place or that place (unless we have a college or house there), but devote our efforts now to these, now to those, for a short term, freely and without charge.'³²

Two points are notable about Ignatius' response. First, Fr Galvanello was doing holy work, but as far as Ignatius was concerned, it was not the magis. Thus Ignatius wrote of 'greater hope of God's glory' if the Jesuit moved on to the next town.

Second, we can only imagine the reaction of the people in Morbegno when they learned that Ignatius did not consider them the greater good. No doubt many were confused or hurt. Indeed, Schenaldo must have written something like, 'Who are you to say that Fr Galvanello is not serving the greater good?' because Ignatius answered:

³² Munitiz, *Saint Ignatius*, 264. Emphasis mine.

‘It should, however, go with modesty and indeed with prudence that, when others do something reasonably and in order, and are aiming purely to do God’s will, we either approve, or at least do not disapprove without adequate reflection. Everyone who is a soldier of Christ under the banner of the holy Church and with His approval should be allowed to [have his own opinion]. Nevertheless I take in good part what you have written, and put it down to your piety and your charitable concern for your own people.’³³

The case of Fr Galvanello certainly proves one thing. Even with the best intentions, those who use the magis as the criterion for their choices will have critics. Any doubts on that score will be eliminated by the next examples.

Should Jesuits become bishops?

Because Jesuits were so well-educated, the Society was the natural place for popes to go looking whenever they needed to appoint new bishops. Ignatius recognized this danger early on. No one questioned the power of a good bishop to reform the church and edify large numbers of the faithful, but if Jesuits were tapped every time when a bishop was needed, the Society would cease to exist. And Ignatius was convinced that, in the long run, preserving the Society would reap wider benefits for God’s people.

In 1546, Ignatius wrote a letter to the Holy Roman Emperor, King Ferdinand I, who was pressuring one of the first Jesuits, Fr Claude Le Jay, to become bishop of Trieste, Italy. Ignatius gently but boldly refused. He explained:

‘[If Jesuits regularly became bishops], the Society would be completely wrecked. Quite plainly, by doing something good in one particular place we would be doing a

harm outweighing that good everywhere else.

Secondly, as our Society moves forward in this spirit, God Our Lord has shown Himself in a quite special way through it, bringing about greater spiritual benefit for people.

...
If now some member accepted [an appointment as bishop], another would be caught in a policy of doing the same, and so on with all the others. Thus not only would we lose our spirit, but the Society would be completely destroyed, and then the greater good would be lost for the sake of the lesser.’^{34 35}

Ignatius wrote that ‘God Our Lord has shown Himself in a quite special way through the Society.’ This was his roundabout way of referring to the divine glory. In Christian theology, *glory* is God’s truth, beauty, wisdom and power becoming evident to human beings. Since we do not see God face to face during our earthly existence, all these aspects of His being are partly hidden. In heaven, however, when we understand why history unfolded the way that it did, and how God was working through all of it to draw good even from our sins and tragedies, then His glory will be completely revealed to us.

This point is crucial for understanding AMDG properly. Ignatius believed that serving the more universal good gives greater glory to God than working for a more particular good. If a person gives a man a fish every day, the love behind that act makes it easier for people to believe in the love and providence of God. But by that same logic, transforming the man and his entire village is even more remarkable. It moves humanity still closer to its ultimate destiny in heaven, where full dignity and justice will reign, and it even makes that future reality somewhat tangible while still here on

³³ Munitiz, *Saint Ignatius*, 264-265.

³⁴ Munitiz, *Saint Ignatius*, 169. Emphasis mine.

³⁵ Despite Ignatius’ firmness on this principle, there have been, and continue to be, some Jesuit bishops and cardinals, St Robert Bellarmine being an early example. The *Constitutions* forbid Jesuits from ambitioning

directly or indirectly for ecclesiastical office, and if asked, they are obliged to resist to the extent that they are permitted by right. But Ignatius conceded the possibility that Jesuits might be obliged to accept if the Pope insists (Cons. §817; Ganss, *Constitutions* 334-335).

earth. For these reasons, Ignatius would have said that teaching the man to fish serves the greater glory of God.

Should Jesuits accept prestigious posts?

In 1553, a Jesuit priest named Diego Mirón was working in the royal court of Portugal. King John III, a generous patron of the Society from its inception, asked Fr Mirón to hear his confessions. (Being a royal confessor was a prestigious position; the king was showing great confidence in Mirón's discretion, since the king's confessions would include delicate matters of state.) Mirón declined the request. He was afraid that accepting it would make him proud, and he wanted to preserve his humility. He also feared that people would gossip that Jesuits were seeking such dignities. Just as Jesuits should avoid being bishops, Mirón reasoned, so too should they avoid being royal confessors. When Ignatius learned what Mirón had done, he wrote a letter urging him to accept the position. It was all about the magis:

'For my part I can only whole-heartedly approve your intentions. . . [but] when I take an overall view I am convinced that you have missed the mark by such decisions, bearing in mind the greater service and glory of God our Lord. . . .

If one bears in mind the universal good and the greater service of God, then as far as I can see in the Lord, the greater benefit will result from [hearing the king's confessions]. For all members of the body share in the advantage of the head, and all subjects in that of their rulers. So the spiritual help given to Their Highnesses should be esteemed more valuable than that given to other people. As for the judgments that people may pass about your wanting honours and dignities, they will fall of their own accord under the force of truth and with the proof of your way of life. . . . So you ought not to avoid what may result in great service of God our Lord, of Their Highnesses

and of the common good, just because of what the multitude may say and think.'³⁶

Zeal not according to knowledge

In 1547, Ignatius received word that Jesuit scholastics (seminarians) in Portugal were acting strangely. They were supposed to be studying philosophy and theology in preparation for ordination to the priesthood. Instead, they were spending most of their time in extreme ascetical practices, charitable works, long hours of prayer, and preaching in the streets. To their minds, studies were boring and irrelevant, especially considering all the good to be accomplished for people right then and there.

In his letter to them, Ignatius was walking a tightrope. He did not want to dampen their enthusiasm for their vocations, but he had learned from his own mistakes that they needed to pace themselves for the long haul. They would make a wider impact with theology degrees: church authorities would trust them with positions of influence, and they would possess the theological depth to engage people more profoundly. By persevering in studies, they would grow in the virtues of patience and trust. In short, scholastics should forego a smaller return now for a greater return later. Ignatius wrote:

'During this intermediate period of studies, do not think that you are of no use to others. Beyond the fact that you are making progress yourselves . . . you are even now serving others in many ways and furthering the honour and glory of God.

When soldiers are occupied in equipping themselves with weapons and ammunition for a future campaign, it would be wrong to say that their work is not in the service of their prince. . . . So if you yourselves are growing personally in every virtue in the way I spoke of earlier [i.e., during studies], you are being of great service to others. By making moral progress you are no less (but

³⁶ Munitiz, *Saint Ignatius*, 248-249. Emphasis mine.

rather more!) instruments for the grace to be conferred on them than you are by your learning, though obviously God's instruments should be fully developed in both.³⁷

Should Jesuits publicly defend themselves?

Before the founding of the Society, while Ignatius was still an unordained man in theology studies, he was investigated no less than nine times by the Inquisition. Some churchmen found it difficult to believe that he was preaching orthodox Catholic doctrine if he did not possess a theology degree. Others suspected him of being an *illuminati*, i.e., a Catholic who claimed to be enlightened directly by the Holy Spirit in all things, and who therefore did not need the teachings or sacraments of the institutional Church. The investigations made Catholics leery of approaching Ignatius for spiritual help. He knew that, and resented it.

Ignatius was never convicted of heresy. But for him, it was not good enough simply to be cleared of the charges. On at least three occasions, inquisitors heard complaints made against Ignatius, but they informed Ignatius that they were not going to investigate those charges, as they already believed that he was innocent. To their surprise, Ignatius insisted they conduct investigations anyway, complete with notaries, witnesses, and formal verdicts!³⁸ In a letter to a friend, concerning the most serious charges that occurred in Rome, he wrote:

'I went there and talked to His Holiness [the Pope] alone for a good hour. As I was explaining to him at length our proposals and intentions [i.e., of the first Jesuits], I gave a very clear account of all the times when I had been arraigned in Spain and in Paris; similarly the times when I had been imprisoned in Alcalá and in Salamanca. I did this partly so that nobody can give him

more information than I have, partly so that he would be more inclined to set up an investigation about us. Either way, a sentence or declaration about our teaching would be given. It was so very necessary for our future preaching and exhortation that we should be held in good repute, not only in the eyes of God our Lord but also in the eyes of ordinary people . . .'³⁹

Here Ignatius did not use his typical expressions *the more universal good* or *greater good*. But the meaning was the same. Because Jesuits were working in the world alongside others, they could not afford to take the response that, being unjustly accused, they should simply 'offer it up' as an opportunity to grow in patience and humility.

They needed to be innocent, not only in the eyes of God, but also in the eyes of ordinary people. The *magis* meant that other possible responses were off the table, too: 1) Do not dignify the attacks with a response, or 2) Ignore the attacks and they'll go away, or 3) Do not defend ourselves, since we will only draw more attention to the accusations.

IV. Modern applications of the *magis*

Jesuit-lay collaboration

In the 1970s and 1980s the number of men in the Society of Jesus declined dramatically. As a result, heated debate arose among Jesuits: should they consolidate their manpower in fewer schools, and thereby ensure the Jesuit character of those works, or should they spread themselves more thinly, trusting that lay colleagues could assist in the preservation and promotion of the mission? Jesuits opted for the latter, in the slowly-growing conviction that this would serve the more universal good. And the results, by almost all accounts, have been clear. It may fairly be said that Jesuit institutions are better capable of articulating

³⁷ Munitiz, *Saint Ignatius*, 179-180. Emphasis mine.

³⁸ *The Autobiography of St Ignatius Loyola* §§81, 86, 98 (Munitiz, *Saint Ignatius*, 52-53, 55, 61-62).

³⁹ Letter to Isabel Roser dated Dec. 19, 1538 (Munitiz, *Saint Ignatius*, 152-153). Emphasis mine.

the Jesuit mission now – and they are certainly more deliberate about it - than they ever were in the past.⁴⁰

Education

Schools were not on the agenda of Ignatius and his companions when the Society was first founded in 1540. Their goal was a peripatetic ministry, going wherever the needs of the church were greatest. In 1546, however, Ignatius made a command decision to start a school for the education of young Jesuits and local boys. The school became an instant success, and the Society was soon building more schools throughout Europe, Asia, and the Americas.

Ironically, these schools required many Jesuits to remain in one place, in order to serve as teachers and administrators. But this did not mean that they lost a commitment to the magis. On the contrary, education was a perfect fit, as it was making an extraordinary impact on youth that would last for generations. Indeed, one could argue that the Society of Jesus, through its schools, has been one the principal influences on the history of western intellectual life.⁴¹

Social justice

Ignatius never used the term *social justice* as we do today, but the basic commitment to making a wider impact is the same. In simple terms, social justice means going beyond immediate aid to the poor toward addressing the social and political conditions that give rise to poverty and oppression in the first place. With reference to our fishing analogy, it means teaching the man to fish and thus transforming his village. In this sense, Jesuit dedication to

social justice is a clear manifestation of the magis in action.⁴²

That being said, two clarifications are important, in light of what we have seen about Ignatius' approach. First, to be authentically Jesuit, social justice must be considered means to a higher end, namely the service of faith. The ultimate goal cannot be creating a just society for its own sake (secular humanists seek as much), but rather bringing people to faith in a personal God who loves them.⁴³ The Fathers of GC32 had this in mind when they made a careful distinction that 'the mission of the Society of Jesus is the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement.'⁴⁴ For Christians, an eternity with God and the blessed in heaven is the greatest, most universal good that any human being can possess. Thus the magis by definition always points Jesuits and colleagues toward that ultimate goal.⁴⁵

Second, many students are engaged in service projects. But what happens if their grades suffer as a result? Are the projects an end in themselves, or are they a means for students to grow in dedication to social justice? If the first, then students will feel pressure, no matter how slight or unintended, to continue working; if the second, they will feel more at liberty to disengage if necessary. This tension is more than theoretical. Teachers are sometimes heard to lament that 'we are just using the poor' by sending our students to live and work among them, which seems to be a way of saying that charitable works that are not ends in themselves are ultimately unjust.

To address this tension, we find guidance in Ignatius' aforementioned letter to the young Jesuits in Portugal. For them, as for today's students in Jesuit schools, the goal of

⁴⁰ See D13 of GC34, *Cooperation with the Laity in Mission* (Padberg, *Jesuit Life*, 608-615).

⁴¹ For a general overview, see John W. O'Malley SJ, *How the First Jesuits Became Involved in Education*, in *The Jesuit Ratio Studiorum: 400th Anniversary Perspectives*, ed. Vincent J. Duminuco SJ (New York: Fordham University Press, 2000), 56-74.

⁴² See D4 of GC32, *Our Mission Today: The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice* (Padberg, *Jesuit Life*,

298-316); D3 of GC34, *Our Mission and Justice* (Padberg, *Jesuit Life*, 530-535).

⁴³ See *Cons.* §623b (Ganss, *Constitutions*, 275-276).

⁴⁴ GC32, D4, §2 (Padberg, *Jesuit Life*, 298).

⁴⁵ Ignatius made this ultimate end a point of meditation in *The First Principle and Foundation*, found in the *Spiritual Exercises* (§23).

formation is well-educated persons committed to faith and justice. But formation takes time, and priorities during the formation process are not the same as priorities afterward. Ignatius required young Jesuits to serve the poor in temporary assignments (called *experiments*) in order to test their skills and generosity and to instill in them a deeper humility and love of service.

Does this mean Ignatius was ‘using the poor’ to form his men? One could phrase it that way, one supposes, and it would not be inaccurate, strictly speaking. But it is a bit like saying that ‘students are just using their teachers.’ Such a way of speaking does not take into account the goal of the formation process, or the motivations and love that prompt the process, or the richness of the relationships in the process. Ignatius would have called this way of thinking ‘zeal not according to knowledge’ (*zelo non secundum scientiam*), which meant well-intentioned but short-sighted.⁴⁶ Rather, Ignatius repeatedly urged ‘discreet charity’ (*discreta caritas*), a chestnut of medieval spirituality which meant that one should pace oneself to serve God in the most effective way possible over the course of time.

V. What *magis* doesn’t (or shouldn’t) mean

Many definitions of the *magis* currently in circulation at Jesuit institutions are not without problems. They either have little or no foundation in the historical sources, or they are too vague to have significant implications for Jesuit works, or they are easily misinterpreted in ways that are harmful. But to be clear, these values are not necessarily absent when the

magis is rightly understood and applied. Even though *generosity* and *excellence* are poor definitions of the *magis*, authentic applications of the *magis* often include acts that are generous and excellent.

Generosity / Giving more

One of the more prevalent – and dangerous – misconceptions about the *magis* is that it means working harder or being more generous. Many choose to work in Jesuit institutions, with lesser pay, because they are already generous people dedicated to service. And generous people, by their nature, are often susceptible to doubts about their own motivations or the value of their contributions.⁴⁷ Add to this reality the frenetic pace of U.S. culture, where many are obliged to hold two jobs to make ends meet, and it becomes clear that ‘giving more’ is not the message that Jesuits and colleagues should be sending.⁴⁸

I was explaining this to a class of undergraduates, when one responded, ‘So *magis* means working smarter, not harder!’ She had it exactly right. By *smarter* we should think of careful and courageous discernment of where lies the more universal good.

Excellence / Quality

At first glance, the assertion that *excellence* is a poor interpretation of the *magis* might be startling. Who can argue with excellence?

That’s the problem. No one does. Probably there is not a school or business on earth that does not claim excellence in its mission statement. One thing is certain: for five

⁴⁶ A common phrase in the theological jargon of the sixteenth century, inspired by a passage in St Paul’s letter to the Romans (10:2).

⁴⁷ Ignatius is occasionally misquoted as having written in the *Spiritual Exercises* §53: ‘What have I done for Christ? What am I doing for Christ? What more can I do for Christ?’ In point of fact, his third question was: ‘What ought I do for Christ?’ [lo que debo hacer por Cristo]. Similarly, Ignatius is commonly credited with the famous *Prayer for Generosity*: Lord, teach me to be generous, and to serve you as you deserve, to give and not to

count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to labor and not to seek for rest . . . In fact, its true author is unknown. And the prayer, while romantic in its own way, is inconsistent with the spirituality of the mature Ignatius, who was quite concerned about the potential cost and reward of any proposed endeavor.

⁴⁸ See Diane Dreher, *What To Do About It: Cura Personalis and the Challenge of Life-Work Balance*, in *Conversations on Jesuit Higher Education* Vol. 41, Article 19 (2012), 30-33.

centuries, the Jesuits have not garnered so many passionate supporters, and vociferous critics, by claiming something as safe as *excellence*! The *magis* is a powerful idea. Above all, we must not reduce it to a predictable advertising jingle.

There is a second hitch as well. Since the opposite of excellence is implied to be mediocrity or complacency (both of which are negative by definition), choosing the *magis* becomes a matter of choosing good over bad. But, as Ignatius explained, our concern is how to choose between two goods, since it goes without saying that, if we already know that one option is bad, we should not be choosing it.⁴⁹ (Hence the motto is not 'for the glory of God' but 'for the greater glory of God.') Discernment is often needed to find the *magis* precisely because the inherent goodness of both options means that the greater good is not always obvious.

The harder option / The riskier option

Ignatius was explicit in the *Constitutions* that the more universal good is often served by choosing the easier or safer option. If the harder or more dangerous promises greater rewards, so be it, but choosing it for its own sake would be another case of 'zeal not according to knowledge.'

But a careful distinction is necessary. The *harder option* is not a good definition of the *magis*, but those options that serve the *magis* are often de facto harder. Why? If greater numbers are aided by the project in question, so too greater numbers are apt to question it or feel threatened by it. That is why the virtue of magnanimity, which Ignatius considered so important for Jesuits, is closely linked to the *magis*. It comes from the Latin *magna anima*, and means literally *greatness of spirit*. For Ignatius (who follows the thinking of St Thomas Aquinas on this point), magnanimity is a readiness to think big, to embrace projects of

grand scope. But it also includes, of necessity, a willingness to endure the additional conflicts that come with having that greatness of spirit.⁵⁰

What we find in the *Constitutions* about magnanimity in the Superior General applies to all who seek the *magis*:

'Magnanimity and fortitude of soul are likewise highly necessary for him to bear the weaknesses of many, to initiate great undertakings in the service of God our Lord, and to persevere in them with constancy when it is called for, without losing courage in the face of contradictions (even though they come from persons of high rank and power) and without allowing himself to be moved by their entreaties or threats from what reason and the divine service require.'⁵¹

Good things that we're already doing

Well-intentioned people sometimes suggest that any noble or loving deed can properly be called the *magis*: when a teacher gives her time outside of class, or a Jesuit listens to confessions for long hours, or an administrator is especially attentive to the personal needs of faculty and staff. To be sure, such works of love lie at the heart of the Christian gospel. They should be praised where found and held up as examples for inspiration.

So what is the problem? For Ignatius, it is quite possible for one to labor generously, prayerfully, and even heroically for God . . . but not in a course of action that will make the more universal impact, compared to other legitimate options. That someone is doing something noble does not ipso facto mean that she serves the *magis*. We have already seen that Ignatius removed Fr Galvanello from a mission where he was working with great dedication and success, for the sake of putting him where the greater good was served.

people call me a saint. I ask why they're poor and they call me a Communist!

⁵¹ *Cons.* §728 (Ganss, *Constitutions*, 310). See also St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* II-II, Q.129, art.1.

⁴⁹ Ex. §§169-174 (Munitiz, *Saint Ignatius*, 316-317).

⁵⁰ Brazilian archbishop Hélder Câmara expressed this same truth ironically when he said, 'I feed the poor and

VI. Questions about the *magis*

Where did Ignatius get his idea for the more universal good?

Ignatius never indicated the inspiration behind *ad majorem dei gloriam*, at least not in any text that survives today. But two are more than likely. The first was his mystical experience at the river Cardoner, which occurred about seven months after his spiritual conversion. In that intellectual illumination (it was not a 'vision' properly speaking), he received a profound insight into the presence and activity of God in every place and in all created things.⁵² It gave him a fundamentally optimistic attitude toward the world, and made him confident of the fruits to be gained by throwing the net widely.

Ignatius' second inspiration was the theology of St Thomas Aquinas, the most famous Catholic theologian of the Middle Ages. His writings became popular at the University of Paris at the same time that Ignatius was studying there. St Thomas' treatise on political philosophy, *On Kingship – to the King of Cyprus*, was a major influence on constitutional theory in the sixteenth century.⁵³

Probably for that reason, the content of the Jesuit *Constitutions* bears strong similarities to it. In *On Kingship* and other writings, St Thomas addressed the common good, the glory of God, and the more universal as the more divine.

If people can disagree about which options serve the *magis*, does it have any real value? Does it admit of too many qualifications to be of guidance?

If nothing else, when it comes time for Jesuits and colleagues to make hard decisions, the

⁵² *Autobiography* §30 (Munitiz, *Saint Ignatius*, 26-27). See also Charles J. Jackson SJ, *Something that happened to me at Manresa: The Mystical Origin of the Ignatian Charism in Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits* 38/2 (2006).

⁵³ St Thomas Aquinas, *De Regno ad Regem Cyprici (On Kingship: To the King of Cyprus)*, trans. Gerald B. Phelan (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Religious Studies, 1949).

magis reminds us what the real question is: Where is the more universal good? That by itself is no small contribution. At least we're arguing about the right thing.⁵⁴

The *magis* is a constant reminder that all decisions we make, no matter how personal or private they might seem at first glance, have implications for the wider community, and therefore the common good is a value to always hold before our eyes. In a U.S. culture where talk of *rights* is everywhere, but talk of *duties* is not, the *magis* can be powerfully counter-cultural.

In matters of discernment, the *magis* seems to take certain considerations off the table as a matter of course. Historical tradition or emotional attachment would not appear to be good arguments for remaining in a particular work, if it became clear that the more universal good was served by going elsewhere. In other cases, people will be saddened or offended that they were not considered the greater good. As difficult as that is for all involved, it probably should not be allowed to sway careful decisions about the *magis*.

Indeed, the fact that people can disagree about *the more universal good* is an excellent reason why it should be considered the definitive definition of the *magis*. During such disputes, there is no potential implication that the minority opinion comes from a 'less generous' or 'less devout' frame of mind. Dissenters can make their case on the same grounds of desiring to serve the greater good.

Was Ignatius elitist?

Ignatius' idea of AMDG can make people uncomfortable. Was he really implying that those who seek the more universal good, like

See also Rogelio García-Mateo SJ, *El 'Cuerpo de la Compañía' en el contexto socio-religioso del siglo XVI y su significado para hoy*, *Centrum Ignatianum Spiritualitatis* 66 (1991), 11-22.

⁵⁴ See Daniel A. Dombrowski, 'All for the Greater Glory of God': Was St Ignatius Irrational? In *Logos* 9:3 (2006), 109-117.

Jesuits, serve God's glory more than other Catholic groups or other persons of faith? Giovanni Schenaldo seems to have concluded as much in his letter to Ignatius. But especially today, in a postmodern culture that is generally adverse to anything that sounds like a hierarchy of vocations or values, Ignatius' ideas can appear divisive.

What is certain is that Ignatius was a product of his intellectual milieu. Medieval thought was deeply influenced by Plato, who had categorized everything in terms of hierarchies and 'grades of being.' Thus, in the Catholic theology of the sixteenth century, there were higher and lower rankings for everything from angels to doctrines to virtues to vocations. We must also remember that, in Ignatius' day, monastic life was widely considered the most ideal Christian vocation. If someone really wanted to ensure his salvation, he became a monk. This mindset was a headache for Ignatius. For the first time in Christian history, he had created a religious order dedicated primarily to work in the world, and it was difficult for him to convince many potential recruits that the Society was not an inferior way of serving God, or riskier for their own salvation. To attract and keep men, therefore, he felt it necessary to stress the grandeur of the Society's way of proceeding.

Now that being said, one must admit that a certain hierarchy is inevitable when one asks about the more universal good. By definition, it implies the existence of more particular goods. No one can reasonably deny that teaching a man to fish makes a wider impact than giving him a fish, or that the transformation of his village is correspondingly more remarkable. Simply put, people will stand up and take notice more readily.

In that light, is it fair to say that Ignatius's logic holds, even if some bristle at it? Does that make him elitist?

Even if we accept *the more universal good* as the primary meaning of the *magis*, would it not be helpful to supplement it with a more affective dynamic such as 'greater devotion' or

'greater gratitude'? Is a single definition too restrictive?

As indicated earlier, the expression *the magis* is of unknown origin. In theory, then, there can be some liberality in how we use it. Nevertheless, I suggest that even two definitions are too many, since, whenever the *magis* is invoked in our Jesuit institutions, clarification will be required. And of course, subjective meanings such as *greater devotion* or *greater gratitude* will return us to the same problems that were raised at the beginning of this essay.

To be clear, limiting usage of the *magis* to *the more universal good* does not preclude the legitimacy of teaching greater gratitude or devotion as important Ignatian values. But neither is there a need to apply the term *magis* to them in order to teach them.

What happens if the *magis* doesn't materialize as expected?

There is a fascinating postscript to the story of Fr Diego Mirón, who rejected a post as royal confessor out of fear that others would question his pride or motives. Ignatius urged him to accept it, arguing that so long as Mirón lived virtuously, any gossip would eventually cease. As it happened, Ignatius was quite wrong. Jesuits soon became the preferred confessors for Catholic royalty in Europe, and as a result, many people, both Catholics and Protestants, became afraid that Jesuits were plotting to manipulate kings and queens in the confessional, and thereby dictate the course of European politics! This early conspiracy theory was one of many reasons why the Society of Jesus was suppressed by the pope in 1773.

Does this mean that Ignatius made a bad discernment about the *magis*? Not necessarily. A common misconception is that discernment is about predicting the future. Imagine a man who discerns that he was meant to be a priest, but when he applies to the seminary he is not accepted. This is not the future that he had anticipated. But he did not necessarily make a mistake. One can choose only according to the lights that God gives here

and now. If one chooses a particular course of action precisely because he believes that it will serve God's greater glory, then that choice is meritorious in itself, and draws him closer to God, regardless of the actual outcome.⁵⁵

St Francis Borgia was another early Jesuit whom Emperor Charles V and Pope Julius III were trying to make a cardinal. Ignatius resisted for the same reasons that he did for Fr Claude Le Jay. Even so, Ignatius wrote to Borgia that it would not be a contradiction if he (Ignatius) discerned one course of action while others discerned the contrary.

'Despite all this I was also convinced, and still am, that while it was God's will that I should adopt a clear position, if others adopted a contrary view and you were given this dignity, there would not be any contradiction whatsoever. The same Spirit could inspire me to take up one point of view for some reasons and inspire others to the contrary for other reasons, and what takes place would be the appointment requested by the Emperor. May God our Lord bring about—in all things, in whatever way, and at all times—His own greater praise and glory.'⁵⁶

For that reason, Ignatius uses careful language in the *Spiritual Exercises*. He repeatedly distinguishes between: 1) what a prayerful discernment prompts us to desire and choose, and 2) what God will actually give us.⁵⁷

In 1551, Ignatius wrote a letter to his brother Jesuits, asking permission to step down as Superior General. He had concluded, after many hours of prayer, that someone else could fulfill those duties better than he. Ignatius' companions did not agree with his discernment, notwithstanding his reputation as a spiritual master, and the reverence in which they held him. For just as it was Ignatius' insistence on the more universal good that prompted him to tender his resignation, it was that same consideration that compelled the Jesuits to refuse it. Ignatius' letter still speaks to Jesuits and their friends today:

'In the case of there being, for the greater divine glory, a disagreement among those who are to receive and judge my request, I implore them out of love and reverence for God our Lord kindly to commend it with great fervor to His Divine Majesty that in all things His most holy will be done to His greater glory and to the greater universal good of souls and of all the Society, and that they bear in mind in all things the greater praise and glory of God forever.'⁵⁸



Jesuit Institute London
Jesuit Higher Education 1(2): 16-31 (2012) 16
Regis University, Toronto
Reprinted with permission (2017)

⁵⁵ For an odd application of this principle by Ignatius, see *Remembering Iñigo: Glimpses of the Life of Saint Ignatius Loyola: The Memoriale of Luís Gonçalves da Câmara*, eds. Joseph A. Munitiz and Alexander Eaglestone (St Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2004), 212 (§387).

⁵⁶ Letter to St Francis Borgia, dated June 5, 1552 (Munitiz, *Saint Ignatius*, 245-246). Emphasis mine.

⁵⁷ Ex. §§97, 135, 146, 152, 168, 180, 183.

⁵⁸ Letter to the Society of Jesus, dated January 30, 1551 (Munitiz, *Saint Ignatius*, 242).